Toward a Feminist Conception of Personal Sin

Laura F. Hawthorne Palmyra, Virginia

Bachelor of Arts, University of Virginia, 1990 Master of Teaching, University of Virginia, 1990 Master of Arts, University of Virginia, 2010

A Dissertation presented to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Religious Studies

University of Virginia May, 2015

Contents

Abstract		V
Acknowledgments		vi
Chapter 1:	The Argument for Rethinking Personal Sin	1
1.	Introduction	1
2.	The Self in Sin	9
3.	Complicating the "Self"	13
4.	What's Wrong With Focusing on "Individual" Sin?	19
5.	What's Wrong With Focusing on Sin as Bad Behavior?	24
	a. Popular Understandings of Sin in American Culture	25
	b. The Emphasis on Bad Behavior and Punishment in Christian Thought on Sin	29
6.	Rethinking Original Sin	34
	a. The Doctrine of Original Sin: Its Detractors and Its Revisionists	35
	b. A Feminist Perspective on Personal Sin as Condition	48
7.	An Overview of the Project	53
Chapter 2:	Developing Criteria for a Feminist Conception of Personal Sin	57
1.	Women's Sins?	59
	a. Introducing the "Feminine Experience": Valerie Saiving's "The Human Situation"	60
	b. Articulating Assumptions About Gender: Judith Plaskow's Sex, Sin and Grace	63
	c. Invoking Gender Strategically: Serene Jones's <i>Feminist Theory</i> and Christian Theology	71
2.	Dualism and Talking About Sin	75
	a. Challenging Male/Female Hierarchies: Rosemary Radford Ruether's <i>Sexism and God-Talk</i>	76
	b. Distinguishing Social Sin: Relational and Structural	80
	 c. Challenging Subject-Object Dualisms: Catherine Keller's From a Broken Web 	84
	d. Rethinking Divine Transcendence	88
3.	Radical Suffering and Conceptions of Sin	92
5.	a. The Protest Against Radical Suffering	94
	b. Attending to the Survival and Suffering of African American Women: Delores Williams's "A Womanist Perspective on Sin"	99
	c. Listening to the Voices of Those Who Have Survived Abuse: Mary Potter Engel's "Evil, Sin, and the Violation of the Vulnerable"	104

4.	A Different Way of Talking About Sin	109
Chapter 3:	The Self and God Beyond Dualism—Julian of Norwich	112
1.	Julian's Life and Writings	113
	a. Who was Julian?	114
	b. Julian the Theologian	116
	c. When did Julian Write?	119
	d. A Note on Manuscripts and Modernization	121
2.	The Revelations	124
	a. The First Revelation	125
	b. The Second Revelation	128
	c. The Third Revelation	128
	d. The Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Revelations	129
	e. The Eighth Revelation	131
	f. The Ninth, Tenth, Eleventh, and Twelfth Revelations	133
	g. The Thirteenth Revelation	134
	h. The Fourteenth Revelation	137
	i. The Fifteenth Revelation and the First Attack of the Fiend	140
	j. The Sixteenth Revelation and the Return of the Fiend	141
3.	Julian's Anthropology: The Substance and Sensuality of the Human	142
	a. "Human Substance" in the Eighth Revelation	143
	b. The "Godly Will" in the Thirteenth Revelation	147
	c. "Human Sensuality" and the Development of Julian's Theological Anthropology in the Fourteenth Revelation	149
	d. A Non-Gendered Model of the Human	154
4.	A Creatively Gendered God	159
	a. Jesus/God as Mother: Relational and Physical	159
	b. Divine and Human Physicality in the Work of Salvation	161
	c. The Limits of the Motherhood Metaphor	164
5.	Perspective and Judgment: The Unlikeness of God	166
	a. The Limits of Human Perspective and Earthly Judgments	167
	b. "I Saw No Wrath in God": Julian and the Teachings of the Holy Church	168
Chapter 4:	Julian's Thought on Sin	173
1.	"What is Sin?" Sin as Condition	174
	a. The Suffering of Sin: How Can All Be Well When There is Sin?	175
	b. The Impossibility of Divine Wrath: Defining Sin in Terms of Love	177
	c. Believing We Are Unloved: Defining Sin as Condition	182
	d. The Sin of Despair	187

2.	God's Embrace: Sensuality, Sin, and God's Physicality	191
	a. A Growing Emphasis on Human Physicality	192
	b. The Importance of Christ's Physicality	193
	c. Julian's Concern With Suffering	197
	d. Christ's Compassionate Embrace	201
3.	Knowledge of Sin and the Unlikeness of God	204
	a. Awareness of Sin	204
	b. Misperceptions of the Self in Sin	205
	c. The Function and Limits of Human Judgments About Sin	207
	d. "Seeing" Sin	211
4.	The Collective Dimensions of Sin	214
5.	What Have We Gained?	219
Chapter 5:	Toward a Feminist Conception of Personal Sin	222
1.	Personal Sin as Estrangement	223
	a. Focusing on Human Receptivity and Personal Sin as Condition	223
	b. Rethinking the Doctrine of Original Sin	226
2.	Disrupting Binaries: Extending Julian's Theological Anthropology and	
	Her Creatively Gendered God	231
3.	Focusing on Suffering: The Pain of Sin	238
4.	Acknowledging Limits: The Unlikeness of God and Sin-Talk	243
5.	Reorienting Sin	248
Bibliography		255

Abstract

In this dissertation, I draw on the theology of Julian of Norwich to develop a feminist conception of personal sin that is responsive to feminist and womanist concerns about Christian thought on sin and that takes seriously the perspective of those who face violence, hopelessness, poverty, and injustice. I argue that a better understanding of personal sin complements previous feminist and womanist scholarship on social sin, both relational and structural. Instead of beginning with a concern for how the individual sins, this dissertation focuses on describing sin as a condition from which the individual suffers. I distinguish between sin as condition and sin as act in order to develop an alternative to moralistic ways of talking about sin that focus exclusively on human behavior. In developing an account of sin as condition, I engage elements of the doctrine of original sin-the contingency of sin, its universal dimension, and its damage that is beyond human capacity to repair-and propose how each may be rearticulated in a feminist register. I argue for the theological importance of acknowledging the pain of sin and the healing work of grace before raising questions of accountability and agency. I develop criteria for evaluating the extent to which a concept of sin may be considered feminist, in particular, the need to resist hierarchical dualism, to stress the particularity of all claims about sin, to hold ideas about sin accountable to women's experiences of suffering and healing, to value human embodiment and particular human bodies, and to retain an awareness of the complex, interlocking dynamics of the self with structural and relational forms of sin. Throughout I draw upon Julian's theological anthropology, soteriology, doctrine of God, and creative use of gender to develop a conception of personal sin as estrangement—a condition in which humans cannot experience themselves as receiving or participating in divine love.

v

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the members of my committee, co-directors James Childress and Margaret Mohrmann, Charles Mathewes, Paul Jones, and Maurie McInnis, for their enthusiastic challenges to and support of this project. I am a better thinker and writer for the time I spent studying and talking with each of them, and I look forward to continuing the conversation. I am particularly grateful to Margaret Mohrmann for her encouragement, wisdom, and guidance throughout my graduate career and the careful attention she gave this project over the last five years.

I am grateful to Anda Webb, Gene Block, and my colleagues in the Provost's Office and throughout the University of Virginia for their support and patience as I learned to be a scholar as well as an administrator.

I am grateful to my parents and my extended family for their unflagging confidence in my ability to finish what I had started.

Finally, I am grateful to Eric Denby, without whom I would not have had the courage to start down this road or to persevere to its end.

Chapter 1

The Argument for Rethinking Personal Sin

1. Introduction

The topic of sin in Christian thought has received considerable attention from feminist thinkers in the years since Valerie Saiving first published her article, "The Human Situation," in 1960.¹ From the early critiques offered by Saiving, Judith Plaskow, Delores Williams, and Rosemary Radford Ruether, to more recent works by Serene Jones, Emily Townes, Wendy Farley, and Joy Anne McDougall, feminist and womanist thinkers working in both Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions have, in turn, challenged, rejected, and revised some of Christianity's ideas about sin. Throughout these feminist and womanist responses, as I discuss more fully below and in chapter 2, a dominant concern has been to shift attention from an overly individualistic conception of sin—that sin is a question of the individual's relation with God—to what is often called "social" sin, but what I refer to throughout the project as relational and structural sin. These thinkers argue that sin corrupts relations and structures, not just individuals, and that the sins of individuals cannot be evaluated or understood separate from these systematic corruptions.²

These critical responses have signaled an important step in developing a rich and nuanced understanding of sin that avoids the harm promoted by some aspects of the long-standing

¹ Valerie Saiving, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," Journal of Religion 40 (1960): 100–12.

² I resist the generalization of "social sin" because the distinctions between relational and structural sin are significant and I have found that some discussions of social sin tend to elide the distinctions in ways that are not helpful. It is also important to emphasize that while some of the feminist and womanist scholars who have focused much-needed attention on the workings of structural or relational sin have paid little attention to the individual's experience of sin, others have been explicit that an awareness of individual sin remains important. See particularly Mary Potter Engel, "Evil, Sin, and the Violation of the Vulnerable," in *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*, ed. Mary Potter Engel and Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite (San Francisco: Harper, 1990), 152–64; Delores S. Williams, "A Womanist Perspective on Sin," in *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, ed. Emilie M. Townes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 130–49; and Joy Ann McDougall, "Rising with Mary: Re-visioning a Feminist Theology of the Cross and Resurrection," *Theology Today* 69.2 (2012): 166–76.

tradition of individualistic sin in Western Christian thought. Derek R. Nelson suggests, however, that liberation theologies, including those developed by feminist, and womanist scholars, have focused their efforts too exclusively on the social dimensions of sin. "Perhaps," he says, "the pendulum shift towards social sin, while a necessary movement, swung a bit too far." Nelson calls for "a proper integration" of understandings of sin as structural with understandings of sin as relational, "coupled with useable material from the rich tradition on how the individual sins."³

In response to Nelson's call, I agree that Christian thought, particularly feminist Christian thought, needs a better understanding of the dynamics of personal sin (and my use of "personal" rather than "individual" is a deliberate choice, as I explain below). My primary focus in this project is to offer such an understanding, if only in its initial stages. As a corrective to Nelson's call, however, I argue that developing a feminist conception of personal sin needs to begin, not with a focus on how the individual sins, as Nelson urges, but rather with a focus on sin as a *condition* from which the individual suffers. In other words, in this dissertation, I offer a feminist rethinking of certain elements of the doctrine of original sin and develop a conception of personal sin as condition. I am here distinguishing between sin as condition and sin as act as two aspects of personal sin, rather then employing the traditional language of original sin and actual sin, because my development of the idea of personal sin as condition, while it owes much to the doctrine of original sin and retains some of its key elements, also rejects other of its traditional elements, so much so that a new, more flexible term seems appropriate. I emphasize personal sin as condition because I have found that beginning my reflection on personal sin with a concern for human suffering, rather than a concern primarily for human responsibility, challenges and complicates how I think about sin and leads me to focus on personal sin as condition rather than

³ Derek R. Nelson, *What's Wrong With Sin: Sin in Individual and Social Perspective from Schleiermacher to Theologies of Liberation* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2009), 187.

as act. Beginning with a concern for human suffering situates us to appreciate more deeply and more fully humankind's need for redemption while resisting our human tendencies to indulge in judgmental moralism.

Toni Morrison's 1998 novel, Paradise, explores and challenges this human tendency to see the world in terms of Us and Them, this ever-present temptation that Catherine Keller has described as the "apocalypse habit," the desire to protect oneself and one's community from the Evil Out There by identifying it with a particular body or bodies that can be controlled, dehumanized, violated, or terminated.⁴ Morrison's novel challenges the "apocalyptic" dualism of Us vs. Them by refusing to allow any of her characters to remain simplistically good or evil. The novel's opening pages describe the attempts of nine men to kill five women who have taken up residence in a dilapidated mansion seventeen miles from the men's town. The men are determined to rid their town, Ruby, of the evil they have decided these women embody. They line up in front of a large window of the old mansion, known as "the Convent," sighting three of the women as they flee across fields for safety. "God at their side, the men take aim. For Ruby."⁵ The novel plunges us into the terrain of the apocalyptic, a holy war being waged for the goodness of the community against the Evil Out There that is believed to threaten the community's existence. However, as Morrison gives us the highly complicated and intertwined stories of her characters-both the women who have taken up residence at the Convent because they have nowhere else to go and the nine men who appear in the novel's opening pages with guns in their hands, hunting the women like wild game—we begin to realize that there are no simple judgments in Paradise.

⁴ Catherine Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 11.

⁵ Toni Morrison, *Paradise* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 18.

Morrison shows us how the men of Ruby, clearly "sinning against" the women of the Convent in the novel's opening page, have, themselves, as black men in the United States, experienced brutal and degrading racism in the world beyond Ruby. Likewise, we see how the women of the Convent, "sinned against" as the novel opens, have stories far too complex, with moments of harming others and themselves, for them to be considered only victims of another's sin. At the same time, Morrison's novel offers a powerful illustration of the ways in which ideas about sin function, the ways in which how we think about sin affects how we act in the world. These concrete implications make theology far more than an intellectual exercise. Religious ideas shape and justify human behaviors and, in the case of ideas about sin, the results can be deadly, as the novel shows.

A concern for the practical effects of theological ideas is central to feminist thought, and it is a guiding commitment in this work. As a feminist, I am not only committed to beginning with a focus on lived experiences, particularly the experiences of those who are marginalized or harmed by current configurations of privilege and power, but also to tracing the ways in which theological ideas, including my own, shape particular ways of living. This leads me to engage with popular culture and literary projects like Morrison's, as well as with other theologians and ethicists. I am interested in exploring how theological ideas translate into and surface within popular culture because it is there that so much of our collective imagination is shaped, consciously and unconsciously. The success of a feminist theological and ethical project is measured not only by its persuasive power among others in the field but also by the degree to which its ideas might be translated into popular culture and daily life outside the academy.

As a woman and a feminist who is persuaded by womanist, *mujerista*, and feminist analyses of the ways in which talk about sin has been particularly dangerous to women of color and white women, I engage the Christian tradition on sin with deep suspicion and wariness. Christian thought on sin has been used to justify harm against those most vulnerable to the abuses of worldly power, telling those who suffer most that they most deserve it.⁶ In her 2000 study of Christian theology and feminist theory, Serene Jones acknowledges that feminism has much to suspect with regard to "sin talk," but she argues that those of us who are committed to both feminist and Christian thought cannot allow our suspicions to hold us back from engaging the tradition. There is, she writes, "no single topic in Christian theology [that] has more resonance with feminist theory than the much disdained topic of sin… This recognition of the pervasive, insidious, and historically persistent forces of destruction at work in the world sits at the heart of the feminist movement."⁷ With Jones, I argue that there are ways in which the concept of sin needs to be reclaimed, not only in spite of feminist concerns but also in support of them.

In this dissertation, I argue that reflection on the personal dimensions of sin is an important companion to feminist scholarship on structural and relational forms of sin and is, itself, feminist in its concern for the particular, lived experiences of individuals. Such reflection focuses attention on the value of the individual and her relationship with God, not solely as a solitary quest for salvation but as the necessary ground of existence upon which the self's sociality depends, thus balancing an interest in the self with an acknowledgment of the self's cultural and social interconnectedness. This kind of reflection considers the ramifications of the fractured nature of the self's relationship with God and struggles seriously with the claim that

⁶ To the point that some white feminists have chosen to reject Christianity entirely. Daphne Hampson argues that Christianity and feminism cannot be reconciled because the former is too much shaped by sexism and too bound to the revelation of God as a historical moment to be redeemable in light of feminist commitments. Jesus may have been kind to women, she concedes, but to call him a feminist is to have a very low bar for what one considers feminist. Daphne Hampson, *Theology and Feminism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd., 1990), 87–90.

⁷ Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 96.

there are broken dimensions of the self, its relations, and the social world that cannot be healed through human effort.

This project began with my interest in the language of evil and questions of radical human suffering and evolved into a focus on the language of sin. It is guided by my belief that there is a dangerous seduction at work when we are drawn to make claims about evil in judging the actions of others. Even when we find ourselves with no other language in the face of horrors that humans inflict on one another, invoking the language of evil without sufficient reflection risks eliminating any degree of moral uncertainty or openness to the possibility of our complicity in the harm being done. Christian thought on the self in sin, for all of its dangers and potential for abuse, can help retain some degree of individual moral uncertainty. Linking evil and sin provides a language and a framework for naming and thinking about the destructive impulse in every human being, even if that naming and thinking fall short of explanation.⁸

In exploring Christianity's ideas about sin and considering how I might engage different aspects of that tradition in developing a feminist conception of what it means to be a self in sin, I found the work of Julian of Norwich, a 14th century Englishwoman, to be challenging and helpful to my task. Often classified as a mystic for her powerful and intimate account of a series of visions she experienced at the age of thirty-one, Julian has more recently been recognized as a gifted and sophisticated theologian whose thought both reflects and creatively develops the theology of her day, theology that was strongly influenced by Augustine, another figure who has shaped some of my ideas about the self in sin. In Julian's work, I find a deep concern for human suffering, a concern I have come to believe must be central to the task of reflecting on sin. I also

⁸ Indeed, I am wary of any conception of sin that claims to have fully explained human complicity in evil, as some interpretations of the doctrine of original sin have done. Karen Halttunen's study of murder in the American imagination reveals an early American community that did not wonder at murder as horror but rather believed "that all murders were simply natural manifestations of universal depravity." In this New England community, "the doctrine of original sin provided a universal explanation of the roots of murder." Karen Haltunnen, *Murder Most Foul: The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 4–14.

find in Julian's writing a playfulness and creativity with regard to gender that offers great promise for a feminist project. Grace Jantzen, Caroline Walker Bynum, Denise N. Baker, Nicholas Watson, and others have demonstrated the richness of Julian's thought for scholars concerned with questions of sex, gender, and sexuality.⁹ In the context of my project, Julian is helpful for the ways in which she resists a polarized gender hierarchy in developing her theological anthropology and for the ways in which she employs sex/gender creatively to cultivate a particular understanding of the divine-human relationship that is grounded in love, faith, and hope. As I discuss in chapters 4 and 5, these aspects of her anthropology and theology influence a particular understanding of sin that is useful in developing a feminist conception of personal sin as condition.

I begin this project with a set of feminist commitments that shape my reading of Julian's work, even as they have been shaped in turn by my engagement with her thought and that of other feminists. These commitments include first, a concern for human flourishing, a concern that encompasses all humans while holding itself particularly accountable to the suffering or flourishing of women within every segment of society. Second, they include an emphasis on lived practice as the forum in which theological insights are realized or rejected, such that theory or theology matters only to the extent that it influences and explains practice in ways that promote the full flourishing of women and men. Third, with Traci West, I embrace "the liberationist traditions that make it a priority to pay attention to the conditions that entrap socially

⁹ Grace M. Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982); idem, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992); Denise Nowakowski Baker, *Julian of Norwich's* Showings: *From Vision to Book* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Nicholas Watson, "'Yf wommen be double naturelly': Remaking 'Woman' in Julian of Norwich's Revelation of Love," *Exemplaria* 8 (1996): 1–34.

marginalized people.¹⁰ My attention to the socially marginalized drives my concern not only for their experiences but for ways in which Christian thought contributes to or challenges that marginalization, particularly as it relates to the behaviors and beliefs of the socially and materially privileged, including myself. Fourth, with Rosemary Radford Ruether, I reject as false ideologies the claims that women's subordination to men is ordained by God, justified by women's greater proclivity toward sin, or the "natural" order of creation.¹¹

Fifth and finally, as a white feminist Christian theologian who takes seriously the critical contributions of womanist scholars, particularly Delores S. Williams and Emilie Townes, I am committed to the lifetime task of learning to recognize the insidious infections of racism and other dehumanizing belief systems such as heterosexism, classism, and sexism in myself, my work, and my relations. This commitment influences my concern for the ways in which multiple vectors of oppression intersect within my experience and those of others and requires me to consider the ways in which this project and its reflections on the personal nature of sin either challenge or perpetuate these intertwined forces of oppression.¹² These commitments surface explicitly at times throughout the project, though they do not remain in the foreground at every moment. They do, however, shape the final evaluation of my proposed conception of personal sin.

In the following sections of this chapter, I introduce some of the concepts that are fundamental to my project. I begin by discussing more fully my decision to focus on personal sin. I then challenge two modern assumptions about the "self": first, that the self is constituted primarily by its freedom to choose and act, and second, that the self can be neatly distinguished

¹⁰ Traci C. West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), xv.

¹¹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Introducing Redemption in Christian Feminism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 11.

¹² Mary Potter Engel describes these interlocking forces of oppression as "strands in a cable [rather than] links in a chain." Mary Potter Engel, "Evil, Sin, and the Violation of the Vulnerable," 160.

from the social. I next introduce two major concerns about traditional ideas of sin in Christian thought: the tendency to be focused on the individual without attending to the social or structural dimensions of sin and a closely related tendency to focus exclusively on sin as bad behavior. I demonstrate the dangerous implications of these two tendencies and trace how they shape a particular set of attitudes and ways of being in the world that I wish to resist. This leads to my proposal to rethink certain elements of the doctrine of original sin from a feminist perspective, developing a concept of personal sin as condition. I then discuss four contemporary works that also rethink original sin and introduce the concept of personal sin as estrangement that I develop in this project. I conclude with a brief overview of the remaining four chapters.

In developing a particular understanding of personal sin as condition, I keep the women and men of Morrison's novel in mind. It is unclear whether the ideas about personal sin that I develop by drawing on Christian and feminist thought will resonate for them, yet they are where I begin and where I turn to hold my ideas accountable. I wish to offer a conception of sin that is pastoral in the broadest sense, a conception that does not bury these women and men beneath an even greater burden of self-hatred or drive them apart in self-righteous judgment but restores a sense of God's hope and love for humankind and empowers and challenges them to respond in kind to God, their fellow human beings, themselves, and the world around them.

2. The Self in Sin

Why focus on sin, particularly the self in sin? Theologians working within the traditions of the social gospel and liberation theology, including many feminist and womanist thinkers, have raised significant concerns about overly individualistic conceptions of sin and focused much-needed attention on the structural and relational dimensions of sin. Emilie Townes writes of the "cultural production of evil," a society's production of "misery and suffering in relentlessly systematic and sublimely structural ways." Rosemary Radford Ruether highlights the ways in which "distorted relationships, translated into power tools of exploitation, have built up a powerful counter-reality that perpetuates itself, both through socioeconomic and political structures and through ideology that shapes education and socialization at every level." Ivone Gebara focuses on the ways in which "structures of violence reproduce violence in concentric circles." ¹³ These writers do not deny the phenomenon of the self in sin, but they situate it clearly within larger structures and concentrate greater attention on these structures. This body of scholarship protests against thinking in terms of the isolated individual in favor of the contextualized individual, the individual in relation whose actions and choices are constrained and enabled by her context, particularly the sinful social structures and relations which influence her from birth.

I have more to say about these important concerns in section 4 of this chapter, but here, to ground my focus on the self in sin, I turn our attention to the larger theological context that frames my project. I begin with the conviction that reflection on the self in sin within Christian thought is properly motivated by love—human love responding to the primary action of divine love in Christ—and a desire to draw others closer to this love. Augustine, a North African bishop in the late 4th and early 5th centuries, writes in his *Confessions*: "It is from love of your love that I make the act of recollection. The recalling of my wicked ways is bitter in my memory, but I do it so that you may be sweet to me, a sweetness touched by no deception, a sweetness serene and content."¹⁴ Sometime around the end of the fourteenth century, Julian of Norwich writes in *A Revelation of Love*: "And in this [showing from God that all humankind will sin], I began to feel

¹³ Emilie Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 12; Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 164; Ivone Gebara, *Out of the Depths: Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation*, trans. Ann Patrick Ware (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 96.

¹⁴ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), II.i.1, 24.

a soft dread. And to this our lord answered: 'I keep you full securely.' This word was said with more love and assurance of spiritual keeping than I can or may tell."¹⁵

This project, as an exercise in Christian theology, reflects on the self in sin not to bury individuals beneath the burden of failure but, as Rowan Williams writes, to recover the past in hope, not only to be "assured that our destructiveness is not the last word," but "to turn the past of guilt and injury into a resource, the soil on which a richer identity may grow."¹⁶ Reflection on the self in sin in the presence of God in Christ is an act of restoration and healing. It allows for the possibility of transcendence, not in the sense that the self and sin are left behind, but in the sense that the self glimpses, for a moment, both its condition of profound estrangement *and* God's radical loving action.

In this work, I do not promise to solve the mystery of sin. I offer no safeguards against bad acts. If I am successful, this project will complicate, not simplify, our understanding of sin and what it means to live as a self in sin. Following in the tradition of Augustine, Julian, Williams, and other Christian thinkers, I offer therapy but no cure. I do not understand reflection on sin as an event, a moment in which sin is revealed to us so that we no longer live as selves in sin and can now judge the sins of others with confidence. Instead, reflection on sin in light of Christian revelation is a process, an element of the ongoing life in Christ. Drawing on feminist thought, both secular and theological, and the Christian tradition, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, I reflect on the self in sin in hope of cultivating a deeper awareness of human existence and a greater compassion for that existence in all its complexity and heartbreak. I offer

¹⁵ 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 (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 37:8–10, 235 (hereafter W&J). References are to the chapter, line numbers, and page numbers of *A Revelation of Love* in this edition of Julian's work. I have modernized Julian's text for the convenience of my readers. For a full discussion of my treatment of Julian's work in this project, see "A Note on Manuscripts and Modernization" in chapter 3.

¹⁶ Rowan Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1982), 32.

this reflection as a way of opening the self to the grace that makes growth possible, instilling not a pious self-righteousness but a sobering humility that is infused with joy, drawn into God's love.

Although I acknowledge the importance of moral responsibility, in this work I resist mapping sin neatly onto categories of guilt and blame. I challenge the idea that the self's experience of sin can be understood only or even primarily as deeds, bad acts that can be enumerated, tallied, guarded against, or punished. I insist that such precise definitions of sins as particular acts are products of particular people or groups at particular moments in time, human constructions vulnerable themselves to the distorting effects of sin.¹⁷ This orientation toward sin as act, especially sin as particular acts, aligns neatly with talk about sin that is motivated by a concern with blame and guilt and a hunger for punishment. As I demonstrate below, these concerns can sometimes, perhaps often, be traced to a desire to control, the lust to dominate that Augustine cautioned us is the dominating lust.¹⁸ In this project, I am concerned not with an enumeration of sins but with reflection on the self in sin, the conditions of suffering, both experienced and inflicted, that permeate and fracture human existence. Reflecting on the self in this way requires a more nuanced, more complex understanding of the self than is sometimes found in contemporary thought, so I turn now to a brief discussion of the ways in which I wish to challenge two common assumptions about the self.

¹⁷ Here, I am embracing Michel Foucault's belief that "history serves to show how that-which-is has not always been; i.e., that the things which seem most evident to us are always formed in the confluence of encounters and chances, during the course of a precarious and fragile history." Michel Foucault, "Critical Theory/Intellectual History," *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984*, trans. Jeremy Harding (New York: Routledge, 1988), 37.

¹⁸ "...indeed, the lust for mastery, to say nothing of any other, is itself the harshest kind of mastery, which lays waste the hearts of mortal men." St. Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), XIX.15, 943.

3. Complicating the "Self"

There are two ways in which I want to complicate how we think about the self. First, I offer a challenge to contemporary assumptions about the self's agency and freedom. Second, I want to qualify and complicate an understanding of the self's identity as it relates to the personal and the social.

Charles Mathewes writes of the dangers of an exclusively subjectivist account of human agency that relies entirely on a particular understanding of human freedom to explain human existence.¹⁹ In the subjectivist account, the human subject is entirely self-determined, insulated from external forces, free to choose who and what she will become, wholly autonomous at every point in her existence. Contemporary concerns with this concept of "free will" usually link directly to concerns about moral responsibility and accountability.²⁰ If individuals do not freely choose their actions, they cannot be held accountable. This view of human existence would seem to be compatible with an exploration of the personal dimensions of sin: individual, autonomous, freely willing selves choose to do bad things; they sin. In this work, I challenge both this notion of the self and this notion of sin.

As Mathewes argues, the subjectivist account of the self, far from being a satisfactory explanation of human existence, collapses into incoherence when it becomes clear that the freely willing "I" remains a mystery, even to the self in which it resides. A subjectivist account begins and ends with the "I" that wills, but it offers no insight into how that "I" directs the self or why the self is beholden to this apparently unpredictable and freely willing "I".²¹ Subjectivism that

¹⁹ Charles Mathewes, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 52.
²⁰ For example, Cornelius Plantinga writes, "What seems clear is that all culpable moral wrongdoing is sin, that some wrongdoing is not sin because it is not culpable (as in some cases of wrongdoing by children, mentally deficient or disturbed persons, or persons whose morally wrong acts are determined by outside influences)." Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., "Not the Way It's S'pposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin," *Theology Today* 50 (July 1993): 186 n.14.

²¹ Mathewes, Evil and the Augustinian Tradition, 54.

stresses human freedom while simultaneously treating the self as an isolated agent renders human existence unintelligible, for a completely free, completely isolated self can neither predict nor explain her actions to herself or others. The choices of the "I" mysteriously erupt into existence, as much a surprise to the self as to others. Taking subjectivism and its notions of human freedom and human autonomy to this extreme helps us to see that its assumptions on several fronts are questionable, if not false. The self is neither completely free nor completely autonomous and self-determining.

In his study of mimetic theory and its usefulness in rethinking the doctrine of original sin, James Alison offers an alternative to the model of the subjectivist self with a theological anthropology that builds on a deep awareness of the ways in which "the self" is formed through relations, beginning with the infant's response to the adult who cares for her. Mimetic theory understands this attention as the first experience of imitation, the first step in a process that draws humans into social relations. These relations with others form the ground of who we are and who we become. Alison's model helps us see more clearly the false assumptions in the subjectivist model of an autonomous, freely choosing self. "The human self, the 'me' of each one of us," Alison writes, is "an unstable structure, one that is changeable, malleable, and other-dependent, whether it likes it or not. The other is always anterior to 'me."²² Alison's work is a brilliant illustration of the way in which Christian theology, while benefitting from engagement with social theory, ultimately reorients discussion of the self and its willing within the framework of God's agency and goodness. For Alison, Christian scripture reveals God to be the original and primary giver, the source of gratuitous giving that erupts into human history: "It is not universal human self-transcendence which makes itself explicit in the events and narrations of salvation,

²² James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin Through Easter Eyes* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 30.

but the universally present self-giving of God, enabling us to become receivers, rather than graspers, of the other which forms us, revealed as purely gratuitous.²³

Exploring the nature of the self with the help of feminist and womanist thought and Julian of Norwich is a primary focus of this project, for to explore the notion of the self in sin requires us to consider the nature of the self and its relations with God, itself, and others. I argue, with the help of Julian, that the self's experience of sin is best understood first as a state of existence, or more properly, a state of non-existence, a state of less-than-being that has at its ground estrangement from God. The self in sin is estranged from God, herself, and others. These forms of estrangement cannot be neatly segregated or even always distinguished, though I argue that these dimensions of human existence are not identical, even as they are intertwined.

In this thesis, I develop a conception of the self that attempts to avoid the false assumptions of subjectivism, even as it acknowledges that humans are, in some way, free (in ways that deeply challenge contemporary understandings of freedom), and that humans do, to some extent, determine themselves, even as they are constrained and shaped by forces other than a "willing I". Mathewes believes that a non-subjectivist account of human agency can reassure us that we have not been abandoned, that we are not as isolated as subjectivism asserts.²⁴ A non-subjectivist account assures us that we are not the sole determinant of our destinies. We are neither absolved of responsibility nor vested with it alone. The non-subjectivist view makes it possible for us to become deeply aware of sin as a persistent reality of our existence, beyond our powers to eliminate, while instilling in us hope for healing.

²³ Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong*, 45.

²⁴ Mathewes, Evil and the Augustinian Tradition, 57.

If I am to incorporate a notion of the non-subjectivist self into my conception of personal sin, reconceiving of humans as essentially responding to God,²⁵ then my conceptions of God must be subjected to rigorous feminist critique and creativity before they can be incorporated into a feminist conception of sin. Feminist scholars have long recognized the need to challenge the idolatry of exclusively masculine language for the divine. Rather than turning to this body of contemporary scholarship in developing a conception of sin that is both Christian and feminist, however, I draw instead on Julian's *A Revelation of Love*. This work provides a unique approach to sin that is compatible with some of the Christian tradition's thought on the self in sin, yet avoids, or even challenges, certain ways of thinking that are either themselves misogynistic or that have proven to be conducive to misogynistic ends. Most significant, Julian offers 1) a non-gendered understanding of the human, an important alternative to the gendered hierarchy of being we find in much of traditional Christian anthropology, and 2) a creatively gendered God, both of which are essential elements in developing a feminist conception of personal sin.

If the idea of the non-subjectivist self is my first challenge to contemporary assumptions about the self, my second challenge is to complicate the idea that the individual and the social can be understood as two easily separable, discrete entities. Recent scholarship on the self, particularly the poststructural thought of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler and the work of feminist theologian Catherine Keller, challenges the simplistic yet all-too-common collapse into a dualistic conception of individual vs. community in which we confront an either-or relation of a "unifying community or the ongoing advance into a fragmenting individualism."²⁶ The relationship between individual and social (and, for purposes of this project, the conceptions of

²⁵ Ibid., 17. See also H. R. Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999).

²⁶ Catherine Keller, *God and Power: Counter-Apocalyptic Journeys* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 212, discussing the work of Iris Marion Young.

sin unfolding in relation to each) is complicated and intertwined. For Foucault and Butler, the self is shaped by dominant social discourses of power that control as well as create. Foucault describes this phenomenon as power in "its capillary form of existence, the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives."²⁷ He argues that "the individual is not a pre-given entity which is seized on by the exercise of power, [but rather that] the individual, with his identity and characteristics, is the product of a relation of power exercised over bodies, multiplicities, movements, desires, forces."²⁸ Power and knowledge, for Foucault, are interrelated realities: to speak of one is to invoke the other. Knowledge of bodies produces effects upon those bodies.²⁹

For Judith Butler, sex, gender, and sexuality are not naturalized "facts" of human identity but rather repeated performances circumscribed by particular social/political/cultural rules. These social rules do not reflect reality with objective neutrality but, in fact, shape it, allowing us to see some things and ignore, fail to notice, or violently erase others. Butler argues that when we recognize the constructed, performative nature of gender, we begin to see how these rules can be parodied and subverted, thus undermining the hegemonic power of certain social discourses.³⁰ Both Foucault and Butler resist the idea of a neutrally formed, free-standing "self" that might choose to stand in opposition to or alliance with the "community." Some feminists, however, wish to retain the distinction between self and social, even as they complicate it. Catherine Keller

²⁷ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 39.

²⁸ Ibid., 73–74.

²⁹ "The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power...Knowledge and power are integrated with one another, and there is no point in dreaming of a time when knowledge will cease to depend on power...It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power." Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 52.

³⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1990/1999).

speaks of "solitude and solidarity," fleeting "communing moments" with "not-so-wholly others"³¹ and argues for a self that is becoming (a self) *and* relational (with others), both formed by relations and forming them.³² Keller and other feminists are careful to distinguish notions of relation, community, and mutuality over against notions of unity, loss of distinction, and dissolution of self into society.³³ For all the limitations and complications of the self/social binary, something remains important about the distinction.

So it is with reflections on the nature of sin. On the one hand, the social (both structural and relational) and personal (both condition and act) dimensions of sin are so intertwined that the distinction hovers on the edge of meaninglessness. On the other, there is something dangerously abstract and diffuse in an understanding of sin that does not attend in some way to the experience of the self as it is affected by, attests to, participates in, and struggles to understand sin. For all of its relationality, all of its sociality, the self remains unique and significant, even if its boundaries cannot be easily drawn or maintained as something other than the environments in which it exists, both physical and social. The permeability of the body defies us to mark just where it is that body ends and something else begins. Air enters and leaves the body as breath. Mouth, stomach, and intestines ingest, digest, and excrete. Chemicals, nutrients, matter seep into and out of the pores. Physical boundaries dissolve and form and dissolve again, reforming, passing through and on, and yet we nonetheless recognize individual bodies. The identity and boundaries of the self prove equally challenging to pin down. Languages that are not of the self permeate the self with infectious visions and biases, expanding and limiting, destroying and creating. Actions, behaviors, beliefs, desires enfold and form the self, even as they are enfolded and given shape by

³¹ Keller, God and Power, 221–22.

³² Catherine Keller, From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism, and Self (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986).

³³ Iris Marion Young, "The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference," *Social Theory and Practice* 12 (1986): 1–26, reprinted in *Feminist/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990), 300–23; Linell Elizabeth Cady, "Identity, Feminist Theory, and Theology," in *Horizons in Feminist Theology*, ed. Rebecca S. Chopp and Sheila Greeve Davaney (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 17–32.

the self. And yet despite the impossibility of precision, there remains a body, connected to a self, unique, irreplaceable, partial, and essentially part of something greater than itself.

This permeable self, understood, in Keller's words, as becoming and relational, helps frame a conception of sin that is personal without being privatized or individualistic. Rather than speaking of a personal/social binary, I employ the personal and social as partial, shifting perspectives on and dimensions of human experience, taking as my primary concern the socially infused and socially infusing contours of the self as it relates to Christian thought on sin. Further, I explore the claim that the conception of self and social as binary is, itself, an expression of the estranged nature of human existence, estrangement that this project describes as sin.

4. What's Wrong with Focusing on "Individual" Sin?

Before outlining my proposal to rethink some elements of the doctrine of original sin from a feminist perspective, I want to explore two closely related concerns about conceptions of sin in Christian thought: the tendency to focus exclusively on sin as an individualistic phenomenon, which I discuss in this section, and the tendency to focus on bad behavior when reflecting on sin, which I discuss in the following section. In particular, I want to show how these two tendencies function, how they cultivate, reinforce, and justify particular attitudes and behavior toward others that I hope to resist.

One of the major concerns that liberal theologians have raised, beginning with Walter Rauschenbusch in the early twentieth century, is that traditional conceptions of sin in the Christian tradition are overly individualistic, dangerously so. In his 1917 work, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, Rauschenbusch attributed Western Christianity's individualistic notions of sin to its corresponding emphasis on Adam's fall from a graced state of existence. The focus on Adam as solitary individual gave theology a "fatal turn" toward the individualistic in its development of a doctrine of sin,³⁴ stressing the ideas of personal damnation and personal salvation above all else. This individualistic turn meant that Western Christianity had concerned itself so intensely with "the soul of the individual and its struggles that [it had] remained uneducated as to the more complex units of spiritual life."³⁵ Rauschenbusch offered the social gospel, with its compelling and clear vision of the kingdom of God as the standard of righteousness (as opposed to the speculative vision of a pre-fall Adamic perfection) and its heightened sensitivity to the social nature of sin, as a vital antidote to the individualistic gospel he saw dominating Western Christian doctrine from its earliest formation. The individualistic gospel was unable to embrace the growing social awareness of the early 20th century, unable to recognize that its concern for the wrongdoings of an individual could devolve into irrelevant minutiae while grievous social harms went unremarked. Finally, and perhaps most important, the individualistic gospel did not acknowledge the powerful influence of social forces on the individual, the ways in which sin was "original" as the result of social contamination.³⁶

Rauschenbusch offers us a place to begin in thinking about the self in sin because he alerts us to some of the dangers of doing so. The focus on the individual too readily neglects the socially structured and communal dimensions of sin.³⁷ It too easily devolves into a language of

³⁴ Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, [1917] 1997), 51.

³⁵ Ibid., 69.

³⁶ Reinhold Niebuhr famously denounced what he saw as the unrealistic idealism of social gospelers in 1932 with his publication of *Moral Man, Immoral Society* (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1932). Gary Dorrien argues that Niebuhr was responding more to the works of those who took up the social gospel movement after Rauschenbusch's death and not the work of Rauschenbusch himself, which offered an understanding of the kingdom of evil and social sin that "in crucial respects...was closer to Niebuhr than to the social gospel moralism that Niebuhr later repudiated." Gary Dorrien, *Soul in Society: The Making and Renewal of Social Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 148–49.

³⁷ Even among groups that are sincerely dedicated to serving the needs of others, a too narrow focus on the individual can severely constrain one's capacity to build meaningful and lasting relationships across social and cultural differences. Paul Lichterman's study of mainline and evangelical Protestant ecumenical civic organizations who developed faith-based responses to welfare reform in 1996 shows that both a high degree of certainty (moral or practical—being confident from the outset that one knows the "problem" and its "solution") and an emphasis on personal needs (rather than appreciating the ways in which the personal and social are intertwined) left well-meaning, dedicated volunteers frustrated by their ineffective attempts to make the difference they wanted to make in

blame that, in turn, devolves into a justification for horrendous injustice. James Morone's historical study of American politics illustrates this tendency in American life. Whites in southern states justified the lynching of black men and the institution of Jim Crow oppression by accusing blacks of moral depravity, dismissing the overwhelming evidence that pointed to the significant progress that southern black communities had made to recover, not from "moral depravity," but rather from the degradation and destruction of slavery: "22,000 churches built, 32,000 schoolteachers in the classroom, and an illiteracy rate that [had] gone down 45% since Emancipation."³⁸ Morone argues that the white majority not only justified its treatment of blacks-conviction and execution by mob without trial, evidence, or anything resembling due process-with claims of moral depravity, but also glorified its own behavior, with white congregations posing proudly in the light of day for photographs beneath the bodies of dead black men hanging from the tree branches above them. White southerners "stripped their fellow citizens of the vote and called it removing the gun from the child's hand," Morone writes. "They stripped them of human rights and called it protection for our women and children."³⁹ These are the dangers of invoking the language of sin-at least, the dangers of talking about sin in a particular way—a way that equates sin and individual moral failing, moral depravity, or a list of vices attributed to individuals or groups of individuals.

This kind of talk about sin is dangerous for any individual or group that finds itself on the margins of power within a society. Articulating the violation of moral norms in the language of sin suggests a divine endorsement for the norms of a particular group. This divine endorsement, in turn, seems to justify "any means necessary" for controlling or punishing those who are

the lives of others. Paul Lichterman, *Elusive Togetherness: Church Groups Trying to Bridge America's Divisions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

³⁸ James Morone, *Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 297, quoting Ida Joyce Jackson, "Do Negroes Constitute a Race of Criminals?" *Colored American Magazine* 12:4 (April 1907): 252.

³⁹ Ibid., 297.

accused of "sin". The violation of a social norm becomes a violation against God and the accusation of sin becomes a weapon of social control. In her study of witchcraft in 17th century New England, Carol F. Karlsen observes that although witches "are almost always described as deviants-disorderly women who had failed to, or refused to, abide by the behavioral norms of their society," in actuality, women accused of witchcraft during this period were more similar to their neighbors than not, no more prone to lapse into generally "sinful" behavior than those not accused.⁴⁰ Karlsen argues that women accused of witchcraft most often violated *particular* norms—those connected with gendered hierarchy, or, as some clergy described it—"the order of creation" (119). Women who behaved in ways perceived to be a threat to the proper social order (especially the economic order that privileged a particular group of men) were most likely to be targeted: women who had experienced some degree of success as independent business owners, women who inherited substantial property in the absence of male heirs, or women who were perceived to challenge the authority of male clergy (101, 125). Women who openly expressed their dissatisfaction with the social order were particularly vulnerable. Petitioning for divorce, protesting what they perceived as mistreatment (when, for example, their property was seized by male neighbors or family members), or publicly expressing frustration or anger with their lot became evidence of their pact with the Devil (128). The charges of sin leveled against witches could have been leveled against numerous others in the community without leading to charges of witchcraft. It wasn't just that these women were envious, greedy, or proud; their behavior was cast in terms of sin to cloak the charges in religious righteousness when the more practical transgression, Karlsen argues, was as likely to be economic, theological, or social competition with men (146).

⁴⁰ Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987), 118.

Karlsen's study, like Morone's discussion of lynching in the American South, illustrates the ways in which the language of sin can be employed strategically to elevate and obscure more earthly motives for attacking and attempting to control others. In one way, the Christian community of 17th century New England operated with a conception of sin that functioned in the "ordinary" sense—sin is universal, afflicting everyone, to be resisted. In another way, sin was deployed in an "extraordinary" sense with murderous effect when women transgressed the boundaries surrounding male and female. In being perceived as transgressing those boundaries, these women discovered their vulnerability on the margins of society, a dangerous place to be when moralistic talk about sin reaches fever pitch.

In seeking an alternative to moralistic ways of talking about sin, I want to keep in mind what can go wrong when one uses sin as a lens to focus on the individual rather than society, even as I maintain a focus on the individual's experience with sin. Liberation theologies, including womanist, feminist, and *mujerista* theologies, have provided important alternatives to individualistic conceptions of sin, drawing on Christian theology to provide visions for naming and addressing social wrongs, empowering believers to stand in solidarity with the oppressed, insisting upon and working for change in this life. The social gospel movement and related schools of thought have recognized that an individualistic conception of sin may too easily become another tool of oppression, conflating sin with blame and guilt and explaining an individual's suffering in terms of her individual sins. In this context, sin is understood as shameful, willful, disobedient acts, and the one who sins deserves the suffering she gets.

Within such an individualistic framework, Christians are "good" when they focus on their obedience to God, praying for God's grace and salvation, both of which are understood in terms of their individual fate before God. This kind of focus, these critics argue, encourages passive acceptance of social harms by turning individuals away from the suffering around them toward

the promise of personal salvation to come. Rather than challenging individuals to become "resistance fighters working to end these 'corrosions of sacred possibilities'," an emphasis on individualistic sin and salvation can instead foster "passive and active accomplices in…crimes against the vulnerable" and use the doctrine of original sin to blame the victim.⁴¹ The historical perspectives offered by Morone and Karlsen remind us that the language of sin can be invoked not only to justify the suffering of the oppressed, it can be used to cloak the actions of oppressors in a mantle of righteousness. Invoking the language of sin eclipses the injustice inflicted by oppressors in the name of preserving morality.

Given the dangers of an overly individualistic focus when talking about sin, instead of talking about "individual sin," I adopt instead the language of "personal sin" to mark my awareness of these dangers and my desire to avoid them as I explore the nature of the self in sin. In speaking of individual sin (or, in the context of this project, personal sin), Christian thought has traditionally offered us the distinction of original and actual sin—sin is both condition and behavior. Again, I resist the traditional language and adopt instead the language of sin as condition and sin as act in hopes of disrupting established assumptions about the nature of original and actual sin. In the next section, I focus on the idea of sin as act, in particular, sin as bad behavior, and explain why I find it to be just as problematic as an overly individualistic conception of sin.

5. What's Wrong With Focusing on Sin as Bad Behavior?

The over-emphasis on individualistic sin in Western Christianity is closely related to the second concern I want to raise with regard to talking about sin: that is, the tendency to overemphasize sin as bad behavior. These ideas have proven particularly persistent in American

⁴¹ Engel, "Evil, Sin, and the Violation of the Vulnerable," 160–62.

culture, at times explicitly and at others implicitly, operating beneath the surface even when "sin" is never mentioned. In this section, I show how these ideas about sin can cultivate a hostility toward others who are judged "sinful" or "bad" that, in turn, justifies the dismissal or violation of those others. It is because I find these ideas about sin to be so persistent and their effect on attitudes and behavior so pernicious, even when they are detached from an explicit language of "sin" or a context that is "Christian", that I argue for the importance of rethinking the concept of personal sin as condition.

In this section, I first highlight some of the claims and concerns about personal sin that arise frequently in American culture. What images and stories shape American imaginations with regard to personal sin and how do these images contribute to or challenge the ways in which particular people or groups are encouraged to see themselves as worthless? I then explore the ways in which particular strands of thought within Christian theology can be understood as reinforcing these popular ideas about sin.

a. Popular Understandings of Sin in American Culture

Contemporary thought is quick to equate sin and deed. Sin is what humans *do*. Speaking of sin, especially the personal dimension of sin, most often means deeming an action sin, assigning blame, invoking guilt, and judging the individual as damned. Consider, for example, one of the more pervasive popular narratives involving Christian conceptions of sin in recent years: the bestselling series of *Left Behind* novels written by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins.⁴² The series, which has sold over 60 million copies and spun off additional series and movie adaptations, presents a fictionalized account of the Rapture, an event that some evangelical

⁴² Tim Lahaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1995). The series' obsession with good and bad behavior, emerging as it does from a particular strand of Protestant belief and practice, complicates the traditional distinction between Roman Catholic and Protestant, with the former generally presumed to concern itself with particular sins, while the latter is presumed to focus on the idea of sin as a condition.

Christians believe is foretold in the Bible. In the Left Behind version of this account, the protagonists come to believe early in the first novel of the series that the Rapture has taken place, the true church of true Christians has been taken up into the sky with the resurrected Jesus Christ. Those who are left behind face seven years of tribulations, great sufferings sent by God to convince those still on earth to convert to Christianity before Jesus returns a final time to judge those who remain. This vision of the endtimes is far from being the only Christian vision, nor is it one that all evangelical Christians embrace,⁴³ yet its ideas about sin and sinners illustrate a powerful set of beliefs that have deep roots in the Western imagination. Bruce David Forbes attributes the series' popularity with not only some evangelical "born again" Christians but other Christians and some atheists to its reinforcement of several powerful, recurring themes in American popular culture: evil is an external threat, a person is good or bad but not both, one deals with evil by destroying those who are evil, and good always wins.⁴⁴ These themes in popular culture can be correlated with common beliefs about sin: sin is bad behavior that deserves punishment; the ultimate "punisher" is God; people who suffer have done something to deserve their suffering—they have sinned; those who do not sin are rewarded by God, not only in some otherworldly afterlife but here and now with material prosperity and good fortune.

The Left Behind novels provide an extreme illustration of the ways in which a particular set of assumptions about sin and salvation—sin is constituted by a set of bad acts that humans freely choose or do not choose thereby "deserving" or "earning" whatever punishment or reward they receive—shape and reinforce popular ideas about human behavior. But we can trace signs of these assumptions pressing against the surface of American discourse in other arenas,

⁴³ A. L. Barry, president of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, called the series "an unbiblical flight of fancy receiving far more press than it deserves." Bruce David Forbes and Jeanne Halgren Kilde, eds., *Rapture, Revelation, and the End Times* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 18. Note, however, that evangelical protest against the novels often focuses on the series' willingness to consider post-Rapture conversion a real possibility, not on its reinforcement of an Us vs. Them mentality

⁴⁴ Ibid., 24.

sometimes breaking through as explicit claims, more often remaining as shadows on the edge of our collective consciousness.

Emilie Townes argues that a set of religious values undergirds much of U.S. public policy focused on issues related to poverty. Because the religious history of these values has slipped beneath the surface of conscious thought and debate, policy makers do not question the ways in which the early Protestant work ethic, defined by Martin Luther and John Calvin as a positive aspect of human life as ordered by God, has in U.S. culture been interwoven with an individualistic conception of the self shaped by Enlightenment thought. The early Protestant understanding of work as divine calling and vocation, a way of fulfilling one's obligation to serve God and neighbor, has evolved into a modern understanding of the work ethic that understands work itself as both duty and a source of value and identity. Work has retained a moral significance but has become detached from the religious context that gave it this value originally and, more important, set its limits.

The idea of individuals as autonomous, independent and rational units, each with a set of natural rights, has, Townes argues, "loosed an unrestrained or rampant individualism in many of our private and public beliefs and practices that stress personal responsibility and despise any hint of or the reality of dependency."⁴⁵ This unrestrained individualism, combined with an enduring belief that poverty is "a result of vice, a lack of thrift, and/or the failure to do the will of God," keeps our society and our policy makers focused on "the incremental conversion of individual souls" and on individual morality rather than the injustices of the larger social structure.⁴⁶ If we believe that hard work unfailingly yields reward (usually material prosperity) that is blessed by God, and poverty is a sign of God's displeasure in the face of slothfulness (i.e.,

⁴⁵ Townes, Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil, 123.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 121 and 124.

sinfulness), then the appropriate political response to the poor is not to provide food, shelter, and access to high quality education and health care, but rather to ensure moral reform and independence. As Townes observes, "the moralization of poverty in the age of empire is a gruesome and death-dealing pageant for low-income and poor women, men, and children."⁴⁷ In a similar vein, Traci West draws our attention to "government-established public practices [that]

presume that poverty is a result of irresponsibility" and the governing policies that "demand moral reform of the applicant" who seeks public assistance.⁴⁸ If the poor were only better people, they wouldn't be poor. Although politicians speak in terms of "individual morality" and "personal responsibility," their subtext is that of sin.

While I am interested in exploring dimensions of personal responsibility within a context of sin, the kind of moralistic approach of the *Left Behind* novels, an approach that, as Townes and West demonstrate, continues to exert influence in some forms of secular political discourse, is particularly unhelpful for those whom Andrew Sung-Park and Susan L. Nelson describe as "the sinned-against."⁴⁹ Although I am uneasy with this language of "sinned-against"—in that it tempts us again into dualistic compartmentalizations, dividing people between those who sin and those who are harmed by sin—with Sung-Park and Nelson, I share a concern for those who know "woundedness" as a relentless attack on their souls and their bodies. I do not find in the language of sinful acts, blame, guilt, and moral reform a language that offers such individuals any contradiction or challenge to the blame, guilt, and self-hatred they already experience on the margins of a society that has taught them to believe themselves to be worthless. Such language does nothing to draw them into the fold of divine, healing love that Augustine and Julian tell us

⁴⁷ Ibid., 125.

⁴⁸ West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics*, 79–80.

⁴⁹ Andrew Sung Park and Susan L. Nelson, eds., *The Other Side of Sin: Woundedness from the Perspective of the Sinned-Against* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001).

must be central to any reflection on sin.⁵⁰ To the contrary, as Christine E. Gudorf argues, citing Sheila A. Redmond's research with survivors of childhood sexual assault, an emphasis on the inborn guilt of individuals in Christian teachings can "easily produce feelings of guilt and unworthiness in individuals" and make it "difficult to understand the guilt and feelings of unworthiness stemming from sexual violence as negative and in need of resolution."⁵¹

b. The Emphasis on Bad Behavior and Punishment in Christian Thought on Sin

These popular and political assumptions about sin and personal responsibility find some of their grounding, consciously or unconsciously, in a long theological tradition of Christian thought on sin. Jesse Couenhoven identifies three "traditional Christian commitments about sin": only persons sin, sin is why persons need divine forgiveness, sin is why persons deserve divine punishment.⁵² For Couenhoven, the "best" view of sin will make sense of what Christian scripture and "widespread practices and beliefs" have had to say about sin. Central among these beliefs for Couenhoven is a concern with divine punishment: "sin is that which makes persons appropriate candidates for divine retributive punishment (most radically but not solely exemplified by hell)."⁵³ Although Couenhoven does not elaborate on the origins of his claim that these three commitments are central to Christian concerns with sin, he is not alone in associating sin with guilt, blame, and punishment. David Kelsey wonders if the reason talk about sin seems

⁵⁰ In her work with addiction recovery groups and survivors of trauma, Linda Mercadante has found it to be critical to distinguish between "sin" and "blame": "Victims need to have their particular conditions recognized before tackling the difficult tangle of issues involving culpability, personal responsibility and appropriate action" (286), she writes. "Before we rush on to find the victim's part in allowing the evil to happen, display a hidden expectation that he or she will react badly, or blame or absolve God, we need to stay awhile with the condition of being-sinned-against and get a clearer picture of what that looks and feels like and how it can deeply color a victim's frame of suffering" (294). Mercadante's work illuminates the importance of developing a concept of sin that does not immediately concern itself with questions of responsibility, agency, or blame. Linda Mercadante, "Anguish: Unraveling Sin and Victimization," *Anglican Theological Review* 82 (2000): 283–302.

⁵¹ Christine E. Gudorf, *Body, Sex, and Pleasure: Reconstructing Christian Sexual Ethics* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1994), 198, citing Sheila A. Redmond, "Christian 'Virtues' and Recovery from Child Sexual Abuse," in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*, ed. Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 74.

 ⁵² Jesse Couenhoven, "What Sin Is: A Differential Analysis," *Modern Theology* 25 (2009): 564–5.
 ⁵³ Ibid., 564.

to have faded from the forefront in Christian communities is due to "an abandonment of the concept of divine wrath, for, if there is no need to talk about the wrath of God, then there is not much need to talk about the sin that incurs the wrath."⁵⁴ Marguerite Shuster argues that thinkers who move away from the traditional view of sin with its emphasis on guilt and punishment toward a view that emphasizes human finitude and fragility "banish not only the fear of punishment but also the hope of redemption."⁵⁵ To the contrary, as I argued in the introduction to this chapter, I believe humanity's need for redemption can best be understood when one begins with humanity's suffering, rather than its guilt.

In the Protestant Reformed view as Shuster articulates it, sin is exactly about how willfully disobedient and culpable humans are: "We are not innocent," she writes. "We are not only sinful but guilty for our sin—guilty and blameworthy."⁵⁶ This strand of Christian thought on sin is about confronting humans with their fallen natures and dissolute acts before God and neighbor. It stresses divine supremacy, understands sin as disobedience to the divine will,⁵⁷ and cites sin as the explanation for suffering.⁵⁸ It sometimes invokes an intense focus on sin as the

⁵⁴ David H. Kelsey, "Whatever Happened to the Doctrine of Sin?" *Theology Today* 50 (1993): 169. Kelsey challenges the basic assumption that the doctrine of sin has fallen out of use, arguing that it has, instead, "migrated" from its original context within a doctrine of creation and now functions, though often "undercover", in contemporary discussions of theological anthropology, redemption, and Christology. Although he maintains the doctrine of sin is still "vigorously alive," he nonetheless concludes the concept seems to have lost some of its traction in the daily life of Christian communities. I take up the topic of divine wrath and sin within the context of Julian of Norwich's theology in chapters 3 and 4.

⁵⁵ Marguerite Shuster, *The Fall and Sin: What We Have Become as Sinners* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 158.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 116.

⁵⁷ "It was because man forsook God by pleasing himself that he was handed over to himself, and, because he did not obey God, could not obey himself." Augustine, *City of God*, XIV:24, 627. Sharon Welch has argued for the dangerous consequences of Augustine's emphasis on divine power: "The claim of complete obedience to a higher power justifies total control of others...[Augustine's] view of unremitting human weakness and the goodness and necessity of divine control legitimates his exercise of coercive power as a bishop." Sharon D. Welch, *A Feminist Ethic of Risk* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), 112–13. We find a similar emphasis on obedience to the divine command in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Creation and Fall*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall / Temptation: Two Biblical Studies* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 72–74.

⁵⁸ Wendy Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion: A Contemporary Theodicy* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 13. In a later essay, Farley reiterates, "Much, though certainly not all, of classical Christian theology is dedicated to showing that suffering is not unjust." Wendy Farley, "The Practice of

best defense against injustice or moral decay, usually citing particular behaviors, beliefs, or acts as the sins that must be resisted in the self and condemned in others.

This tradition of Christian thought on sin stresses divine goodness, human guilt, and divine punishment. Divine goodness did not create humans for sin; the first humans incurred God's wrath through their freely chosen acts against God, making them deserving candidates of God's punishment. Subsequent generations receive this "original" sin and contribute to human guilt through their actions, omissions, and impulses. In John Calvin's words, humans are "overwhelmed" by sin, "as by a deluge—from head to foot, so that no part is immune from sin and all that proceeds from [them] is to be imputed to sin."⁵⁹ Divine goodness completes the circle by intervening in history through the person of Jesus Christ in loving response to humankind's bad acts and corrupt natures.

Part of the motivation in stressing the seriousness of human sinfulness has to do with convincing humans of their need for salvation and God's grace. Again, as Shuster observes, in her tradition, talking about sin is not about reassuring humans that their sins can be understood as "just a few immature spots that can be cured by a bit of 'growth'," but instead about shocking humans into "acknowledging the terrible depth and insoluble nature of [their] moral problem."⁶⁰ Thinking of Seneca—one of the women who find their way to the Convent in *Paradise*, who was abandoned in an apartment at the age of five, who has subjected herself repeatedly to the abuse of others in hopes of gaining their love—it is nearly impossible to imagine her reflection on sin needs to begin by "shocking" her into "acknowledging the terrible depth and insoluble nature of

Theodicy," in *Pain Seeking Understanding: Suffering, Medicine, and Faith*, ed. Margaret E. Mohrmann and Mark J. Hanson (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1999), 103.

⁵⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), II.1, 9. ⁶⁰ Shuster, *The Fall and Sin*, 100 and 184.

her moral problem.⁶¹ Some people may, indeed, as Shuster argues, need to be so shocked, but Seneca already fully believes she is her own insoluble moral problem.

In the views that Couenhoven and Shuster describe, sin is a moral problem that has its beginnings in the biblical account of the first humans in the garden and their decision to eat the fruit of the tree that had been forbidden to them by God. Christian discussions of sin often begin with an interpretation of Genesis 3, the Fall, and its consequences for humanity.⁶² Augustine, whose thought on sin is foundational to traditional conceptions of sin in Christian thought,⁶³ understood the Fall as ending a harmonious existence with God. Death entered human existence, not only for the first humans but for all humankind. Augustine's thought on sin begins with the normative anthropological claim that humans are created to love and praise God. To love and praise God is, for Augustine, to obey God. Humans have failed profoundly on all fronts, beginning with the first act of sin.

In Book XIV of the *City of God*, Augustine asserts that before the Fall, humans lived in harmony with God and would have known only peace with one another,⁶⁴ yet they sacrificed this harmony for the sake of their own wills (604). In Augustine's reading of Genesis, humans chose to disobey God, a senseless act that fractured the harmony of their existence, inside and out. They tried to act as their own gods and so were handed over to themselves (611). They became their own greatest problem. They came "closer to nothingness" (609). Where once they were

⁶¹ Morrison, *Paradise*, 126–38.

⁶² Although Paul Tillich describes Genesis 1–3 as "the profoundest and richest expression of man's awareness of his existential estrangement," he cautions that "Biblical literalism did a distinct disservice to Christianity in its identification of the Christian emphasis on the symbol of the Fall with the literalistic interpretation of the Genesis story." Tillich, instead, urges theology to "clearly and unambiguously represent 'the Fall' as a symbol for the human situation universally, not as the story of an event that happened 'once upon a time." Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 29–31.

⁶³ According to Alistair McFadyen, "Augustine's understanding of sin is the conventional, and arguably even obligatory, point through which to engage the tradition on account of his unequalled role in shaping Western Christianity's understanding of sin." Alistair McFadyen, *Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust, and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 167.

⁶⁴ Augustine, *City of God*, 581. All subsequent parenthetical references to *City of God* are to page numbers in this edition.

ordered properly, aligned with God as their highest and only end, now they are disordered, not only in their desires, but also in their very ability to will and act consistently (612). Sex, originally a sign of the goodness of creation, is now a site of disorder.⁶⁵ Rather than passing the seed of goodness from one generation to the next, sex now transmits sin (617 and 624).

In turning from God and fracturing existence, humans lost the capacity for judgment. They became unable to distinguish good from evil. Left to themselves, they could not choose anything good. Even things that might be good if understood properly, if used for a proper end, were corrupted by humans who sought them as ends in themselves. There is a senseless quality to sin for Augustine, a perversion that defies understanding. The first humans turned from God and caused their own fall. They lost the capacity to desire only God.⁶⁶ With each sin, humans continue to turn from God, the source of their being and happiness. When Augustine recalls stealing pears as an adolescent, not out of hunger but for the sheer delight of doing something

⁶⁵ Kate Cooper and Conrad Leyser stress that Augustine did not attribute original sin to the body and its sexual desires but instead read the body's inability to perform sexually on demand as evidence of the damage of sin. Here Augustine is, of course, concerned primarily with the *male* body's inability to perform on demand. As Cooper and Leyser observe, Augustine "[introduced] impotence into the philosophical discourse of excess and self-control." Kate Cooper and Conrad Leyser, "The Gender of Grace: Impotence, Servitude, and Manliness in the Fifth-Century West," *Gender and History* 12 (November 2000): 541–42.

⁶⁶ Ian McFarland suggests that throughout the course of his work, Augustine discusses two different types of damage to the will that resulted from the fall, both of which are reflected in my discussion here. The first, loss of control of the self, not only loses coherence in light of evolutionary biology, McFarland argues ("There is no reason to suppose that human beings ever enjoyed the kind of control over bodily functions that Augustine seems to envision as Adam's original state," he observes), it also undermines the argument Augustine makes for a noncompetitive relationship between divine grace and human willing by suggesting that self-control might be reestablished through grace without human participation. The second understanding of the damaged will, McFarland argues, the idea of disoriented or disordered desire, is more coherent with the rest of Augustine's thought. If we understand the will not as a type of choosing but rather a function that follows desire, then we can see that the will functions as it should even in a fallen state: it follows desire, however disordered those desires may be. It is desire, not will, that needs to be healed. Healing is not a restoration of control but a restoration of self-consistency. "At bottom, willing is not tied up with the capacity for self-control associated with the rhetoric or experience of choice: even as God's freedom of will does not consist in any capacity to choose between options, but simply in the perfect correspondence between God's triune agency and God's loving nature, so human willing is free when it corresponds to its created end and not by its power to choose." Ian A. McFarland, In Adam's Fall: A Meditation on the Christian Doctrine of Original Sin (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 144–48. For further discussion of Augustine's cooperative model of divine grace and human will with regard to conversion, see David Aers, Salvation and Sin: Augustine, Langland, and Fourteenth-Century Theology (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009).

forbidden, he concedes he delighted in his own destruction.⁶⁷ Not only have humans lost the capacity to judge truly, they are so perverse they seek out even what they believe is wrong.

We see these themes of human responsibility and freedom, human guilt, divine judgment, and human inability to discern the good throughout Christian discussions of sin. This variation of thought on sin, with its emphases on original disobedience and guilt, holds all humans responsible for sin in the world, regardless of their particular situations or choices. To many of its critics, it seems more concerned with stressing that the man hammering a woman's face with his fists, the woman being beaten to death, and the child who watches in terror are all sinners, responsible and guilty, than with stopping the violence, addressing injustice, and healing wounds. Perhaps it is not so surprising that some feminist thinkers, even those who once identified with the Christian tradition, have turned elsewhere for inspiration and guidance, leaving behind any talk of sin, most especially in its "original" form. Perhaps what is more surprising is that a feminist like myself, who shares these concerns, believes it is possible and worthwhile to rearticulate some aspects of the doctrine of notion of original sin as part of a feminist project, so I turn now to that part of my proposal.

6. Rethinking Original Sin

Kathryn Tanner argues for the strategic importance of a feminist "rearticulation" of "the cultural elements" used in the "patriarchal discourse" of Christian thought:

The more that feminist theologians use for their own purposes the cultural elements that have been appropriated by patriarchal interests, the greater the feminist claim on theological credibility, and the harder it is for a feminist agenda to be dismissed by those committed to the dominant patriarchal organization of theological discourse.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Augustine, Confessions, II.iv.9, 29.

⁶⁸ Kathryn Tanner, "Social Theory Concerning the 'New Social Movements' and the Practice of Feminist Theology," in *Horizons in Feminist Theology: Identity, Tradition, and Norms*, ed. Rebecca S. Chopp and Sheila Greeve Davaney (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 189–90.

I choose to wrestle with the idea of sin, especially some of the aspects of the doctrine of original sin, not only out of a desire to gain theological credibility but because my Christian commitments are ones I hold sincerely. I experience my Christian commitments, which have been shaped by my upbringing in the Episcopal Church in Virginia and my study of Augustine, Julian, and liberation theologies, particularly feminist and womanist, as living in productive tension with my feminist commitments. Each challenges the other to greater honesty and greater accountability. My Christian commitments grant theological significance to the destructive impulse in humankind. They acknowledge the severity of the human situation-that no change for the better is beyond corruption—and claim a hope that sustains us in the present—that no darkness is beyond the reach of the light that is Christ in the world. Finally, and here my commitments are influenced most strongly by Augustine's thought, they affirm that sin is inescapable, that it cannot be educated, reformed, or improved out of us, while simultaneously insisting that we are creatures of God's grace and love, capable through grace of responding to and participating in God's goodness. Sin, for all its seriousness, is neither the first nor the last word about the human condition.

In the first part of this section, I consider some of the feminist objections to the idea of original sin and then examine four contemporary works that rethink the doctrine of original sin in response, at least in part, to those concerns. In the second part of this section, I present my argument for rethinking some elements of the doctrine of original sin from a feminist perspective and introduce the idea of personal sin as estrangement.

a. The Doctrine of Original Sin: Its Detractors and Its Revisionists

Modern moral sensibilities recoil at many of the traditional claims associated with the doctrine of original sin. Sharon Welch criticizes Augustine as advocating an "erotics of

domination" in which "the claim of complete obedience to a higher power justifies the total control of others."⁶⁹ Judith Stark describes Augustine as "the man whom feminists love to hate," a not entirely exaggerated claim due, in large part, not only to Augustine's ideas about women but to his ideas about sin.⁷⁰ Wendy Farley wonders if John Calvin was "too innocent or too cruel to imagine the possibility of unjust and destructive suffering?" and asks why Calvin, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas "have so little wisdom to offer those who suffer?"⁷¹ Even if one accepts the claim that original sin is transmitted to each successive generation, how can individuals—indeed, all of humanity—be held responsible for that which is inherited? Why would anyone believe in a God of wrath who distributes suffering as punishment for sin when some forms of suffering—starvation, rape, murder, torture—are distributed disproportionately, engulfing some lives and hardly brushing the edges of others? And if suffering in this life is to be understood as a consequence of sin, why does it appear that so many bad acts lead not to suffering but greater power and privilege?

Farley, in particular, has rejected traditional notions of Christian sin. Although she recognizes how reflecting on and talking about sin can "assist us in seeing the seriousness of injustice and to understand it as a religious and spiritual problem rather than a matter of political opinion,"⁷² she is willing to forego its power in order to avoid its seductive temptation to indulge the human craving for dualistic clarity. Christian thought on sin, with its emphasis on guilt and blame, Farley believes, strays too easily into the language of the saved and the damned. It

⁶⁹ Welch, *A Feminist Ethic of Risk*, 112. Welch bases her argument on Elaine Pagels's reading of Augustine in "The Politics of Paradise," *Harvard Theological Review* 78:1–2 (1985): 67–99. Pagels's reading focuses primarily on *City of God* and the *Confessions*.

⁷⁰ Judith Chelius Stark, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Stark, 2007), 21. As Stark goes on to clarify, and as the accompanying essays in this volume demonstrate, feminist views of Augustine are not all so one-dimensional.

⁷¹ Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion*, 12

⁷² Wendy Farley, *The Wounding and Healing of Desire: Weaving Heaven and Earth.* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 23.

"reinforces our pleasure in casting judgment." Just as important, the language of sin as guilt (and for Farley, the language of sin is irrevocably intertwined with guilt) proves inadequate to describe and interpret human experience. It "limits our perception of how we are bound to harmful ways of life"⁷³ by equating harm of self or others with guilt. This framework of guilt cannot interpret human experiences that seem "good" and yet can be harmful, such as Farley's example of an individual who is addicted to caregiving (or encouraged to sacrifice herself through caregiving). Humans harm themselves and contribute to the harm of others in ways that do not always map meaningfully into a vocabulary of guilt and blame, as the characters of *Paradise* make clear. Suffering can neither be contained nor explained exclusively by guilt.

One of Farley's goals is to develop an interpretation of human existence that cultivates compassion. She rejects the language of sin because it too often cultivates a hardness of heart that judges others as deserving their suffering and distorts human understandings of the divine:

To conceive of our primary identity as sinners makes it all the more difficult to reconnect with the soul's power for love and joy. Worst of all, it maligns the Divine Eros and shuts the magnificence of divine love into a narrow box of judgment, anger, and grudging forgiveness. Sin misrepresents who we are and most of all who God is.⁷⁴

In contrast to much of the popular and political rhetoric related to sin in American culture, four theologians, taking the concerns raised by Farley and others seriously, have attempted to reclaim the doctrine of original sin and demonstrate its continuing validity and usefulness. The four works discussed here offer some of most thoughtful and theologically rich discussions of original sin in contemporary Christian thought. All four thinkers turn to the doctrine of original sin with a deep awareness of the dangers of talking about sin and how such talk can be manipulated to reinforce oppression and injustice. All four believe, nonetheless, that

⁷³ Ibid., 24.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

rethinking and reclaiming the doctrine of original sin is an important task for Christian theology and ethics. In many ways, their work serves as a model for what I am attempting in this project, even as our projects differ, differences I discuss below and again in chapter 5.

Working within the context of process-relational theology, Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki rejects the traditional idea of sin as rebellion against God, in part because those in positions of power have so often invoked it as a divine mandate against all forms of rebellion, including the liberative efforts of those who are marginalized and oppressed, in part because framing all sin in terms of rebellion against God tends to erase the distinctions among sins and to erase the suffering of particular victims.⁷⁵ Suchocki offers in its place the idea that sin is rebellion against the well-being of creation, rebellion that still affects God who is in relation with all of creation, but rebellion understood to encompass all of creation along with God.⁷⁶ Humans originally survived through violence but, Suchocki argues, once the possibility of self-transcendence entered human consciousness (a relational, "horizontal" self-transcendence that operates through the three modes of memory, empathy, and imagination), humans had within them the possibility of freedom, the possibility of choosing to promote well-being rather than violent destruction of others or the self. With the development of self-transcendence, humans could choose otherwise,

⁷⁵ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1994), 17–18.

⁷⁶ Suchocki acknowledges that one's understanding of and claims for "well-being" will be contextual and relative but she insists that "the criterion of well-being is not empty, nor is it so varied as to be necessarily unrecognizable." Humans violate the well-being of others when they "negate the truth of the other or one's own fullness...[have] no love toward the other's or one's own good...[and maintain] a blindness to beauty in forms other than one's own" (80). While I share Suchocki's concern for the well-being of creation, including its human members, I believe the relativized, vague content of her concept of "well-being" could benefit greatly from engagement with more practical efforts to define basic human needs and functioning, such as the capabilities approach developed by Martha Nussbaum on the basis of a concept first proposed by Amartya Sen in 1979. For Nussbaum's original proposal of the capabilities approach, see Martha Nussbaum, *Sex and Social Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 41–42. For her later development of the approach as an important addition/corrective to John Rawls's theory of justice, see Martha Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006). See also Amartya Sen's 1979 Tanner Lecture on Human Values, "Equality of What?" (available through the Tanner Humanities Center at the University of Utah: http://tannerlectures.utah.edu/lecture-library.php#s, accessed November 30, 2014).

so to choose violence, to effect the ill-being of another or one's self was to sin. For Suchocki, "the critical importance of retaining the terminology of sin is that sin, unlike evil, entails human responsibility and human hope."77

Suchocki is concerned primarily with the *why* of sin, "why it is that we humans are so capable of such great harm to all of creation, including ourselves."⁷⁸ For Suchocki, as for most Christian theologians, the explanation rests on the founding assumption that sin cannot be attributed to God. God did not create humans to be sinners. Suchocki offers a "three-fold" explanation through her development of original sin as, first, an evolutionary predisposition toward aggression and violence that, second, infects humankind with a deep anxiety (an infection made possible through the interrelated nature of all creation) and, third, is calcified and perpetuated through social institutions.⁷⁹ She develops a model of guilt and forgiveness in response to this three-fold understanding of original sin. Guilt, for Suchocki, is a "transitional reality" that precedes one's participation in divine forgiveness, which she defines as "the will toward well-being for both victim and violator in the fullest possible knowledge of the nature of the violation."⁸⁰

Where Suchocki uses process-relationship theology and evolutionary science as her entrée for rethinking the doctrine of original sin, James Alison draws instead upon mimetic theory and the work of René Girard. Alison writes of how, from a young age, he felt himself "gnawed and chewed—indeed at some level imprisoned—by" various allusions to the doctrine of original sin and the ways in which it promised to (but never quite did) enlighten his understanding of what it means to be human within the context of the Catholic Christian

⁷⁷ Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 130.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 161. ⁷⁹ Ibid., 163.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 164.

narrative. Upon encountering Girard's work on human desire, Alison felt he had discovered "a perspective, at once absolutely traditional and completely fresh," that allowed him to see the story line of human existence in a radically different way from the fall/salvation story line offered by a traditional account of original sin.⁸¹ For Girard, human desire is triangular, rather than linear, less a subject desiring a particular object than a subject desiring an object *because it is desired by another*. This "mimetic" desire can be acquisitive/rivalistic or pacific (a non-rivalistic imitation that Alison sees embodied in and made possible through Christ). Alison offers mimetic theory as a powerful hermeneutic for reading the Gospel and understanding both what it is Christ is revealing (pacific mimesis) and what this revelation overturns (acquisitive mimesis and the violence that emerges from it).⁸²

Mimetic theory is Alison's "way in" to rethinking the doctrine of original sin. It allows him to reframe original sin in terms of giving and receiving. With the help of mimetic theory, we see that what was lost to humans in the fall was "not our capacity to *receive*, because we have to receive in order to exist, but our capacity to receive *gratuitously*, which is the only way in which we can share in divine life, because that life can never be other than gratuitous."⁸³ In Alison's project, original sin describes "the human state of affairs that is opposed to the coming into being of the new creation" revealed by Christ's pacific mimesis.⁸⁴ Alison warns us that asking about the cause of original sin (the *why* of sin) is all too often connected with the hunger for blame,⁸⁵ and he reminds us that, in the end, we have no explanations for sin, we have only "a salvific revelation: what is revealed as something now operative is the mystery of God's plan of

⁸¹ Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong*, 1–3.

⁸² Ibid., 55.

⁸³ Ibid., 46.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 237.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 241. I readily concede Alison's point, while recognizing that the search for the origins of sin can be motivated by something other than a hunger for blame. Suchocki's concern with the *why* of sin does not seem so much concerned with blame as with discerning what it is humans can and should do in light of sin and suffering.

salvation for us.^{***6} Only revelation through Christ makes it possible for us to see sin. We see it only as it is being forgiven. Even so, Alison cautions us to proceed with care in making judgments about sin, "because the permission we have been given to look back is a healing and forgiving permission," not a permission to condemn or control.^{**7}

Alistair McFadyen engages with the doctrine of sin because he believes it has something unique to offer contemporary discussions of morality, especially when those discussions encounter disturbing human pathologies. McFadyen argues that the doctrine of original sin, in particular its account of human willing as developed by Augustine, offers a more nuanced and complex understanding of freedom and agency than is typically found in contemporary discussions of morality. McFadyen engages in reflection on sin not to develop a heightened moral consciousness—an enhanced ability to distinguish right and wrong—but rather to demonstrate that a concept like original sin, when developed in an explicitly theological way, can illuminate the dynamics of human pathologies more fully than secular thought alone or even some forms of Christian thought. These forms of Christian thought, like modern secular thought, presume that freedom, understood as an independent ability to choose—is the defining quality of human life and attribute blame only when such choice can be connected to freedom. This modern perspective takes offense at original sin's claim that humans are guilty prior to their personally responsible actions. For those who begin with the presumption that the freedom of autonomous choice is the essence of human identity (a presumption I challenged earlier in this chapter), talk of sin takes its primary task to be the assessment of responsibility or blame: "sin thence refers to

⁸⁶ Ibid., 262.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 263.

acts of *free* moral agents; to *sins* rather than to *sin* as some conditioning substratum of action; to culpable breaches of moral law.⁸⁸

In contrast to these views, McFadyen argues that a properly developed conception of the human will, a conception he articulates by drawing both on Augustine's account of the will and contemporary feminist theologies of sin, helps us understand human agents as "bound up" in situations. They participate in these situations as agents without being fully responsible for them. The action of the human will is not a neutral, objective process of selecting from among a set of options. The will is turned, affected, distorted by the conditions of life, including sin. Both McFadyen and the feminist theologians he discusses stress the centrality of the relational self and the importance of community in developing a vision for healing.

Where McFadyen parts ways with a number of feminist theologians is in his emphasis on a transcendent God and his insistence that the relational self is foremost in relation with God.⁸⁹ McFadyen embraces Augustine's belief that "the good integral to humanity demands relation to the God who created and calls us towards *our own* fulfillment, who is other than us but constituted by active being for us."⁹⁰ This belief allows McFadyen to define both sin and freedom in terms of relation to God. If humans are created to participate fully and joyfully in

⁸⁸ McFadyen, *Bound to Sin*, 26, emphasis original. For an illustration of this focus on sin as moral culpability, see Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995). For a response to McFadyen's concern that modern Christian thought focuses too much on *sins* instead of *sin*, see Darlene Fozard Weaver, "Taking Sin Seriously," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 31 (March 2003): 45–74. Elsewhere, Weaver makes clear that she does not reject the distinction between *sin* and *sins* but she does challenge the tendency in Christian thought to treat each side of the distinction separate from the other: "Attention to sin (whether as a condition or a structural context)," she writes, "and to sins as particular acts are not separable, correlative aspects of the doctrine of sin; rather, attention must be given jointly to sin and to sins because they are interlocking dimensions of a single phenomenon." Darlene Fozard Weaver, "How Sin Works: A Review Essay," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 29 (2001): 497. While I agree with Weaver's claim that sin and sins "are interlocking dimensions of a single phenomenon," I maintain that humans are so inclined to focus on questions of human agency and, all too often, to narrow such questions to ones of guilt and blame, that an emphasis on personal sin as condition is still helpful prior to attempting to work out the relationship between sin and sins.

⁸⁹ McFadyen observes that feminist theologians "tend either to elide all reference to God or to make God so immanent to the dynamics of 'right relation' or selfhood that any meaningful distinction between them threatens to collapse." McFadyen, *Bound to Sin*, 164. I discuss feminist theologians' discomfort with divine transcendence in chapter 2.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 212.

relation with God and others (what McFadyen terms "worship"), then freedom is the realization of this participation (and thus the full realization of one's self), while sin is "resistance or opposition to the energies of God's dynamic order, the disorientation of personal energies in an alternative dynamic, a distortion or disruption of the conditions for genuine joy."⁹¹ Like Alison, McFadyen argues that sin is known only through revelation and salvation: "Sin is known in the context of God's active countering of it, working through the damage and brokenness caused by sin, in order to reorient the world towards more abundant possibilities than were available hitherto."92

McFadyen's interpretation of the doctrine of original sin allows him to analyze the dynamics of two particularly disturbing human pathologies—the sexual abuse of children and the industrialized murder of approximately eleven million people, six million of them Jews, during World War II by the Nazi state-in ways that insist on the distinction between murdered and murderer, abused and abuser, while refusing either to cast the former as "victims" or to "blame" them for the horrors in which they were involved. For McFadyen, the idea of original sin as idolatry has both descriptive and explanatory power that secular thought cannot attain on its own when encountering pathologies such as these. Further, his development of original sin as a "universal, original, and radical lack of joy," situated within "the superabundance of a God of joy" cultivates an understanding of responsibility that draws us into radical relations with others. ourselves, and God.93

Ian A. McFarland reminds us that reflecting on sin does not, by itself, lead to better human behavior. Recognizing sin through the encounter with grace does not strengthen individuals and communities against the power of sin. Only grace gives strength. Knowledge is

⁹¹ Ibid., 220.
⁹² Ibid., 210–11.
⁹³ Ibid., 246–49.

not transformation. "Most obviously," McFarland observes, "the fact that individuals with no commitment to the language of sin regularly show themselves capable of responsible behavior, even as people deeply committed to sin-talk acquiesce to and even participate in horrific acts of violence and cruelty, raises serious questions about the power of the concept of sin by itself to improve the caliber of human resistance to evil."⁹⁴ The concept of sin, by itself, does little to deepen understanding or promote healing. Reflection on sin cannot take place in isolation from other elements of Christian thought, McFarland argues. Most important, those who would draw the doctrine of original sin more clearly into the center of contemporary discussions of sin need to keep in mind that "the gospel does not serve the doctrine of original sin; original sin, if it has any place at all in Christian teaching, is legitimate only to the extent that it serves the gospel."⁹⁵

While less concerned with contributing to or engaging with secular thought, McFarland, like McFadyen, argues that the doctrine of original sin, when properly situated within the larger context of a broader Christian theology, plays a vital role in Christian life. First, it points to human solidarity under God: "In the face of the temptation to view some as nearer to God than others, or to establish hierarchies according which the sin of some renders them less worthy of divine regard than others, the doctrine of original sin insists that no one has any greater claim on God than anyone else."⁹⁶ Second, the doctrine of original sin as McFarland develops it, drawing on the thought of Augustine and Maximus the Confessor, helps us think about human moral agency in terms of integrity and consistency, rather than control and freedom (where "freedom" is understood as the capacity to make unconstrained, arbitrary choices). "Contrary to what we might wish to believe," McFarland writes, "we are not masters of our own house, because our

⁹⁴ McFarland, In Adam's Fall, 13.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 213.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

power to shape who we are through our willing is illusory."⁹⁷ The doctrine of original sin that McFarland presents argues that we are controlled and defined by what we desire, desire that we have no power to shape or control in turn. McFarland embraces Augustine's claim that "we do what we desire, invariably-but what we desire remains beyond our control" because the alignment of human desire with divine love was lost in the fall and can be restored only through grace.⁹⁸ Third and finally, the doctrine of original sin rouses humans from moral complacency. Here McFarland challenges one of the most serious charges against the doctrine—that it mires humans in a guicksand of hopelessness and cultivates a guiet acceptance of sin and injustice in this life. If sin is inevitable, why bother? The doctrine of original sin, McFarland argues, in service to the gospel, reminds us that we are called by God into loving relation that is possible only through grace and this grace is already ours. Far from teaching us to accept the reality of sin, the doctrine of original sin reminds us that we never know for certain what form our resistance to divine love will take and therefore we must remain open to the accounts of others if we are to learn how our sin has inflicted harm. We must remain open always to the reality of our own blindness when it comes to sin.⁹⁹

McFarland argues for a clear distinction between original and actual sin, a distinction that I retain in my project, although I do so by adopting the language of sin as condition and sin as act. As McFarland observes, collapsing original sin into actual sin by defining original sin as some type of macro-sin that classifies and orients all other forms of sin (such as pride or sloth, for example) deflects attention away from the many forms actual sin can take. There is little need to examine actual forms of sin closely if they all, in fact, can be understood as manifestations of, for example, pride, and any such examination is likely to miss, ignore, or dismiss manifestations

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 75. ⁹⁹ Ibid., 214.

that don't fit the model at hand.¹⁰⁰ McFarland is careful throughout his work to mark this distinction between original and actual sin, arguing that the distinction is crucial if the account of sin he offers is to be capable of accounting for both "humanity's radical responsibility for sin *and* [its] radical powerlessness in the face of sin."¹⁰¹ Original sin is, for McFarland, "the ontological ground for the diverse, concrete acts of sin willed by oppressors and oppressed alike."¹⁰² The damaged human will (damaged in terms of its desire, not its function), a condition shared by all

humans, makes particular acts of sin possible, particular acts that are as varied and unique as the

individuals who commit them.

These four thinkers share a number of my concerns with regard to talking about sin. Suchocki begins her work on sin in response to experiences of suffering and violence and hopes to avoid "doing violence to experience by rationalizing away [the] surd quality of [violence] and smoothing [the] terror-stricken edges [of experience] with a fine turn of phrase."¹⁰³ Alison, keenly aware that often we engage in talk about sin out of a desire to accuse and attribute blame, stresses the importance of humility and cautions us against "knowing too much" when making claims about sin.¹⁰⁴ McFadyen engages in a discourse about sin because he believes the doctrine of original sin, in particular, offers something to the analysis of human pathology that cannot be achieved any other way. Both he and McFarland are concerned with demonstrating the interrelated nature of individual and social experiences of both sin and salvation and resisting the idea that all sins are equally bad or that violators cannot be distinguished in meaningful ways from those who are violated. To varying degrees and in different ways, all four of these thinkers

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 196.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 18–19 (emphasis added).

¹⁰² Ibid., 183.

¹⁰³ Suchocki, The Fall to Violence, 14.

¹⁰⁴ "It therefore behooves us to proceed somewhat gingerly in deciding what sin might be, because the permission we have been given to look back is a healing and forgiving permission, and any claim to understand sin that is not an understanding of how it is forgiven is automatically suspect. We must be careful not to know too much." Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong*, 263.

believe thought on sin is less about developing a language of guilt and blame and more about recognizing and responding to divine love and joy. Yet our projects differ, as well.

Each of these thinkers engages with the doctrine of original sin out of a desire to better understand human agency and responsibility. I share this concern, but I argue that before we can engage in such explorations, we need an understanding of personal sin as condition that emphasizes personal sin's non-active dimension. These four thinkers, because they take human responsibility for sin as one of their primary concerns, shift their attention from sin as condition to sin as act too quickly and offer interpretations of original sin that are primarily *active*. Suchocki focuses on the idea of sin as violent rebellion against the well-being of creation. Alison understands sin as that in human affairs which is opposed to the coming into being of a different kind of reality, a divine reality that challenges the violent rivalistic mimicry that defines human affairs in their fallen condition. McFadyen defines sin as resistance or opposition to God's dynamic order. Even McFarland, who is careful to mark the distinction between original and actual sin and argues at length for its vital importance, contends that "all human beings resist God in a way that renders them objectively without hope apart from God's acting to turn their hearts to God through the free and unmerited gift of grace."¹⁰⁵

As I hope will become clear, my project has much in common with these thinkers and their work has shaped my own in significant ways, but I believe my decision to begin with and attempt to hold my work accountable to the women and men of *Paradise* and others who have endured, survived, and inflicted violence leads me to focus on acknowledging the pain of sin and the healing work of grace *before* raising questions of accountability and agency. In this, I am indebted again to Serene Jones and her proposal (drawing on the work of Luce Irigaray) that "woman" needs to be "enveloped" before she is judged in her relation with God: "the first word

¹⁰⁵ McFarland, In Adam's Fall, 47.

to meet the woman who enters the doctrine of the Christian life is one that constructs her, giving her the center and the substance she needs to become the subject then judged and graciously forgiven."¹⁰⁶ Like Jones, I argue that there is some need for recognition and healing before there is judgment.

I am interested in developing a conception of personal sin that begins not with the ideas of human responsibility, disobedience, or rebellion (ideas that place too great an emphasis on human agency and the human agent as *active* rather than *receptive*), but rather with the ideas of divine love, human receptivity, and human suffering. As Alison found mimetic theory to be a new "way in" to the doctrine of original sin that resonated with his experience and knowledge, I seek a "way in" to a conception of personal sin as condition that will be responsive to and relevant for the women and men of *Paradise*.

b. A Feminist Perspective on Personal Sin as Condition

In the previous section, I highlighted the concerns that Wendy Farley, in particular, has raised with regard to the idea of sin in Christian thought: the idea of sin is irrevocably intertwined with the ideas of guilt and blame; a focus on sin too often encourages a judgmental self-righteousness, hardening our hearts toward others rather than cultivating compassion; an emphasis on sin distorts our understanding of the divine. Farley argues for the rejection of the language of sin and offers instead the concept of bondage as a rubric for understanding human experience. Instead of connecting this bondedness to sin, guilt, or agency, Farley links it to "the deep woundedness of existence."¹⁰⁷

In developing a conception of personal sin as condition in this project, I share and attempt to address many of Farley's concerns. I, too, wish to offer theological concepts that foster

¹⁰⁶ Jones, Feminist Theory and Christian Theology, 63.

¹⁰⁷ Farley, The Wounding and Healing of Desire, 25.

compassion and untangle the language of sin from assumptions about guilt, blame, and suffering. Unlike Farley, however, I wish to retain and, in Tanner's words, "rearticulate" a conception of personal sin (drawing upon elements of the doctrine of original sin), both because doing so recognizes the importance of sin within the traditions of Christian discourse but also because, as I have tried to demonstrate, conceptions of sin *function*. The vocabulary of sin and assumptions about sin run deep in American culture. They shape our understandings of human experience and existence. They speak to human limits and human hopes. As articulated in some theological and political circles, talk of sin justifies the hard-heartedness that Farley wishes to counter. While I appreciate Farley's development of the concept of bondage as a rubric for understanding human experience and find it a powerful addition to theological discourse, I find the influence of ideas about sin to be too prominent and too influential a strand of theological and popular discourse to set the concept aside as Farley does.

Instead, I want to challenge the conceptions of personal sin that focus primarily on guilt and blame and contribute to the ongoing discussion of sin by rearticulating some elements of original sin in a feminist register. This rearticulation can serve as an important counterweight to exclusively moralistic understandings of sin. It retains some of the critical, familiar contours of original sin while shaping them in light of feminist commitments and insights. These critical elements affirm:

• The contingency of sin, the belief that sin was not God's intention for humankind, even as a feminist rearticulation will resist the language of accusation, blame, and even, at least temporarily, responsibility;

- The universal dimension of sin, even as a feminist rearticulation will insist upon a concept that takes seriously the complexity of patterns of human oppression and suffering; and,
- The irreparable damage of sin that prevents humans from healing themselves, even as a feminist rearticulation will retain hope through God's merciful and gracious healing.

I argue that there is more to a rich understanding of personal sin than a litany of actions, that the place to begin in developing a conception of personal sin is not with blame, guilt, or action but with being. More precisely, in this project, I rethink the concept of personal sin as condition by beginning not with acts of human disobedience or questions of human responsibility or guilt but with the human's estranged state of being and the suffering that results from estrangement. This estrangement is not only, as Paul Tillich argued, the "universal quality of being"¹⁰⁸ but also the disruption of existence. Julian, like Augustine, offers us the insight that humans exist only to the extent they exist in God. To turn from God is to choose some degree of non-existence. In part, this turning away is a product of the social structures and relations into which humans are born, but a conception of personal sin as condition, understood in terms of estrangement, reveals that the corruption of the individual through relational and structural sin is only part of the situation. Far more inexplicable to a Christian theology that understands the self as existing in God is the self's apparent desire to turn away, the human who places herself in

¹⁰⁸ Tillich argues that one must accept that the fall and creation "coincide" if one rejects the idea of an historical paradise prior to the fall. For Tillich, "the notion of a moment *in* time in which man and nature were changed from good to evil is absurd." This means, Tillich concludes, that "the state of existence *is* the state of estrangement" (emphasis added). To exist is to be estranged from one's essence, which is God. Tillich goes on to maintain a distinction between his concepts of "estrangement" and "sin," reserving "sin" for "what is not implied in the term 'estrangement,' namely, the personal act of turning away from that to which one belongs… The word 'sin' can and must be saved…because the word has a sharpness which accusingly points to the element of personal responsibility in one's estrangement." Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, 41–46.

bondage, fixes her chains herself.¹⁰⁹ The human state of estrangement is not solely a condition between each individual and God, a tear that can be repaired through individual salvation. It is, instead, a series of fractures that permeate the entirety of human existence, the self, her relation with others, and her relation with God. Estrangement leads the individual to believe that those various relations can and should be distinguished and separated, compartmentalized, isolated. It blinds her to the interconnectivity and interdependency of all relations. Estrangement manifests itself in a variety of human limitations and perversions, from those most noted by male theologians, pride and selfishness, to those illuminated by feminist and womanist thought: selfloss, blindness, domination, and oppression.¹¹⁰

Developing a feminist understanding of the personal dimensions of sin as condition reorients our thought about sin and the self in sin. It allows us, at least temporarily, to concern ourselves less with questions of responsibility and guilt while we focus on the suffering caused

¹⁰⁹ Philosopher Paul Ricoeur argues that this idea of a will that binds itself in slavery to itself, what he calls "the servile will," is "not directly accessible" and instead can be understood only through interpretation and re-interpretation of the symbols of defilement, sin, and guilt. For Ricoeur, this "inaccessibility" is due, in part. to his claim that "the will…can only signify free choice," and so a will (by definition, "free to choose") that is not free to choose does not compute. Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 151–52. As I hope I have made clear in this chapter, Christian thought still confronts the idea of a will that binds itself as a paradox, but not because it necessarily shares Ricoeur's insistence on a will that is free only when it is free to choose. It confronts the mystery of a desire that the will cannot control but only follow.
¹¹⁰ The metaphor of "blindness" has been developed most fully by Joy Ann McDougall's recent work. She offers a

concept of sin as "bondage of the eve/I" as a substitute for classical Christianity's notion of the "bondage of the will." Building on the work of Kathryn Tanner, McDougall argues her metaphor is particularly helpful for analyzing the effects of gender oppression: "By shifting the description of bondage to the visual sphere, gender oppression can be understood as a profound blindness or distortion in one's sight. The metaphor of 'the bondage of the eye' better describes how personal agency, gender constructions, and social structures often collude together in order to deceive women concerning their grace-filled identities. Meanwhile, the other side of this metaphor, 'the bondage of the I,' draws into clear sight the fallout of gender oppression-the captivity of one's self to the desires, expectations, and needs of others." Joy Ann McDougall, "Feminist Theology," in The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology, ed. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 670-87; see also McDougall, "Rising with Mary: Re-visioning a Feminist Theology of the Cross and Resurrection" in Theology Today (2012) 69.2: 166–76. My proposal of personal sin as estrangement, with estrangement defined as a loss of the capacity to recognize and participate in divine love, can be understood as a companion to McDougall's work rather than a replacement for it. As I discuss above, I am interested in developing a conception of sin that complements and precedes conceptions that take agency and responsibility as their primary concerns. I include McDougall's among these. I am also interested in developing a conception of sin that arises from reflection on the revelation of divine love and is defined in terms of human relationship to that love, rather than one that is defined in terms of human behavior "gone wrong."

by sin. Rethinking personal sin as condition in terms of estrangement arises from my concern—a concern I share with the feminist and womanist scholars whose work informs my own—to attend directly to "the protest of unjust suffering" that Paul Ricoeur identifies as a challenge for philosophy and theology. I seek to avoid developing a conception of sin that condemns that protest "to silence in the name of a massive indictment of the whole of humanity."¹¹¹ Personal sin understood as estrangement does not provide a justification for suffering as deserved retribution. It does not eliminate the mysterious, ineffable dimensions of the self in sin. It is not a simple explanation for human participation in evil. I do not intend to cultivate a false sense of clarity with regard to sin. Rather, I hope this project illuminates some aspects of human experience and suggests possible alternative ways of living ethically in light of this conception of sin.

The Christian feminist conception of personal sin I develop in this project resists the language of accusation, therefore not proving as helpful as perhaps some other conceptions of sin might be in calling others to accountability for the harm they inflict, perpetuate, or allow against others. The problem for feminist thought is that it seeks this accountability and yet recognizes the harm that has been done with such accusations, the ways in which they reinforce the harm that feminist thought seeks to reveal and resist. Darlene Fozard Weaver expresses concern that discussions of sin that do not attend sufficiently to particular sins encounter both theological and ethical problems: "Inattention to sins...obscures the fact that God is the source of freedom and value...and may neglect the power of acts in a person's history to make and unmake, to build up and destroy." A Christian theology of sin that neglects particular sins in favor of a focus on sin as

¹¹¹ Paul Ricoeur, "Evil, A Challenge to Philosophy and Theology," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53 (1985): 640. Elsewhere, Ricoeur writes, "The harm that has been done to souls, during the centuries of Christianity, first by the literal interpretation of the story of Adam, and then by the confusion of this myth, treated as history, with later speculations, principally Augustinian, about original sin, will never be adequately told." Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 239.

condition "becomes abstract and thin apart from recognition of the sorts of sins that give it content and talons in the moral life."¹¹² Weaver argues that reconnecting discussions of sin with attention to particular sins forces us to attend to the real harms of sin and reminds us of the provisionality of moral judgment: "the moral evaluation of a particular act, however reliable it may be, is finally provisional because the full moral meaning of the act is hidden in the counsel of God."¹¹³ Although my project focuses on a feminist rethinking of some aspects of the doctrine of original sin and develops a concept of personal sin as condition, I agree with Weaver that a fully developed Christian feminist conception of personal sin must engage, as well, in an exploration of sin as act—responsibility and harm. My argument here is that such reflection is dependent upon and can take place only *after* the development of a feminist concept of personal sin as condition that begins with a focus on divine love and human suffering.

7. An Overview of the Project

The concept of personal sin as condition that I develop in this project is informed by and responsive to three major feminist and womanist concerns with regard to thought on sin: masculine understandings of sin represented as universal accounts of human experience (and whether feminine accounts of sin can meaningfully challenge these masculinized "universals"); the destructive impact of hierarchical dualisms; and the tendency to justify or minimize experiences of radical suffering. In exploring each of these concerns in chapter 2, I draw from feminist and womanist thought to develop a set of evaluative criteria. I return to these criteria in chapter 5 to evaluate the conception of personal sin as estrangement I develop in chapters 3 and 4 through engagement with Julian's theology.

¹¹² Weaver, "Taking Sin Seriously," 48.

¹¹³ Ibid., 70.

Chapters 3 and 4 introduce and develop my understanding of Julian's theology as it relates to ideas about sin. Chapter 3 discusses three important aspects of Julian's thought: her theological anthropology, which understands humans to consist of substance and sensuality; her creatively gendered God with its emphasis on God's physicality and relationality; and, finally, her emphasis on the unlikeness of God to humans and the corresponding distinction between divine and human judgment. Chapter 4 continues my discussion of Julian's thought, examining more closely her ideas about sin and drawing out the consequences of her thought for the development of a feminist conception of personal sin in the 21st century. It begins by considering what Julian means by "sin," particularly given her insistence in A Revelation of Love that "in all this sin was not shown." Sin may not have been shown, but it remains a primary concern for Julian throughout her work. More specifically, Julian is concerned about the effects of sin on humans. The chapter explores the ways in which Julian distinguishes between sin as condition and sin as act and considers the implications of this distinction. It reflects on the importance of the relationship between God's physicality and human physicality to Julian's thought on sin and salvation. It develops the claim that in Julian's theology awareness of sin, the capacity to see one's sinful condition, is not the product of human claims about sin. Humans do not see sin because other humans name it as such; they see sin as a result of God's loving action on them. The chapter concludes with a summary of the concepts and claims in Julian's thought that are useful to a contemporary feminist conception of personal sin.

Chapter 5 summarizes the elements of the conception of personal sin I propose as a result of my reflection on Julian's thought, considering each in light of the evaluative criteria developed in chapter 2. I begin by building on Julian's distinction between sin as condition and sin as acts. I focus on her interest in sin as a condition in which humans cannot experience themselves as receiving or participating in divine love. I label this condition "estrangement" and offer it as a starting point for rethinking personal sin from a feminist perspective, developing my claim that the idea of personal sin as estrangement emerges from the encounter with divine love.

Next, I develop Julian's theological anthropology and its creative use of and resistance to gender norms by drawing it into conversation with contemporary gender theory and queer theology. This conversation, I argue, further disrupts the hierarchical dualisms that so concern feminist thought and cultivates ideas about a creatively gendered God, laying a critical foundation for developing a soteriology that values the body and contextualizing a discussion of human vulnerability. Third, I take seriously Julian's concern with the pain of sin and use that concern to further develop my conception of personal sin, demonstrating how this focus on suffering allows me to address a number of feminist concerns about traditional conceptions of sin in the Christian tradition. Through this focus on the pain of sin, I am also able to develop my ideas about personal sin as estrangement with an awareness of human vulnerability and the need for a particular kind of compassion. Fourth, I return to feminist concerns about divine transcendence and show how Julian's emphasis on the contingency of human judgment illustrates the importance of divine transcendence for feminist thought. Finally, I return to the idea that all talk of sin needs to be situated within the context of divine love. I consider how the reorientation of sin within a context of love transforms not only our motivation for reflecting on sin but also our understanding of what it means to be humans created out of, sustained by, and drawn into the love of God.

The concept of personal sin I develop in this project suggests that sin is revealed through prayerful and loving relation with God more than it is judged or avoided. My conception of personal sin focuses on sin as condition, rather than act, proposing "estrangement" as a powerful and flexible addition to the collection of metaphors for sin in Christian thought. Personal sin as estrangement illuminates the experience of the self in sin in ways that "disobedience" and "pride" do not. I argue that personal sin as estrangement, defined here as a condition in which we are unable fully to receive, recognize, or participate in love, better recognizes the complicated fractures that run through individuals, communities, and societies. We (as individuals, communities, and societies) are continually undermined in our loving by our desires and insecurities in ways that harm ourselves and others.

This exploration of the self and its experience of sin does not provide the definitive word on either. Instead, it outlines the contours of personal sin from a particular perspective, embracing Emilie Townes's emancipatory claim that "there are many sites of epistemological privilege and authority."¹¹⁴ Emboldened by this claim, in this project I offer a view of sin that emerges from the confluence of my study of contemporary feminist and womanist thought as it encounters the thought of Julian of Norwich. This encounter gives rise to new dimensions of thought about sin, dimensions that can, in turn, be taken up into other perspectives, turned yet again, never absolute, never resolved, contributing nonetheless, in part, to our understanding of what it means to be human and connected to God.

¹¹⁴ Townes, Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil, 115.

Chapter 2

Developing Criteria for a Feminist Conception of Personal Sin

Feminist, womanist, *mujerista*, and other strands of liberation theology have been challenging and re-imagining conceptions of sin, both explicitly and implicitly, from their earliest inceptions. To paraphrase Joy Ann McDougall, each of these strands of liberative thought "is predicated on the assumption that something is drastically wrong."¹ Serene Jones reminds us that this concern is not exclusive to feminist theology but is a concern of wider schools of feminist thought: "This recognition of the pervasive, insidious, and historically persistent forces of destruction at work in the world sits at the heart of the feminist movement."² Theologians who embrace feminist commitments, however, situate this discussion within a context of religious belief and, likewise, have to contend with the ways in which their associated religious traditions have perpetuated and reinforced the very forms of destruction that feminists wish to challenge and resist. McDougall credits the subject of sin with "sparking" the "secondwave" of white feminist theology that emerged in the work of Valerie Saiving, Judith Plaskow, and Rosemary Radford Ruether.³

Because the topic of sin has been of such vital importance to feminist and womanist theology, an exhaustive survey of the landscape of thinkers and their proposals in this area over the last forty years is beyond the scope of this project. Instead, in this chapter, I focus on a handful of feminist and womanist projects in order to develop a set of criteria that can be used to evaluate subsequent conceptions of personal sin. Although I incorporate more recent works into my discussion in this chapter, the majority of works discussed below represent some of the

¹ Joy Ann McDougall, "Rising with Mary: Re-visioning a Feminist Theology of the Cross and Resurrection," *Theology Today* 69.2 (2012): 170.

² Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 96.

³ McDougall, "Rising with Mary," 170.

earliest work to rethink sin in feminist and womanist theology. I focus on them because the concerns they raise remain both relevant and fundamental to feminist and womanist discussions of sin and their ongoing influence can be seen in more recent works.⁴ For all their limitations, some of which I discuss below (limitations that the authors themselves and other scholars have gone on to identify and attempt to address), these initial efforts still serve as a resource for defining criteria that help us evaluate the extent to which a conception of personal sin is responsive to basic feminist and womanist critiques.

I organize my discussion into three sections, each of which takes up a concern that has been central to feminist and/or womanist discussions of sin. In the first section, I examine works that have explored the question of women's experience and sin, revisiting Valerie Saiving's 1960 essay, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," and Judith Plaskow's early work, *Sex, Sin and Grace*. I explore the benefits and limitations of attempting to analyze sin in terms of a male/female binary and turn to Serene Jones's more recent work, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology*, for a model that considers women's experiences when developing a concept of sin but avoids some of the limitations identified in the earlier works.

The second section focuses on works that have raised concerns about the problematic connection between dualistic hierarchies and ideas about sin that have been particularly damaging to women. Here I discuss two works by white feminist theologians: Rosemary Radford Ruether's *Sexism and God-Talk* and Catherine Keller's *From a Broken Web*. I explore how white feminist concerns about particular understandings of divine transcendence and their reinforcement of hierarchical and oppressive dualisms have led many white feminist theologians

⁴ Note, for example, the roundtable discussion of Valerie Saiving's 1960 article, "The Human Situation," in the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* in 2012, discussed below, or Mary Elise Lowe's 2000 survey of womanoriented hamartiologies, which includes a number of the works I discuss below. Mary Elise Lowe, "Woman Oriented Hamartiologies: A Survey of the Shift from Powerlessness to Right Relationship," *dialog: A Journal of Theology* 39.2 (2000): 119–39.

to lean more heavily on ideas of divine immanence. With Rebekah Miles and others, I argue for the importance of divine transcendence in feminist theology, particularly with regard to discussions of sin.

In the third and final section, I focus on experiences of radical suffering and the ways in which traditional theodicies attempt to justify or make sense of such suffering. I turn to two articles—Delores Williams's "A Womanist Perspective on Sin" and Mary Potter Engel's, "Evil, Sin, and Violation of the Vulnerable"—that raise serious concerns about the tendency of traditional conversation about sin to minimize, ignore, or dismiss experiences of radical suffering, particularly as that suffering is experienced by African American women or survivors of sexual violence.

Throughout the chapter, in each section, I extract a set of criteria that these works suggest are essential in any attempt to rethink personal sin from a feminist or womanist perspective. I conclude the chapter by summarizing these criteria and commit to revisiting them in the final chapter of the project in order to evaluate the extent to which the conception of personal sin that I develop from Julian of Norwich's theology in chapters 3 and 4 is responsive to them.

1. Women's Sins?

One of the earliest concerns to emerge among white feminist theologians in the United States during the 20th century focused on sin, in particular the ways in which masculine perspectives alone had shaped the ways that sin had been defined and discussed in Christian thought. In this section, I explore two of the earliest works that articulated and attempted to address this concern as it had developed in Protestant thought: Valerie Saiving's 1960 article, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," and Judith Plaskow's *Sex, Sin and Grace: Women's Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich*. I conclude the section by turning to Serene Jones's concept of "strategic essentialism" to consider ways in which gender can be employed strategically in developing a concept of personal sin.

a. Introducing the "Feminine Experience": Valerie Saiving's "The Human Situation"

In 1960, Valerie Saiving drew attention to the ways in which contemporary theological conversations about sin within Christianity were shaped entirely from a masculine perspective.⁵ Focusing on the work of Anders Nygren and Reinhold Niebuhr, Saiving challenged the tendency in contemporary Christian thought "to describe man's predicament as rising from his separateness and the anxiety occasioned by it and to identify sin with self-assertion and love with selflessness" (100). Saiving posited a "feminine experience" that contrasts with the "masculine experience" informing the work of Nygren and Niebuhr.⁶ Because this feminine experience is so

⁵ Valerie Saiving, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," Journal of Religion 40 (1960): 100–12.

⁶ The issue of "women's experience" and its role in developing theological or secular theory and practices has been a strongly debated issue among U.S. feminists, who have tended to argue against the idea that some essence can be identified as uniquely "woman". Serene Jones describes the longing for normative universals grounded in women's experience as "the rock" that confronts womanist, mujerista, and feminist theologians on the one hand, while "the hard place" on the other is their desire to avoid erasing the cultural and historical specificity of different women. Serene Jones, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Feminist, Womanist, and Mujerista Theologies in North America," in Horizons in Feminist Theology, ed. Rebecca S. Chopp and Sheila Greeve Davaney (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 33–53. Writing in 1987, Sheila Greeve Davaney challenged the normative appeal to women's experience found in the work of Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Mary Daly, arguing that "we have no access to reality separate from our value-ladened, power-infused conception of it; women's experience and knowledge therefore cannot claim, any more than can males', an ontological grounding or an epistemological superiority. Our experience and knowledge, no less than that of males, is a social product and hence is relative, ambiguous, and challengeable." Sheila Greeve Davaney, "The Limits of the Appeal to Women's Experience," in Shaping New Vision: Gender and Values in American Culture, ed. Clarissa W. Atkinson, et al (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1987), 46. More recently, Paul D. Molnar has offered a less charitable analysis of the appeal to women's experience in Elizabeth A. Johnson's She Who Is, relying on his imprecise reading of Johnson's work as the entirety of the argument for attending to women's experience in theology. Molnar presumes an easy, transparent equivalency between human speech about God and God's revealing Godself and concludes (inaccurately) that Johnson (and presumably all feminist theologians since he discusses no others) argues for replacing the latter with the former: "Even though I am sympathetic to the feminist desire for rights and equality," he writes, "these cannot mean that theology should now exchange the revelation of God for the experience of women and thus collapse theology into anthropology." Paul D. Molnar, Divine Freedom and The Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark Ltd. 2002), 10. Johnson is not exchanging women's experience for God's revelation; she is arguing that women's experience can and should be a source for shaping speech about God. In a similar vein, Mary McClintock Fulkerson argues that "experience is not the origin of theology in the sense of evidence for our claims, but the reality that needs to be explained." Mary McClintock Fulkerson, Changing the Subject: Women's Discourses and Feminist Theology (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), viii. Feminist theologians may be concerned about "rights and equality" but they are also deeply concerned about human personhood as part of God's revelation and identifying

different from the masculine, she argued, a theological analysis grounded exclusively in the latter will be inadequate, even wrong, for the former. This claim remains important for a feminist conception of sin, even as subsequent generations of feminist, womanist, and postmodern thinkers have, in turn, challenged and rejected other aspects of Saiving's argument: that "the female roles in adult sexuality" have "a certain passivity about them" (104), that "woman is more closely bound to nature" than man (105), that "almost every woman [has] a deep need...to surrender her self-identity and be included in another's 'power of being'" (108). Saiving's understanding of "the female situation" is a heterosexist view deeply imbedded in patriarchal, white, upper-class norms: women's central social functions are to marry men, have children, and serve as primary caregivers for both children and husbands. A woman who is able "to accept the feminine role with joy" can become "a source of strength and refreshment to her husband, her children, and the wider community" (109).⁷

From the vantage point of the early 21st century, as a theologian and ethicist who has been shaped by the creativity and intellect of artists and scholars whose work attends to the

ways in which the personhood of anyone considered "lesser" has been systematically devalued and dehumanized across centuries. I share Molnar's concern that "unless God is acknowledged at the outset as the one who alone creates, reconciles and redeems us, then we are left alone with ourselves" (25) and I agree with the criticism that some white feminist theologian have invoked "women's experience" as if it were self-evident and itself unproblematic (though I would not include Elizabeth Johnson among them), but I cannot accept his easy assumption that current forms of speech about God are "God's revelation" and therefore "right". Molnar cites Roland Frye's essay, "Language for God and Feminist Language: Problems and Principles," several times in his discussion of Johnson's work. In her review of the volume that includes Frye's essay (*Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism*, ed. Alvin F. Kimel, Jr. [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans,1992]), Sarah Coakley writes: "It is a distinguishing feature of feminist theology that it is interested less in the impeccable theoretical purity of 'orthodox' doctrine than in its nefarious *uses*, and this problem the contributors to this volume simply choose to ignore. Indeed their naïve confidence in the hegemonic power of 'right' trinitarian doctrine is simultaneously touching and chilling." Sarah Coakley, *Journal of Theological Studies*, 47 (April 1996): 392.

⁷ Rebekah Miles reminds us that Saiving herself acknowledge the particularity of her perspective and its limitations. Almost thirty years after the publication of Saiving's article, Saiving reflected that "a lot of things I say [in the 1960 article] may not be true of subcultures in our culture—of poor whites, or of black people or Chicanos. What I say comes out of not only the middle class, but the white middle class...What I know now that I don't think I understood then is that the class and the race you belong to are absolutely crucial in determining how you experience the world." "A Conversation with Valerie Saiving," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 4 (Fall 1988): 111, quoted by Rebekah Miles in "Valerie Saiving Reconsidered," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 28 (2012): 83. Miles goes on to credit Saiving with drawing attention to the importance of attending to a wide range of women's experiences even before criticism's of Saiving's article began to appear.

truths, voices, and bodies silenced and erased by white, heteronormative assumptions about "the feminine situation,"⁸ I can appreciate in a different way Saiving's claim that our assumptions about human experience profoundly shape and distort our claims about sin. Saiving's description of "the feminine situation" leads her to develop a conception of sin that is "precisely the opposite of the masculine." Where [white, materially and socially privileged, heterosexual] men have to struggle with the sin of pride, [white, materially and socially privileged, heterosexual, married] women struggle with the sins of "underdevelopment or negation of the self" (109). My point is not that women and men will not struggle either to constrain or develop a sense of self. Saiving's "feminine forms of sin" are as much a part of the fabric of human experience as the "masculine forms" she critiques.⁹ My concern is that defaulting to a simplistic binary as a heuristic for developing ideas about sin obscures even more than it reveals.

Generalizing along gender lines is not only problematic given the complexity of individual lives, it is particularly dangerous when used to frame a particular conception of sin. While rendering close attention to the ways in which cultural conditioning seems to press women toward restricted ways of being human and may incline some women toward certain behaviors or beliefs, it is dangerous to then label these behaviors or beliefs as "women's sin." The cultural messages regarding women are not directed toward or about all women. They carry complicated and insidious codes involving not only gender but race, class, and sexuality. To draw upon these messages as if they speak of *all* women may surface some dimensions of sexist bias but nonetheless leaves unchallenged the other dimensions of what Emilie Townes calls the "fantastic

⁸ For example, the majority of women in U.S. society who historically have had the ability "to devote themselves wholly to the tasks of nurture, support, and service of their families" (110) have been heterosexual, married, white women with access to some degree of material wealth, usually through their husbands.

⁹ Mary McClintock Fulkerson credits Saiving's article with two lasting contributions: exposing "the non-generic nature of traditional discourse" and demonstrating "that the sin of sexism exacted a social cost, the selfhood of women." Mary McClintock Fulkerson, "Sexism as Original Sin: Developing a Theacentric Discourse," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 59 (1991): 660.

hegemonic imagination," the dominant social imaginings (that need not be grounded in reality) that distort and limit human perceptions of the world.¹⁰ There is also a sense in which calling sin "men's" or "women's" perpetuates the heterosexist illusion of a complementary dichotomy. As Mary McClintock Fulkerson reminds us, "the power of heterosexuality is not the power of the natural—the real apart from its being signified. It is the power of the dominant system of discourse—the power of hegemony."¹¹ Discussing sin in terms of masculine and feminine, even in broad generalizations, reinforces that hegemony. It also lends a normative endorsement to these gendered conceptions of sin. "Women's sin" too easily becomes "womanly sin," the expected sin to be found among women so that to "sin as a man" would somehow further challenge the same social norms that Saiving's argument now bizarrely endorses.

b. Articulating Assumptions About Gender: Judith Plaskow's Sex, Sin and Grace

Twenty years after Saiving's groundbreaking essay, Judith Plaskow continued to draw attention to the limitations of Protestant Christianity's traditional conceptions of sin. In *Sex, Sin and Grace*, Plaskow focused on two major Protestant American theologians of the 20th century, Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich, analyzing the ways in which each man's thought on human nature, human experience, sin, and grace was shaped by unarticulated assumptions about gender.¹² Plaskow was self-consciously explicit that she did not intend to offer an essentialist view of woman, even as she attempted to frame the concept of women's experience as a critical

¹⁰ "The fantastic hegemonic imagination traffics in peoples' lives that are caricatured or pillaged so that the imagination that creates the fantastic can control the world in its own image...It is this imagination, I argue, that helps to hold systematic, structural evil in place...These images have an enormous impact on how we understand the world, as well as others and ourselves in that world." Emilie Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 21.
¹¹ Mary McClintock Fulkerson, "Contesting the Gendered Subject: A Feminist Account of the *Imago Dei*," in

¹¹ Mary McClintock Fulkerson, "Contesting the Gendered Subject: A Feminist Account of the *Imago Dei*," in *Horizons in Feminist Theology*, ed. Rebecca S. Chopp and Sheila Greeve Davaney (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 99–115. Fulkerson is here discussing the work of Judith Butler and Michel Foucault, a discussion I take up in chapter 5.

¹² Judith Plaskow, Sex, Sin and Grace: Women's Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1980).

lens for revealing the shortcomings and undeveloped possibilities in the doctrines of sin and grace developed by Niebuhr and Tillich. In developing this concept of women's experience, Plaskow attended to two factors: first, what has been said about women, particularly ways in which "woman" has been defined culturally as more "natural" and more passive than man, and second, the ways in which women have interpreted and understood themselves. Plaskow developed the latter by briefly referencing the work of cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead before drawing more extensively on Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and Doris Lessing's *Children of Violence*, offering the novels' protagonist, Martha Quest, as a case study to illustrate "women's experience" as it is shaped by cultural assumptions of women's naturalness and passivity.

I want to raise several concerns about Plaskow's approach. As I discuss more fully below, her work provides valuable guidance and insight in thinking about conceptions of sin in terms of gender. Its limitations, however, are similarly instructive. By limiting her exploration of cultural definitions of woman to the writings of well-educated, economically affluent, white men (John Ruskin, Ashley Montagu, and Sigmund Freud), whose "Eternal Feminine" is undoubtedly a white woman with some degree of social and economic standing (though likely her father's or her husband's rather than her own), and countering those cultural "myths" with the writings of well-educated and economically affluent white women, Plaskow's exploration takes place within a hermetic bubble of privilege, a bubble that is preserved with the inclusion of Niebuhr and Tillich. Plaskow acknowledges in *Sex, Sin, and* Grace that her view of "women's experience" is "white, western, middle-class." She acknowledges its particularity and argues that even in its particularity, "it is a significant view and that it leads to results which are theologically interesting, but the changes that have taken place in the academy since the 1970's, the increased visibility of

gender and race studies and postcolonial theory, and the emergence of powerful and diverse voices in theology and ethics, such as Emilie Townes, Ivone Gebara, James Cone, Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, Miguel De La Torre, Traci West, and Marcella Althaus-Reid, underscore the inadequacy and danger of such a hermetically sealed perspective. Scholarship that focuses on the insidious, deep-rooted, and ever-changing facets of white privilege and the racist ways of seeing and being that it inculcates, even in well-meaning white folk who dedicate their lives to dismantling white privilege and racist systems, teaches us that white theologians, particularly white feminist theologians, cannot "take race off the table," even temporarily, without contributing to the structures of whiteness as a systematic privilege.¹³ Because whites benefit most from current systems of racial privilege, they cannot write and think as if race does not exist if they are serious about issues of injustice and suffering.

Despite my concerns about Plaskow's approach in *Sex, Sin, and Grace*, the work nonetheless offers important insights for developing the feminist criteria that can be used to develop and evaluate a Christian conception of sin. Focusing attention on the concepts of

¹³ The importance of keeping race "on the table" in theology and ethics (as well as public policy, politics, social theory, cultural studies, legal studies, health care, etc.) cannot, in my opinion, be overstated. In 2014, researchers at the University of Virginia published their findings on the ways in which Americans rely on their implicit biases to evaluate "who is good" (1805) in American society in terms of race, religion, and age. With regard to race, the researchers found that participants expressed a preference or bias toward members of their own race most, then ranked other groups consistently in the following order: White, Asian, Black, Hispanic. Jordan R. Axt, Charles R. Ebersole, and Brian A. Nosek, "The Rules of Implicit Evaluation by Race, Religion, and Age," Psychological Science 25:9 (September 2014): 1804–15. This affirmation might, in itself, seem innocuous, but when placed within the context of research that demonstrates such implicit biases have deadly effect, the urgency of "keeping race on the table" becomes clear. In her legal analysis of the effects of implicit race biases in U.S. society. Cynthia Lee argues that the Trayvon Martin case offers a telling example of the ways in which U.S. society is not "post-racial", meaning that "race does not matter and should not be taken into account or even noticed" because "the nation...has transcended racial divisions of past generations." Cynthia Lee, "Making Race Salient: Trayvon Martin and Implicit Bias in a Not Yet Post-Racial Society," North Carolina Law Review 91 (2012-13): 1565, quoting Sumi Cho, "Postracialism" in *Iowa Law Review* 94 (2009): 1595 and 1601. Lee argues that racial biases often appear to influence the decisions of prosecutors, judges, jurors, and other legal decision makers, particularly when the case requires decision makers to accept that the perpetrator felt threatened by the actions of a young black man and used deadly force against the young man in light of this fear (implicit bias research has indicated that individuals of all races are more likely to "see" a gun in the hands of a black man, even when he is unarmed, and that shooters are more likely to shoot in response to this "sight" (1585)). Lee cites research done by Samuel Sommers and Phoebe Ellsworth indicating that white jurors, especially those who otherwise hold egalitarian views with regard to race, are less likely to be influenced by their implicit racial biases when race is raised as an issue and they are reminded of the ways in which their own implicit racial biases might affect their decision-making in the case (1586).

naturalness and passivity (which Plaskow identifies as the dominant cultural claims made about women) and the influence of these cultural expectations on the life of a literary character, Plaskow concludes that "the 'sin' encouraged by women's situation...is...the failure to venture responsible self-creation...the radical failure to make self-constituting choices. They drift into life patterns which seem to be waiting for them and which, if dreaded, are also easy and familiar" (114). She then evaluates the doctrines of sin and grace developed in the theologies of Niebuhr and Tillich to determine the extent to which these doctrines are cognizant of or relevant to "women's experience" and "women's sin." While I cannot do full justice to Plaskow's careful exploration and thoughtful critique of these doctrines, I would like to summarize briefly the elements of her analysis that are most relevant to this project.

With regard to Niebuhr's doctrines of sin and grace, Plaskow observes that Niebuhr understands sin primarily in terms of pride and grace primarily in terms of judgment. The basic human condition, for Niebuhr, is one of anxiety, the anxiety provoked by the unique combination of transcendence and finitude that define human existence. Humans can respond to this anxiety creatively through faith in God, but far more likely, in Niebuhr's account, they respond unfaithfully, either pridefully—turning from God toward themselves—or sensuously—turning from God toward any aspect of existence.¹⁴ Plaskow finds Niebuhr's concept of sin as sensuality, at its broadest, to be promising. Sin as sensuality can be understood as any human attempt to forget the realities and responsibilities of human freedom by losing oneself in some aspect of

¹⁴ Daphne Hampson acknowledges that Niebuhr's analysis is "illuminating" with regard to a "peculiarly male temptation" but finds Kierkegaard's analysis of sin as pride and sensuality upon which Niebuhr draws to be "more subtle and more complex" than Niebuhr's, which, as Plaskow notes, develops ideas of pride far more fully than those of sensuality (47). Further, and for Hampson, more important, Kierkegaard, in contrast to Niebuhr, focuses on reciprocal loving relation with God rather than faith as the necessary antidote to sin, so that relatedness, rather than the "new self" becomes a central tenet of salvation: "If woman's basic problem is not self-centeredness, but rather lack of a sense of self, a scheme of salvation which consists in breaking the self, and in discontinuity with the past, may be unhelpful." Daphne Hampson, "Reinhold Niebuhr on Sin: A Critique," in *Reinhold Niebuhr and the Issues of Our Time*, ed. Richard Harries (Oxford: A.R. Mowbray & Co. Ltd., 1986), 54.

human experience, aspects that can range widely from attempting to live one's life through one's children to being consumed by professional achievement to abusing drugs. Plaskow believes that this broader definition of sensuality, when understood as an equally significant possibility, along with rather than derivative from pride,¹⁵ provides a more inclusive understanding of sin than that which Niebuhr develops when he privileges pride as "the" sin: "If pride is the attempt to usurp the place of God," Plaskow observes, "sensuality is the denial of creation in his image" (68).¹⁶ Balancing the emphasis on sin as sensuality as well as pride, we are less likely to elevate selflessness as a virtue. Selflessness may be much needed among those who have access to significant forms of influence over others. Among those who are already, in many ways, systematically diminished or dismissed as "selves", the "virtue" of selflessness too readily advocates passive acceptance of injustice or active sacrifice to no end, both of which are contrary to the emphasis on justice and concrete action in the face of injustice that Christianity and feminism both embrace.¹⁷

Balancing an interest in sin as pride with an awareness of sin as sensuality also enables us to recognize that human existence entails not only finitude but also freedom. Plaskow argues that neither Niebuhr nor Tillich, for different reasons, offers an adequate account of "the dynamics of

¹⁵ Rebekah Miles argues that Niebuhr appreciates the complexity of sensuality more than Plaskow acknowledges and that he is less convinced of sensuality's derivative relationship to pride than Plaskow represents, even as Miles agrees that Niebuhr's discussion of sensuality is not always precise or internally consistent. Rebekah L. Miles, *The Bonds of Freedom: Feminist Theology and Christian Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 84–87. ¹⁶ Linda Mercadante, concerned that retaining the language of "sensuality" may, even with careful redefinition, still lead to gender stereotyping, proposes the alternative language of "inordinate self-loss" and the "panic of disconnection" to describe the human impulse to lose oneself in the existence of another. Linda A. Mercadante,

Victims and Sinners: Spiritual Roots of Addiction and Recovery (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 39. ¹⁷ Jodie L. Lyon argues that Niebuhr's diagnosis of pride as the primary sin is correct, suggesting that the behaviors

described by Saiving and Plaskow can be understood as different symptoms of the disease that is pride, rather than a different disease. "If we do not connect the dots," she writes, "between a failure to self-actualize and a prideful insistence on doing things one's own way, rather than God's way, we cannot move forward" (101). While Lyon may analyze her own motivation in "hiding herself in relations with another" as "a stubborn willfulness," I'm less convinced this motivation is one that is widely shared by those who don't share Lyon's "healthy self-image" (100) or that pride can still stand as "the" primary interpretation of sin, though I agree its manifestations are so numerous and insidious to make it worthy of ongoing attention from feminist theologians. Jodie L. Lyon, "Pride and the Symptoms of Sin," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 28.1 (2012): 96–102.

the responsible use of freedom" that allows us to appreciate "the sin of failing to become a self" (158). Niebuhr, with his focus on sin as pride, inclines toward selflessness as the unachievable but laudable norm, while Tillich, with his ontological privileging of being and unity and his claim that estrangement is the inescapable condition of existence, undermines his own concerns about the importance of self-realization. In Tillich's thought, Plaskow argues, "self-actualization is finally comprehensible only as estranged self-actualization which means that the failure to be self-actualizing can never convincingly be defined as sin. And all Tillich's protestations aside, reunion with the divine ground, achieved fragmentarily through grace and finally in the eschaton, seems to involve the surrender of self-actualization altogether" (147). A feminist conception of sin, then, must account for both the limits of human existence and its freedoms. It must "recognize self-exaltation and self-abnegation as equal dangers of the human spirit" (154).

One of the great strengths Plaskow sees in the work of both Niebuhr and Tillich is their ability to analyze "structures of experience" through "delineation of particular aspects of experience" (173). This approach is one she attempts to emulate and a feature I retain in developing a feminist conception of sin. The problem with Niebuhr and Tillich was not that they sought theological insight through close analysis of the human situation. The problem "is not particularity *per se*, but the universality of their claims on behalf of the particular" (174). A feminist conception of sin must, then, remain self-conscious of its limited particularity and its "fascination with certain types of sinfulness" (160). A feminist conception of sin resists the temptation of universal claims and proceeds with great caution as it attempts to extract insights from its study of the particular.¹⁸

¹⁸ In some ways, as discussed more fully below, I am embracing Serene Jones's proposal of a "strategic essentialism". Strategic essentialism, Jones argues, provides a "middle way" of negotiating the debate between feminist essentialism (that there is some "true essence of woman" that needs to be recognized and celebrated) and feminist constructivism (that there is no "true" or "real" self beneath the layers of socially influenced, manipulated, and defined ways of being that determine identity). Strategic essentialism values the normative power of certain

Plaskow is careful to acknowledge that one of the dangers of analyzing Niebuhr and Tillich within their own theological frameworks is to neglect attention to the social dimensions of human existence. She recognizes that this individualistic focus can result in a tendency to "blame the victim" for being affected by powerful, inescapable social dynamics (168). She argues that while Niebuhr and Tillich develop significant social dimensions in their thought, neither thinker "defines sin or grace in terms which are fundamentally social" (168). Niebuhr grounds his discussion of sin firmly in the action of the individual and Tillich, although his view of sin as estrangement and destiny offers an opportunity for exploring the social dimensions of sin, focuses instead on sin as it is manifested in the individual's experiences of unbelief, *hubris*, and concupiscence (169). A feminist conception of sin, even as it attempts to develop more fully its awareness of the individual, must remain cognizant of and compatible with a conception of sin as social.

Plaskow stresses the importance of a "conscious appropriation of women's experience in all its particularity" (173), but the narrow range of her sources leaves us with insights that draw on the experiences of white, heterosexual, materially privileged women in the United States and parts of Europe who appear, themselves, to be unconscious of the complicated, intertwined dynamics of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism.¹⁹ The experiences of a wealthy Black woman in Atlanta, a lesbian Latina woman living in El Paso, or a second-generation Chinese American girl living in rural Maryland would have been invisible to the women whose experiences are explored under the rubric of "women's experience" in Plaskow's work. The fact that not even Plaskow's identity as a Jewish woman could be acknowledged in her work on two

[&]quot;essentials" (evaluated in terms of their practical effect on women's flourishing) but never assumes they are universal and fixed (Jones, *Feminist Theory*, 22–48).

¹⁹ Plaskow and Carol P. Christ make a similar point in the introduction to their 1989 edition of essays, *Weaving the Vision: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1989), 1–13.

of the 20th century's most influential Christian theologians suggests the narrow confines within which she had to work in order to secure membership in the academy.²⁰ Writing in the mid- and late-1970's, among the first women to break into the cloister of white male privilege in seminaries and graduate programs in religion, Plaskow's commitment to women's experience, even if the experiences she was able to consider were highly privileged, was a first step in a journey I now wish to continue, but I do so with the commitment that any attempt to develop a feminist conception of personal sin requires a rigorous engagement with a wide diversity of perspectives and experiences, both as resource and as challenge.

While I do not retain the gendered division of sin that Saiving and Plaskow developed in their work, I share their feminist commitment to the concrete realities of women's lives. A feminist conception of sin must be relevant to the lives of women—a diversity of women—and the many variations of suffering they experience. It must attend to the concrete reality of individual lives, aware that "general principles are easily applied in ways which only serve to reinforce the status quo" (160). A feminist conception of sin must include the "conscious appropriation of women's experience in all its particularity" (173). At the same time, I want to resist the temptation to generalize broadly about these various experiences. In developing ideas about sin, while attending to a diverse range of experiences is essential to developing and challenging our understanding of sin, codifying those experiences as one group's special inclination toward a particular kind of sin moves dangerously close to acceptance and blame.

²⁰ Plaskow credits her dissertation advisor, Julian Hartt, with supporting and encouraging her to pursue what was already considered a "controversial topic" at Yale University in the mid-1970's in a religious studies program that focused exclusively on Christianity and where the director of graduate studies advised Plaskow "she had a good subject if only she would drop the references to women!" (Plaskow, *Sex, Sin, and Grace*, vii; see also Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, eds., *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1979), ix–xi). Writing ten years later in her introduction to *Standing Again at Sinai*, Plaskow notes that it was not until 1980, when she taught a course on Jewish feminist theology as part of the first National Havurah Summer Institute, that she "had the opportunity to grapple with issues of theology and spirituality in a Jewish feminist context." Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1990), xii.

c. Invoking Gender Strategically: Serene Jones's *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology*

We find a more recent and more nuanced attempt to develop a conception of sin in the Protestant tradition that is informed by "women's experience" in Serene Jones's Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace. Drawing upon the Reformation traditions, Jones "remaps"²¹ the doctrines of justification and sanctification articulated by Martin Luther and John Calvin and uses these remapped doctrines to develop a feminist doctrine of sin. For Jones, who understands doctrine both as a "loose but nonetheless definitive" script that the believer performs and as "an imagistic and conceptual terrain within which people of faith locate and interpret their lives and the world around them" (17), the driving question becomes, "What kind of person (and community) is formed by this doctrine?" (96). As a white feminist theologian, Jones is committed to analyzing the ways in which Christian doctrine and practice harm or diminish women, while also seeking ways in which Christian doctrine and practice can offer an empowering, hopeful vision for women's flourishing. Jones recognizes that Christian thought is part of the problem, even as she remains committed to its potential as part of the solution.

Jones begins by summarizing the conversion narratives found in Luther's doctrine of justification and Calvin's doctrine of sanctification.²² In these narratives, the human is judged a sinner before God—undone, convinced of his inability to do right, even if he desires to do so. Once judged, the human realizes that even attempting to lift himself out of sin is, itself, sinful. Only God can offer the grace that the human needs, which God does as a result of God's decision to impute Christ's righteousness to the human. The human is justified through Christ.

²¹ Jones writes, "I lay feminist theory over the terrain or landscape of Christian doctrine to see how the lines of theory might map the contours of theology...the cartographical metaphor makes clear feminist theory is concerned not so much to reconstruct the terrain of faith as to provide markers for traveling through the terrain in new ways" (Jones, *Feminist Theory*, 19). ²² Jones is clear that both Luther and Calvin acknowledged both concepts, but she argues that Luther more fully

developed a doctrine of justification while Calvin concentrated greater attention on the doctrine of sanctification.

Jones writes, "To put on such an identity is to inhabit a space in which one stands as both the judged and the loved" (57). In this space, the human individual is always still a sinner (broken by judgment) and justified (restored by grace). Once justified, the human enters the narrative of sanctification, a transformative process, through which God's grace moves the human closer to Christian perfection. The human believer's life is given new direction, new structures, new norms that draw the human closer to the life of Christ.

Neither Luther nor Calvin considered that others, including women, might experience these doctrines differently than they did. Jones begins her feminist remapping of justification and sanctification by turning to feminist theory for its insights into the experiences and nature of women. Adopting an approach of "strategic essentialism" that appreciates the importance of universal claims even as it remains deeply suspicious of them. Jones considers "woman's state" as it has been described in the work of French theorist Luce Irigaray: woman "exists without independent self-definition because she has been constructed by Western discourse to be radically fluid, to be a space that is always receiving...because of her lack of internal selfdefinition, she has no boundaries to defend against the onslaught of a culture that also wishes to define her (in her fluidity) according to an economy of masculine desire" (62). Jones revisits the conversion narratives of justification and sanctification from the perspective of Irigaray's theoretical woman who lacks external boundaries and internal self-definition. In doing so, Jones suggests that a feminist remapping of the doctrines will recognize the importance of providing this theoretical woman with some definition (an "envelope") before God before she faces the revelation of judgment, "the moment of dismantling and forgiveness" (63). A feminist retelling of the conversion narratives of justification and sanctification not only revises their content in light of feminist analysis, it reverses their order so that the human receives the healing boundaries of sanctification before she is judged and forgiven by God in the reconciling moment

of justification. Jones argues her theoretical woman needs building up before she can face the destructive dismantling of judgment. "In sanctification, woman's dispersed and fragmented identity is pulled together and held in the 'envelope of God's grace'...In justification by a divine degree of forgiveness, woman is pronounced a newly born agent and is called to live in just relation with others" (112).

In remapping doctrine, Jones is clear that she turns, at moments, to universalizing claims about women. She does so to provide clear, powerful counter-narratives to the "social scripts" that surround women with messages that silence and erase them (65). Strategic essentialism is pragmatic. It recognizes the power of ideals and norms, and where such ideals and norms can serve as tools to resist oppression and promote women's flourishing, it deploys them.

As she moves from her remapping of sanctification and justification to the doctrines of sin and grace, Jones shifts from the abstract world of theoretical universalizations into the midst of women's lives. She draws on the stories and insights of women in her Tuesday-night dinner group to develop a feminist remapping of the doctrine of sin as unfaithfulness. This remapping retains several aspects of Calvin's thought on sin: it insists that sin is a theological concept that can be known only in light of God's grace (98). To that end, the purpose of talking about sin is not to bury the individual beneath an unbearable burden of guilt and blame but to draw her closer to God by helping her recognize her need for God (99). In this sense, feminist talk about sin is always hopeful, sustained by its faith in God's vision for all of creation.

In searching for a Christian feminist definition of sin, Jones and the other women of her Tuesday-night group move away from expanding Calvin's list of sins to include experiences of oppression. They seek instead a definition that points toward the ideal state of God's relations with humans while retaining some flexibility in its capacity to reflect a wide range of human experience (112). Sin defined as unfaithfulness, Jones argues, captures women's experiences of oppression. "To live in a state of unfaithfulness," she writes, "is to be a fragmented self who knows neither the promise of agency nor the hope of just relation" (113).

Jones's work provides an important model for my own. Jones demonstrates the important role of feminist theory in drawing attention to previously unrecognized aspects of oppression, aspects that need to be considered theologically within a discussion of sin. By engaging resources from her Reformed Protestant tradition through the lens of feminist theory and in the company of a diverse group of women, Jones both claims and recreates the doctrines of her tradition, infusing them with a passion for women's flourishing and making them relevant to women's struggles within and against the forces of oppression.

As for her insights into the self in sin (including those elements of Calvin's thought she retains), there are several that inform my efforts to develop a feminist conception of personal sin. My conception remains open to reinterpretation as it encounters different human experiences of oppression and suffering. It takes seriously the deeply entrenched nature of sin and recognizes women as both agents and victims of sin. It retains Calvin's insight that the function of talking about sin is to draw the individual closer to God, to cultivate her awareness of God's empowering grace in her life. It also embraces Jones's commitment to "rhetorically scaled" discussions of agency within the realm of sin-talk, that "the concrete particularities of a given situation of oppression" have to be attended to carefully" before we begin ascribing responsibility or agency in overly general terms" (123).²³

Building on the earlier insights of Saiving and Plaskow, Jones's study of women and sin illustrates how theoretical claims about women can be drawn into productive conversation with

²³ As I discussed in chapter 1 and will take up again in chapter 5, my work has led me to argue that, when considering the perspective of those who have survived violent abuse, such as the women and men of Toni Morrison's *Paradise*, there is value to developing an understanding of personal sin that focuses on sin as a condition without immediately moving to discussions of agency and responsibility.

the concrete particularity of women's lives. She offers theoretical insights as potential openings, potential revelations, not exhaustive truth claims about "woman's nature." While she begins with these theoretical insights, she does not remain only theoretical. She attends to the particular details of women's stories, their experiences of sexual abuse, homophobia, racism, ageism, and violence. Even if we reject the notion of "women's sins," Jones's work illustrates the importance of women's perspectives on sin.

Keeping in mind these perspectives on sin, I turn now to the ways in which talking about sin lends itself all too easily to rigid dualistic patterns of thought, patterns that have proven to be particularly harmful to women.

2. Dualism and Talking About Sin

In Eros for the Other: Retaining Truth in a Pluralistic World, Wendy Farley traces the relationship between dualistic thought and the "logic of totality" that insists only "the One" (whether god, religion, nation, race) is real and valued while all else is only partially real and meaningless.²⁴ This totalizing view of the world rejects the world's inherent plurality, forcing all of creation into oppositional camps-human/subhuman, white/non-white, Western/non-Western-in which the first camp is understood as the absolute norm against which all else is compared and either assimilated or found wanting and rejected as "less than." Although Farley does not argue that dualistic thought is a necessary element of oppression, she recognizes the compatibility between the two, for "there are ways in which dualistic constructions of the world reflect the structure of illusion," an illusion that teaches us "there exists only the One and a shadowy realm of quasi-reality outside of the One."²⁵ In such a system of absolute dichotomy, all

²⁴ Wendy Farley, Eros for the Other: Retaining Truth in a Pluralistic World (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 19. ²⁵ Ibid., 23.

difference becomes a sign of inferiority or superiority: the One is superior, all who resemble the One are superior, all who differ are inferior and therefore justifiably treated as subhuman.

This division, while represented as a neutral observation of the "natural" order, shifts readily into a moral register. As Kathleen Sands observes, "In dualistic patterns of thought, reality is construed as a battlefield between good and evil."²⁶ In this framework, sin, evil, and immorality become interchangeable. Immoral behavior (i.e., sin) is that which identifies the individual with evil.²⁷ When mapped back onto any of the dualisms that reflect the absolute dichotomy of totalizing thought that Farley (drawing on Emmanuel Levinas and Hannah Arendt) describes, this conflation of immorality/sin/evil aligns with that which is deemed "less than" the One. Historically, this has cast women of any race, men of color, and individuals whose lives do not conform to a rigid heterosexuality and gender binary on the side of immorality, sin, and evil. Although many thinkers have challenged these dualistic patterns of thought, this section focuses on Rosemary Radford Ruether's *Sexism and God-Talk* and Catherine Keller's *From a Broken Web* because their exploration of dualistic impulses connects these impulses with Christianity's traditional ideas about sin and gives rise to a set of criteria that are important in evaluating any proposed conception of personal sin.

a. Challenging Male/Female Hierarchies: Rosemary Radford Ruether's *Sexism and God-Talk*

In her 1983 work, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*, Ruether discusses sin primarily in terms of a rigid, hierarchical dualism that corrupts the self-other relationship and

²⁶ Kathleen Sands, *Escape from Paradise: Evil and Tragedy in Feminist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 3.

²⁷ We can see this interchangeability in Billy Graham's writing. Arguing for an unchanging set of standards for moral behavior, Graham characterizes anything that "tempts" the individual toward a particular set of behaviors as "evil." When "we get our values so mixed up…we fall into this trap of Satan" (Billy Graham. "Confusing Evil with Good" in *Decision*, the magazine of the Billy Graham Evangelical Association (June 2012) available on-line: http://billygraham.org/decision-magazine/june-2012/confusing-evil-with-good/, retrieved December 13, 2014.

exploits and suppresses the non-dominant group.²⁸ When feminists name this exploitation and false hierarchy as evil, Ruether argues, they not only acknowledge the existence of evil, they must then also deal with the question of human sin: "Feminism's own claim to stand in judgment on patriarchy as evil means it cannot avoid the question of the capacity of humanity for sin."²⁹ Reuther adopts an active/passive framework for sin. Sin is both the human's capacity to act in ways that corrupt relations between humans and the human's passive acceptance of this corruption. Salvation, for Ruether, involves a turn from these corrupted relations, a conversion toward "a self grounded in community as a free and individuated self" (164). As a white Roman Catholic feminist theologian working within the Western liberal tradition, Ruether values both the integrity of the individual and the relationality of community. This turning toward the self in community, or *metanoia*, is not a single moment of conversion but rather a process that unfolds over time. The human grounds herself in the commitment to community and works to "dismantle the institutional structures and refute the ideologies that incarnate alienation" (164).

While Ruether's understanding of sin leaves room for the hierarchical dualisms that shape multiple vectors of oppression (white/non-white, rich/poor, Western/non-Western), she

²⁸ Kathleen Sands and Rebekah Miles have each offered extensive, careful analyses of Ruether's body of work. Each, in turn, raises concerns about the dualism and hierarchy that persist in Ruether's thought, even contrary to Ruether's explicit objectives in opposing and dismantling both. As Sands writes, "Dualism is perhaps the last word that Ruether herself would use to describe her position." Arguing for a deeper recognition of the tragic realities of human existence, Sands illustrates the ways in which Ruether retains "a dualistic shadow" because "she does not notice that the privation theory [of evil] presumes greater and lesser degrees of being, so that even if one repudiates the notion of a hierarchy of created beings, one is still left with the ontic inadequacy of relative goods in contrast with the Absolute." Ruether, Sands writes, wants to "disengage" the moral dualism of good/evil "from its roots in" the metaphysical dualism of spirit/matter, "hoping in that way to convert alienated Christian consciousness to the service of justice." In this, Sands argues, Ruether fails, as so many "from Augustine on" have failed, because "the ongoing theological suppression of tragic multiplicity...divide[s] reality into the ideal and the nonideal" (Sands, Escape from Paradise, 89–90 and 111). Miles argues that Reuther's proposal for a different understanding of human self-transcendence, that of human consciousness, which Ruether, drawing on the work of Teilhard de Chardin, understands as an outcome of the evolutionary process, remains hierarchical. Further, Miles argues that Ruether's thought lacks a sufficient political realism that might inform "how we get to her new world from our present location in the toxic garbage heap" and guide our use of the coercion that appears to be necessary "given the reality of human domination" that Ruether so rightly identifies (Miles, The Bonds of Freedom, 82 and 114) ²⁹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983),

^{161.}

considers the distortion of the male/female dualism into male/superior/good and female/inferior/evil to be "among the primary distortions of the self-other relationship" and it is here that she concentrates her attention (165). Christianity's long tradition of associating women with evil or sin is of particular concern for Ruether. She credits Pauline and post-Pauline scripture with drawing the Hebrew myth of Eve into the center of Christian discussions of sin and granting it significance as both explanation and justification for women's subjugation,³⁰ and credits Augustine, who drew heavily on Paul's understanding of the Old and New Adam, with first systematizing Christian thought on humankind's fall. Augustine assumes the "natural" order of the male/female hierarchy and maps an understanding of *imago Dei* onto this hierarchy, arguing that women are made in the image of God but to a lesser extent than men. According to Ruether, "Although Augustine concedes woman's redeemability and hence her participation in the image of God, it is so overbalanced by her bodily representation of inferior, sin-prone self that he regards her as possessing the image of God only secondarily" (95).

In brief strokes, moving quickly from Augustine to Aquinas to Luther to Barth and the Calvinist tradition, Ruether traces the affiliation of women and sin in both Roman Catholic and Protestant thought. Aquinas embraces the Aristotelian concept of woman as "misbegotten male" (96). Woman is naturally inferior to man and therefore good order demands she be ruled by him. For Luther, woman's inferiority is the result of divine punishment for Eve's transgression. Although Luther maintains Eve's original equality to Adam in the Garden before the first sin,

³⁰ Ibid., 167. Elsewhere, Ruether argues that the baptismal promise Paul includes in Galatians 3:28 ("There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus") was a formula that Paul incorporated but did not create and that its inclusion should not be interpreted as Paul's endorsement of the liberation of slaves or women: "I believe that Paul did not create this baptismal formula…because he did not actually promote either an ontological return to prefallen wholeness or its implications of social equality of women with men, slaves with masters, that would allow either women or slaves to throw off their subordination to the paterfamilias of the household." Paul includes the formula, Reuther argues, because he is primarily concerned with its attention to the distinction between Jew and Greek. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women and Redemption: A Theological History* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1998), 31.

Ruether argues, this doctrine "does not become a source for the theological reevaluation of woman's historical subjugation. On the contrary, it simply deepens the reproach of her as one whose sinfulness lost this original quality and merited the punishment of subjugation" (98). In Barth's theology and the Calvinist tradition, Ruether sees a consistent pattern of justifying women's hierarchical subordination to men. When domination is understood as God's desire, rebellion against that order is defined as sin. As Ruether observes, "Any effort to change this order and give woman equality with man would itself be a sinful rebellion against God's divinely enacted ordinances of creation and redemption" (99). Ruether demonstrates the ways in which the tradition of talking about sin within Christianity not only has defined women as more sinful, it has drawn the lines of sin in such a way that even questioning the hierarchy of the system qualifies as sin.

Gender dualism, distorted by sexism to overvalue men's humanity while negating women's, is "the original sin" for Ruether in *Sexism and God-Talk* (182).³¹ Her invocation of the language of original sin does not offer a reformulation of the doctrine of original sin but points

³¹ Ruether's concern here is to develop a theology that affirms the "full humanity of women" (18); her primary theological task is to redefine the image of God (imago Dei) to include women. Mary McClintock Fulkerson's poststructuralist analysis of Ruether's argument demonstrates that Ruether's approach assumes and implicitly endorses "the heterosexual binary", an "affirmation that the world is divided into two kinds of people," which assumes that a "me-too" approach to the *imago Dei* is what's most needed. Mary McClintock Fulkerson, "Contesting the Gendered Subject: A Feminist Account of the Imago Dei," in Horizons in Feminist Theology: Identity, Tradition, and Norms, ed. Rebecca S. Chopp and Sheila Grave Devaney (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 109. To the contrary, Fulkerson argues, such an appeal assumes that the subject's identity as "woman" is premised on something real, when, in fact, it is premised on a "discursive power regime...of heterosexuality that reinforces and reproduces the connections between binary, sexed identity, the collapse of sexual desire into gender, and the normative linking of desire with the opposite (binary) sex. To reiterate 'woman' is to support and maintain heterosexual binary arrangements" (106). Fulkerson calls instead for feminist theologians to focus on "stories, rather than explanation" and to "develop stories of a God of justice in light of poststructuralist destabilizations." Such stories should cultivate an openness to new visions and understandings of what falls outside current discursive regimes and maintain a commitment "to the goodness of the partial" (114). Ruether, for her part, strongly contests the way in which Fulkerson and other feminists have described Ruether's work as exclusively focused on the gender binary. While Sexism and God-Talk does maintain its focus almost exclusively on the gender binary, Ruether reminds us that her "earliest writings, in fact, explored class, race and colonialist hierarchies before I brought sexism into the picture...My view of sexism has always been rooted in a multi-dimensional view of sin that includes class, race and other structures of domination, and has to be looked at in many cultural contexts." Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Women and Sin: Response to Mary Elise Lowe," dialoge: A Journal of Theology 39.3 (2000): 235.

instead to the ways in which sexism has so thoroughly infused Western culture and its various political and social systems that it pre-exists and surpasses the existence and influence of any one individual. For Ruether, "sexism...is central to the origin and transmission of [humanity's] alienated, fallen condition." She urges feminists to embrace "the basic theological insight that humanity has become radically alienated from its true relationship to itself, to nature, and to God" while rejecting any conception of "the Fall that makes [women] scapegoats for the advent of 'evil'" (37).

b. Distinguishing Social Sin: Relational and Structural

Ruether draws attention to the ways in which sin has been overly individualized within the Christian tradition and urges a greater focus on the social dimensions of sin. She draws on the "critical prophetic principle" in Christian scripture to argue for a transformation of the oppressive, exploitative structures of society that foster oppressive, exploitative relations among humans and between humans and the natural environment. This prophetic principle, as interpreted by Ruether, rejects any norm that privileges one group over another as being more closely aligned with the divine. The most powerful of these privileging norms, for Ruether, is patriarchy: "Patriarchy itself must fall under the Biblical denunciations of idolatry and blasphemy, the idolizing of the male as representative of divinity" (23). In denouncing these norms, the critical prophetic principle provides a vantage point from which the individual can begin to recognize the systematic, social nature of sexism/sin, along with the dangers of overly individualized understandings of sin. If sin is understood as a phenomenon at the level of the individual only, salvation involves personal, rather than social, transformation. An individualized conception of sin lends itself to the patriarchal claim within the Christian tradition that has understood women as particularly prone to sin through her inferior nature and responsible for sin

through the acts of the first woman in Genesis 3. When sin resides primarily at the individual, rather than social, level, the sin of some individuals (including groups of individuals) can be distinguished and invoked to justify their suffering, punishment, control, and subjugation.

Recognizing sin as social, however, involves something other than claiming "we are all sinners equally" (180). As Ruether points out, such a claim can be used to deflect criticisms of patriarchy and analyses that hold males more responsible for its harms than females. While Ruether is clear that she does not believe men are "by nature" any more inclined toward sin than women, she does insist that patriarchy is an ideology developed primarily by men for the benefit of men (165). Claims that argue for an equality among sinners too often obscure the disproportionate opportunities some groups have had to exercise greater power over others and inflict harm.³² Recognizing sin as social, Ruether argues, means recognizing the ways in which individuals are connected to others, so that no harmful act is purely personal. As she says, "there is no evil that is not relational" (181). Sin is relational in that sinful acts always harm others, as well as the self, but also in the fact that all acts take place within a network of relations, within a system that precedes and shapes the individual act. At its most basic level, sin is about corrupted and damaged relations. For Ruether, we sin when we accept these damaged relations as the norm, damaged relations that have, themselves, resulted from sin.

While Ruether discusses social sin in both relational and structural terms in *Sexism and God-Talk*, she does not draw a clear distinction between these relational and structural forms of sin. I believe such a distinction can be helpful. It helps us recognize that structural sin is something more than the collective sins of a group of individuals or the impact of an individual's

³² Reinhold Niebuhr makes a similar point when he argues for the distinction between "the equality of sin and the inequality of guilt." Niebuhr urges us to "walk warily in relating the Biblical truth that all men are sinners to the other truth that there is nevertheless an ascertainable inequality of guilt among men in the actualities of history." Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. 1 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996 [1941]), 221–22.

sins on a network of relations. Recognizing sin as structural draws our attention to the ways in which social systems—configurations of different networks and forms of power and privilege—consistently benefit some to the disadvantage of others. In this regard, Emilie Towne's discussion of "the fantastic hegemonic imagination" is a helpful addition to Ruether's thought on the nature of sin. Drawing on the thought of Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci, Townes invokes the fantastic hegemonic imagination to describe the complicated, interconnected forces of domination that shape people's physical, emotional, and spiritual lives. "The fantastic hegemonic imagination traffics in peoples' lives that are caricatured or pillaged so that the imagination that creates the fantastic can control the world in its own image."³³ Townes stresses that these forces are not merely rational and systematic, nor are they necessarily the product of a particular individual's intentions or acts. The fantastic hegemonic imagination functions at a meta-level. Although advanced by the acts and beliefs of individuals, it is more than the sum of those acts and beliefs:

...the fantastic hegemonic imagination is in all of us. It is found in the privileged and the oppressed. It is no respecter or race, ethnicity, nationality, or color. It is not bound by gender or sexual orientation. It can be found in the old and the young. None of us naturally escape it, for it is found in the deep cultural codings we live with and through in U.S. society.³⁴

Townes argues that the fantastic hegemonic imagination maintains and advances structural evil, "the ways in which a society can produce misery and suffering in relentlessly systematic and sublimely structural ways."³⁵ Townes emphasizes the ways in which social sin can be understood as more than the social ramifications of individual acts. There is a systematic and structural dimension to social sin that needs to be analyzed as such; a personal conception of sin can go only so far in helping us recognize the depth and range of human suffering. At the

³³ Townes, *Womanist Ethics*, 21.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 12.

same time, an analysis of the relational and structural dimensions of sin struggles to give adequate attention to the individual's experience of sin, an experience that encounters both the social phenomena described by Ruether and Townes and the personal phenomena of being a self in sin.

On the one hand, Ruether and Townes recognize oppressive belief systems (sexism, heterosexism, racism) as cultural, human products, thereby capable of being changed; on the other hand, they do not want to underestimate the depth to which these oppressive belief systems have infiltrated not only the systems that surround us but our very psyche.

For Ruether, in *Sexism and God-Talk*, this leads to a two-fold conception of *metanoia*. There is both the personal, small group conversion, which seeks to transform one's personal identity and immediate relations with others, and the "great *metanoia*, in which all humans decide to disaffiliate from violence and cooperation with violence" (183). Ruether points toward the great conversion of all while pressing for immediate action. She is vague in her discussion of this "Shalom of God," because she is clear that she believes the task of religion is not to point the human toward the mysteries of eternal life or eschatological visions. It is, instead, to empower humans in their struggle against the evils of corrupt and distorted relations and systems. "Our responsibility," Ruether writes, "is to use our temporal life span to create a just and good community for our generation and for our children. It is in the hands of Holy Wisdom to forge out of our finite struggle truth and being for everlasting life" (258).

Not surprisingly, then, Ruether is more concerned in her discussion of sin to attend to distorted human relations than to the relation between human and God, or to a web of relations that encompass God and humans. She is more interested in defining particular human behaviors and attitudes as sinful, than in reflecting on the human condition of sin that precedes those acts. She limits herself to the moralistic view of sin that I argue is problematic when it stands in

isolation from a view of sin that focuses on sin as a condition, a reality of human existence that precedes particular acts of sin.

Nonetheless, Ruether's work in *Sexism and God-Talk* offers several important insights that need to be retained in the development of a feminist conception of personal sin. She alerts us to the dangers of overly individualistic conceptions of sin. She suggests an alternative understanding of sin as relational that I take into account in my development of a feminist conception of personal sin. Finally, in discussing sin as social, she gestures toward the interconnected nature of personal and social sin, an interconnection that I retain and develop.

c. Challenging Subject-Object Dualisms: Catherine Keller's From a Broken Web

In her early work, *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism, and Self*, Catherine Keller challenges Western assumptions about separation and selfhood, primarily, the belief "that any subject, human or non-human, is what it is only in clear division from everything else."³⁶ The "root presupposition" that frames Western thought about the self, Keller argues, is oppositional: a self exists only to the extent that it opposes the other.³⁷ This subject-object dualism traps humans into believing that the existence of the self requires distinction to the point of isolation and consistency to the point of death. The isolated, unchanging self is an illusion, "a self-contradiction" (22). No self is absolutely independent, absolutely autonomous. "We begin to suspect that the ideal of autonomous self-assertion is implicated in a sort of ontological belligerence," Keller writes, "and we see that the hostility, glorified by the image of the warrior, discloses after all a specific historical beginning and so no universality" (26). This fundamental

³⁶ Catherine Keller, *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism, and Self* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 2.
³⁷ Keller, *From a Broken Web*, 19. Keller argues that this root presupposition shapes not only patriarchal thought but also feminist thought that attempts to separate itself from these sexist assumptions about complementarity, only to embrace the oppositional assumptions of oppression. Women seeking liberation from the restrained relations of patriarchal society exchange complementarity for mimicry (16). To become "true selves" they embrace an oppositional separation.

dualism in Western thought has it roots in Western theology, Keller argues, specifically classical Christianity, its ideas about a transcendent God, and its ideas about sin.

The idea of a transcendent God has been challenged extensively in feminist thought. More than forty years ago, Mary Daly wrote, "The widespread conception of the 'Supreme Being' as an entity distinct from this world but controlling it according to plan and keeping human beings in a state of infantile subjection has been a not too subtle mask of the divine patriarch."³⁸ Concerned that ideas of divine transcendence reinforce worldly hierarchies of dominance, feminist thinkers have, instead, stressed God's immanence and relationality. Daphne Hampson writes:

It seems to me to be far from axiomatic that it makes the most sense today to conceive God in traditional terms as a kind of agent, separate from the world, who can act upon it. Much in science (and contemporary thought forms) suggests that all power, all reality, is in some way in flow and interconnected. May 'God' not be a dimension of all that is?³⁹

Kathleen Sands argues that when the idea of "transcendence" is invoked as "an absolute and invulnerable Good...[it] only serves to authorize moral positions that have already been reached by other paths."⁴⁰ Sallie McFague offers new ways of understand human-divine relations and human-divine power because, she argues:

The evolutionary, ecological perspective, the holistic vision that is basic to a new sensibility, renders untenable any understanding of the God-world relationship in which God is viewed as a being externally related to the world as the power that totally controls it.⁴¹

³⁸ Mary Daly, "After the Death of God the Father: Women's Liberation and the Transformation of Christian Consciousness," in *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, ed. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (New York, NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1979), 56–57, originally published in *Commonweal*, 12 March 1971. Writing before her later repudiation of Christianity, Daly here goes on to acknowledge that Christian thought may offer resources that "foster genuine experiences and intimations of transcendence" but that "their liberating potential is choked off in the surrounding atmosphere...of patriarchy" (57).

³⁹ Daphne Hampson, *Theology and Feminism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1990), 171.

⁴⁰ Sands, *Escape from Paradise*, 167.

⁴¹ Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), 17.

Sharon Welch "finds the god of classical theism irrational and unworthy of worship" and offers instead the idea of relational power as divine. She sees no need for "a substance or ground that exists outside" it. For Welch, "divinity, or grace, is the resilient, fragile, healing power of finitude itself."⁴²

Keller, sketching the contours of the classical tradition that represents God as the "ultimate separate subject," writes that this God is so transcendent as to be radically separated from "his" creation, "sundered from the natural universe by the transcendent exclusivity of his being." This ultimately separate subject demands absolute dependency (37–38).⁴³ Within a Christian framework, humankind understands itself to be made in God's image, yet human pretensions to self-sufficiency—aspirations to God's separateness—are, for classical Christianity, sin. For theologians such as Augustine and Luther, humankind's greatest sin is self-absorption, humans bending all things toward themselves.⁴⁴ The greatest human sin is presuming to be self-sufficient, isolated, and yet, as Keller observes, the God of classical Christianity, so thoroughly molded by Aristotelian metaphysics, is, "himself", absolutely separate, immutable, untouched by anything or anyone. Keller writes, "No tenet of Christian theology has stood so firmly—and with so little scriptural justification—as the divine unchangingness" (36). Only God

⁴² Sharon D. Welch, *A Feminist Ethic of Risk* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), 173–78.

⁴³ Daphne Hampson writes that " the God of the tradition...seems to have been modelled on the worst image of the human male. He is isolated, powerful, and at the top of the hierarchy" (Hampson, "Reinhold Niebuhr on Sin", 56). Hampson, like Keller, goes on to question Reinhold Niebuhr and the Lutheran Protestant tradition for its emphasis on creaturely dependence. She rejects the idea that a creature is, by definition, dependent on God, but her proposed vision for women's flourishing seems premised no less on creatures who find their being in God: "God becomes the one who allows us to come into being. God enables us to fulfill the potential of what we have it in us to be... Thus power becomes not something which is exercised, but the empowering of people. God no longer competes with us, a separate entity, superior to all others, but is that which is creative of our relatedness" (58). In this vision, humans remain dependent on God who is the source of their "coming into being" but the *effect* of that dependency on humans changes dramatically, so it would seem not to be dependency that is the problem for Hampson but a particular kind of dependency. Feminist theologians need to be precise about their concerns, for misunderstanding them may lead us to reject concepts and ideas (such as dependency) that could be essential to a new vision for Christian feminist hope.

⁴⁴ Keller quotes Luther: "...man as curved in upon himself to such an extent that he bends not only physical but spiritual goods toward himself, seeking himself in all things." *Luther: Lectures on Romans*, ed. Wilhelm Panck (Philadelphia, PA: Westerminster, 1962), 218ff, quoted in Keller, *From a Broken Web*, 33.

can become "ultimately separate" without sin, yet Keller questions a system whose ultimate praise is reserved for the perfection of what in humans is understood as sin. "A bizarre double standard confronts us here," she writes. "The traditional God is the absolute instance of the traditional sin" (38).

These ideas about God and sin rely on the fundamental oppositional dualism of subjectobject and its insistence on a corresponding dualism of independence-dependence mapped onto a patriarchal hierarchy. God is the transcendent subject upon which the human male object is dependent, just as the female object is dependent on the male subject, as well as God. Keller argues that so long as these dualisms of self/object and isolated/dependent frame our thinking, our ideas about God and sin will be confused, at best, and destructive, at worst.

Keller does not develop a non-dualistic conception of sin, but she offers four nondualistic conceptions of selfhood that serve as resources for thinking about sin in new ways. These "non-polarities of being" (225) challenge the simplistic either/or of dualistic thought with a more complex both/and conception of the self that *is* in an ever-shifting, ever-becoming web of relations. This self is Being One/Being Many, "not *simply* one but many ones," weaving its many selves into a self that is never fixed, never finished (228). The self exists in the movement of one and many, neither an "absolute" nor a "dissolute" self (225). This self is Being Private/Being Public—neither stiflingly isolated nor perpetually vulnerable. She is Being Body/Being Soul, her body and soul integrated, aspects that remain distinct without separating (238). The self *is* its body and yet is not only its body (235), physical and yet something other than physical. Being Here/Being Now, the self is immersed in "the organic interactions of timing and spacing" (248), recognizing existence as a continual fluctuation of relations through which and in which the self unfolds, absorbs, and becomes.

Keller offers her "webbed vision" (236) as "a way of being a self at any moment, a way of radical integrity" (225) that demands "a heedful awareness" (252) of these constantly shifting relations. Rather than seeking the static security of immutable boundaries, the radically integrated self embraces the flux of creation, feeling herself created and creating at every moment. These conceptions of the self lend themselves toward a new way of living. The self, fluid and whole, does not dissolve herself into the being of another, nor does she succumb to the illusion of the independent monad, untouched by its contact with others. Tribal, familial, and traditional boundaries give shape to aspects of her existence, but she resists the oppositional dichotomies that seek to control her allegiance through hostile demonization of those who are outside the tribe, family, or tradition. Keller's ideas about the "webbed" self are important in rethinking "the self in sin" from a feminist perspective. They offer a critical alternative to the dualistic framework of pride/self-sacrifice that shaped earlier thought on sin. They provide a fertile ground for thinking about ways that the self "goes wrong," not with regard to bad deeds but with regard to the ways in which the self cannot and/or does not recognize and live into its interrelated existence. The emphasis on inter-relationality in Keller's vision challenges us to imagine a similar nonpolar space in which to think about the self/communal experiences of sin and grace.45

d. Rethinking Divine Transcendence

Keller's vision in *From a Broken Web* is fully immanent; the only transcendence is that of the self as it "makes something of the world, flowing out," creating new possibilities, new realities (248). Having deconstructed the "ultimately separate subject" that is classical

⁴⁵ The nonpolar quality of this new way of thinking is essential, for as Mark Douglas observes in his discussion of Valerie Saiving and Reinhold Niebuhr, the "willingness to think in terms of a spectrum between two poles reveals [a] submission to dualistic temptations. After all, spectrums do not deny dualisms; they merely provide another way of incarnating them." Mark Douglas, "Experience and Relevance: Continuing to Learn from Niebuhr and Saiving," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 28.1 (2012): 104.

Christianity's God, Keller resists the incorporation of a deity into her "arachnean spirituality." She resists not only the idea of a "traditional faith [with its] controlling God who will set things right in the end" but also the cultivation of any deities, gods or goddesses, "whose own egoes [sic] would need 'praising' and propitiating" (224–25). She acknowledges the divine force of the universe but encourages us to welcome its fluidity, to resist the desire to "tie up or tie down the ontological status of a deity," for "we can no more immobilize the divine element in the universe in the form of a single name, a single sex, a single code, creed or cult, than we can freeze the fluid transformations of the universe" (250–51).

While Keller turns toward the transcendent divine in more recent works,⁴⁶ her theology here is strictly immanent. In this, she is not alone among feminist theologians. Joy Ann McDougall notes that "feminist theologies of sin have largely stopped speaking of sin as either a ruptured relationship to God or a refusal of God's will for humankind."⁴⁷ Drawing on Alistair McFadyen's *Bound to Sin*, McDougall draws attention to the "pragmatic atheism" that seems to pervade much feminist theology, particularly when it discusses sin. McDougall does not claim, nor do I, that feminist theologians have decided theology can do without God (quite the contrary).⁴⁸ However, as with Keller in *From a Broken Web*, the work of some feminist theologians, particularly white feminist theologians, often reflects a deep suspicion of divine

⁴⁶ In *God and Power*, Keller argues for a new understanding of God, "not as a unilateral superpower but as a relational force, not an omnipotent creator from nothing, imposing order upon chaos, but the lure to a self-organizing complexity, creating out of the chaos" (31). Keller's new understanding of God retains a sense of transcendence, something beyond the world, calling the world, but a transcendence that remains relational. Catherine Keller, *God and Power: Counter-Apocalyptic Journeys* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005). ⁴⁷ McDougall, "Feminist Theology", 680.

⁴⁸ Kathleen Sands points out, for example, that Carter Heyward, who "argued that omnipotent or dominating power, far from epitomizing goodness, is the very paradigm of evil in the world," still did not seek to eliminate God from the discussion but rather "wanted to redeem God with a relational ontology, not abandon God in favor of a purely immanent goodness." Sands, *Escape from Paradise*, 44, discussing Heyward's *The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Revelation* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1982). Sands's larger project, however, is to urge theology to relinquish its appeals to transcendental ideals, to move beyond its "familiar warrants of certitude, paths on which to move with confidence from what is to what ought to be" in order to take up "a tragic heuristic" that allows it to recognize and respond to "the return of color...[a] tide [on which], with the multiple tones of humanity, comes a riddling plurality of truths and goods" (137).

transcendence. Like Keller, some feminist theologians equate ideas of divine transcendence with the human male's desire to transcend the limits of human existence, his desire to rule at the top of a hierarchical order that celebrates maleness/control/civilization and situates femaleness/dependency/nature in a lower realm. These white feminists seem not so much to disagree with Augustine's analysis that the lust to dominate is the dominating lust as to challenge its claims to universality. Instead, they connect the *libido dominandi* specifically with positions of racial, social, gender, or economic privilege and resist the models of a transcendent God that seem to reinforce, rather than qualify, human hierarchies of oppression.

These suspicions about transcendence are not without warrant, but as Rebekah Miles and other feminists have argued, feminist theology needs transcendence as well as immanence in its doctrines of God, sin, and salvation.⁴⁹ Miles writes, "The turn away from divine transcendence and human self-transcendence poses difficult problems for feminist theologies. In the interests of *curbing* human domination, some feminist theologians have undercut a primary *check* on human pretense and domination."⁵⁰ As developed within a framework of feminist concerns, Miles argues, divine transcendence offers a restraint on human systems of power and privilege, "a check against the idolatry of patriarchal attempts to use God to support male privilege."⁵¹ God's transcendence reminds humans that any attempt to describe or name God (including as "Father" or "He") is partial. As Elizabeth Johnson writes, "Whenever one image or concept of God expands to the horizon thus shutting out others, and whenever this exclusive symbol becomes literalized so that the distance between it and divine reality is collapsed, there an idol comes into

⁴⁹ For a summary of feminist discussions of divine transcendence and immanence, see Rebekah L. Miles, *The Bonds* of *Freedom: Feminist Theology and Christian Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), particularly chapter 1.

⁵⁰ Miles, *The Bonds of Freedom*, 17.

⁵¹ Ibid., 21.

being."⁵² Retaining the idea of God's transcendence underscores the distance between the language used to speak of God and the "divine reality" that surpasses all human constructions of symbol and language.

Drawing on the work of Reinhold Niebuhr, Miles argues that a commitment to divine transcendence not only qualifies all human claims as contingent, it "can unify and give meaning to our diverse, finite moral lives."⁵³ Miles develops a "comprehensive model of divine presence" that synthesizes Niebuhr's emphasis on divine transcendence with feminist commitments to divine immanence and community. Her work illustrates the importance of divine transcendence to feminist theology. Divine immanence, as developed in feminist theology, is a crucial development in Christian thought, particularly in supporting concerns with justice, liberation, and embodiment, but divine transcendence, when modified by feminist concerns for immanence, infuses feminist theology with the hope that God's vision for humankind surpasses even our most ambitious dreams.

Miles's work suggests that Keller's "arachnean spirituality" need not demand the exclusion of a God who is both transcendent and immanent. Thus, while the feminist conception of personal sin developed in my project embraces Keller's challenge to imagine non-dualistic conceptions of human existence, it offers non-dualistic conceptions of a God who is both transcendent *and* immanent. Such a conception resists a polarized model in which transcendence and immanence are cast as opponents, thus establishing an either/or relation that lapses back into the familiar dualisms of male/female, spirit/body, or civilized/natural that Keller and Ruether want to challenge. A conception of sin situated in this dualistic framework tends to devolve into its own dualism of saved/sinful, a familiar refrain that offers little that is hopeful or productive

⁵² Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), 39.

⁵³ Miles, *The Bonds of Freedom*, 153.

for a feminist rethinking personal sin. Ruether, Townes, Keller, and Miles help us recognize that if we are to develop non-dualistic ideas about sin, we must also seek non-dualistic ideas about human selfhood and the divine, a task I take up in the remaining three chapters of the project.

3. Radical Suffering and Conceptions of Sin

In Book I of the *City of God*, Augustine makes a number of claims about suffering that feminist theologians have found problematic.⁵⁴ While a close reading of Augustine's larger arguments might help us appreciate that he offers a more sophisticated and nuanced approach than some feminists have appreciated, what concerns us here is how feminists have understood and responded to these claims, not only as they were articulated by Augustine, but as they have echoed through subsequent generations of Christian thought.

In *City of God*, what matters, Augustine writes, is not "what is suffered, but by whom; for stirred up by the same motion, mud gives forth a dreadful smell, yet ointment has a sweet fragrance" (I.8, 13). The good and the wicked may experience the same hardships, the same afflictions, but the good will come through the suffering "purged and purified" while the wicked will be "damned, ruined, and destroyed" (I.8, 12). Augustine sees suffering as a good, a necessary trial sent by God to strengthen and instruct humans. "The good are afflicted with temporal evils, as in the case of Job, so that the human spirit may be tested in itself, and the great strength of its piety known, by which it loves God even without reward" (I.9, 15). God sends afflictions, also, because they are deserved. Even the good, whose sins may be minor compared to those of the wicked, suffer because they tolerate the more serious sins of the wicked: "because they are lenient towards the damnable sins of the wicked, the good are justly scourged alongside

⁵⁴ Augustine, *City of God*, ed. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). All parenthetical references are to book, chapter, and page numbers in this edition.

them in this world even though their own sins are light and venial, and even though they certainly do not deserve to suffer eternal punishment" (I.9, 13–14).

Two commitments frame Augustine's discussions of suffering. First, any suffering in this life is far outweighed by the blessings or suffering that humans will experience after death. "Those who are of necessity bound to die," Augustine writes, "need not care greatly by what means they will eventually die, but into what place they will be brought by dying" (I.11, 19). When famine takes many Christians in death, Augustine understands their deaths as "rescue from the ills of this life" (I.10, 19). Second, God's providence is absolute. Nothing takes place, not even suffering, without God. Whatever the suffering, God has God's reasons for inflicting it or allowing others to do so.

In his response to the consecrated virgins who were raped during the invasion of Rome, Augustine assures the virgins that their chastity remains untouched so long as their wills did not consent to the violation: "the body is made holy by the exercise of a holy will...and...while this will remains unshaken and steadfast, nothing that another does with the body, or in the body, that the sufferer has no power to avert without sinning in turn, is the fault of the sufferer" (I.16, 26). He does not blame the virgins for their rape. To the contrary, he seeks to assure them that they are not at fault. He argues against those who say the virgins should have committed suicide rather than allow themselves to be raped. "A woman who has been overcome by violence and violated by the sin of another," Augustine argues, "has done nothing for which she ought to punish herself with voluntary death" (I.18, 28).⁵⁵ Yet his commitment to God's absolute

⁵⁵ It seems appropriate to pause and recognize the radical nature of Augustine's position here and its complementarity with feminist thought. Christine E. Gudorf notes Christianity's long tradition of venerating women's reproductive capacities and seeing the violation of these capacities through sexual violence as "more horrendous, since they impinge upon her God-given purpose." Consequently, women's virginity/purity came to be valued more than their lives. "As late as the 1950s," Gudorf notes, "Maria Goretti was canonized a saint in the Catholic church because in 1902 she had chosen to forfeit her life rather than her virginity." Christine E. Gudorf, *Body, Sex, and Pleasure: Reconstructing Christian Sexual Ethics* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1994), 198,

providence requires him to remain open to the possibility that the rape of these women served some good purpose. Perhaps the women had become too vain of their chaste status; they valued the praise of others who admired their chastity, rather than valuing their chastity for the sake of God. Perhaps they were vulnerable to becoming prideful (I.29, 43). If so, their rape taught them an important lesson. Augustine understands his own suffering in the same way. In *Confessions*, he describes the torment he experienced when he sought love through sexual encounters. "I was tossed about and split, scattered and boiled dry in my fornications," he writes.⁵⁶ Reflecting on the misery he experienced during adolescence, Augustine understands God to have been "mercifully punishing" him, "touching with a bitter taste all my illicit pleasures."⁵⁷ Suffering, for Augustine, is sent by God as instruction or punishment (sometimes both). His suffering, like that of the consecrated virgins in Rome, like all of human experience, is governed by God's providence and is therefore justified. Augustine has no conception of unjustified suffering. It simply does not exist.

a. The Protest Against Radical Suffering

Modern and postmodern thought reject this idea that all suffering can be justified. Paul Ricoeur argues that the Christian doctrine of original sin as articulated by Augustine "leaves unanswered the protest of unjust suffering, by condemning it to silence in the name of a massive indictment of the whole of humanity."⁵⁸ Liberation theology is clear that the suffering of the poor and oppressed is not only unjustified, it is intolerable. Dorothy Soelle argues against "Christian masochism" and its attempts to rationalize suffering: "Any attempt to look upon suffering as

citing Pius XII, Allocution to "Very Young Girls" of Catholica Action, October 2, 1955, in The Monks of Solesmes, ed., *Papal Teachings: The Woman in the Modern World* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1959), 246.

⁵⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) II.ii.2, 24.

⁵⁷ Confessions, II.ii.4, 25.

⁵⁸ Paul Ricoeur, "Evil, A Challenge to Philosophy and Theology," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53 (1985): 640.

caused directly or indirectly by God stands in danger of regarding [God] as sadistic.⁵⁹ James Cone writes, "Therefore when suffering is inflicted upon the oppressed, it is evil and we must struggle against it.⁶⁰ Christianity, understood within the context of liberation, demands action in alliance with and on behalf of the poor. Feminist theologians likewise reject the idea that suffering is a divine form of instruction or purification; that which causes suffering is a force to be resisted and addressed. Wendy Farley rejects the classic Christian tradition of the Fall for its presumption that suffering can be explained as punishment or desert:

It is the neatness of this vision that disturbs me. It quells outrage over suffering by *explaining* it and, worse, by justifying it. I find myself in the company of Ivan Karamazov, who refuses to be comforted by any theodicy purgation, punishment, vindication, harmony, retribution. None of these can make it all right that children are tortured by their parents or their governments. At best these explanations make it easier not to mind other people's suffering so much. Moralism moves too quickly to palliatives that obscure the cruelty of evil.⁶¹

Beverly Wildung Harrison is concerned not with justifying or explaining suffering but

with responding to it. "A chief evidence of the grace of God," she writes, "is this power to struggle and to experience indignation. We should not make light of our power to rage against the dying of the light."⁶² Traci C. West observes that "the gospel…directs Christians toward a recognition of, and struggle against, public practices of state terror and humiliation, especially ones that reinforce social hierarchy and marginalization."⁶³ In her exploration of women's experiences of evil and salvation, Ivone Gebara calls for action in the face of suffering. "Men

⁵⁹ Dorothy Soelle, *Suffering* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 26. Soelle argues instead that our focus must shift to the sufferer: how she experiences her pain, what meaning she makes of it, what voice she brings to it.

⁶⁰ James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 163. Cone's approach understands Biblical revelation as affirming God's desire to liberate the oppressed. "Although the continued existence of black suffering offers a serious challenge to the biblical and black faith, it does not negate it. The reason is found in Jesus Christ who is God's decisive Word of liberation in our experience that makes it possible to struggle for freedom because we know that God is struggling too" (178).

⁶¹ Wendy Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion: A Contemporary Theodicy* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 12–13.

⁶² Beverly Wildung Harrison, *Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics*, Carol S. Robb, ed. (Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1985), 21.

⁶³ Traci C. West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 40–41.

and women who neglect to fight against certain forms of suffering, on the excuse of powerlessness or some cherished tradition, become accomplices in destroying life."⁶⁴ Unlike Augustine, these liberationist, feminist, womanist, and *mujerista* theologians seek explanations for suffering in unjust social systems and hierarchies, not the will of God.

In rejecting Christianity's traditional theodicies—suffering as punishment for sin, as instructional, as part of a larger harmony in creation, or as pointing toward an eschatological vision—Wendy Farley introduces the concept of radical suffering. For Farley, radical suffering "destroys the power of these theodicies to spirit away the problem of evil."⁶⁵ It is a suffering so destructive, so horrific that it cannot be contained within a framework of justification: the suffering of women, children, and men who were tortured, murdered, stripped of human existence in the Nazi death camps during World War II;⁶⁶ Chilean women who were "disappeared"—murdered, tortured, dismembered—by men who "went crazy/delighted in burning/children and books/played at decorating cemeteries/bought furniture made of broken bones/dined on tender ears and testicles",⁶⁷ Sethe, Toni Morrison's protagonist in the novel *Beloved*, whose suffering in slavery was so horrific, so dehumanizing, that she was willing to murder her children—two boys, her older daughter "already crawling," and her infant daughter—rather than allow them to be taken by "schoolteacher," the white man who claimed her body, spirit, soul, and children as his property:

Because the truth was simple, not a long-drawn-out record of flowered shifts, tree cages, selfishness, ankle ropes and wells. Simple: she was squatting in the garden and when she saw them coming and recognized the schoolteacher's hat, she heard wings. Little hummingbirds stuck their needle beaks right through her headcloth into her hair and beat their wings. And if she thought anything, it

⁶⁴ Ivone Gebara, *Out of the Depths: Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation*, trans. Ann Patrick Ware (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 111–12.

⁶⁵ Farley, *Tragic Vision*, 21.

⁶⁶ Charlotte Delbo, *Auschwitz and After*, trans. Rosette C. Lamont (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995).

⁶⁷ Marjorie Agosin, *Zones of Pain / Las Zonas Del Dolor*, Cola Franzen, trans. (Fredonia, NY: White Pine Press, 1988), 12.

was No. No. Nono. Nonono. Simple. She just flew. Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them. Over there. Outside this place, where they would be safe. And the hummingbird wings beat on.⁶⁸

Morrison shows us the horror of the aftermath through the eyes of the slavecatcher when he enters the shed where Sethe fled with her children moments before—"two boys bled in the sawdust and dirt at the feet of a nigger woman holding a blood-soaked child to her chest with one hand and an infant by the heels in the other"—and of the schoolteacher as he leaves the shed a few moments later:

Little nigger-boy eyes open in sawdust; little nigger-girl eyes staring between the wet fingers that held her face so her head wouldn't fall off; little nigger-baby eyes crinkling up to cry...But the worst ones were those of the nigger woman who looked like she didn't have any. Since the whites in them had disappeared and since they were as black as her skin, she looked blind.⁶⁹

Any attempt to frame such horrific experiences as justifiable or deserved, Farley argues,

quoting Kant, constitutes "an apology in which the defense is worse than the charge...and may

certainly be left to the detestation of everyone who has the least spark of morality."⁷⁰ Radical

suffering does not strengthen or instruct; it destroys. It assaults the body and the spirit, threatens

to strip away all traces of humanity.

Marilyn McCord Adams frames this discussion in terms of "horrendous evils", events that so overwhelm participants with their horror that it is doubtful the horrors can ever be balanced in the participants' minds so as to make the participants believe their lives are "a great good on the whole."⁷¹ Such evils "invade the deep structure of the person's frameworks of

⁶⁸ Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2004), 192.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 175–77.

 ⁷⁰ Farley, *Tragic Vision*, 21, quoting Immanuel Kant, *An Inquiry Critical and Metaphysical, Into the Grounds of Proof for the Existence of God and Into Theodicy*, trans. John Richardson (London:1819), cited in Harold M. Schulweis, *Evil and the Morality of God* (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 1984), 120.
 ⁷¹ Marilyn McCord Adams, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God" in *The Problem of Evil*, ed. Marilyn

¹¹ Marilyn McCord Adams, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God" in *The Problem of Evil*, ed. Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 211.

meaning-making and seemingly defeat the individual's value as a person."⁷² Rather than seeking "reasons-why" God allows such horrors to occur, Adams seeks instead an understanding of God's goodness that promises the integration and defeat of them within the context of the individual's relationship with God.⁷³ Like Farley and others, Adams rejects the idea that the suffering caused by horrendous evils can "be reckoned into the category of *just deserts for sin.*" The scale of horrendous evils is so much greater than that of human agency that it is "impossible for humans to bear full responsibility for their occurrence."⁷⁴ Where Farley embraces a "tragic vision" and offers a model of redemption as resistance "in the midst of tragedy and rupture" as an alternative to this suffering-as-retribution model,⁷⁵ Adams offers an understanding of divine agency writ large. Adams's God is not only "incommensurately Good," her God is "incommensurately good *for the participant*" who is affected by horrendous evil.⁷⁶ Emphasizing Christology and the Trinity, Adams argues that God's goodness is so all-encompassing and so committed to love for creation that this God's love is capable of defeating horrendous evils both symbolically and concretely, if not in this lifetime than in the life beyond death.

Neither Farley nor Adams seeks to reconceptualize the idea of sin within the context of radical suffering or horrendous evils, but both draw attention to the serious challenges such types of suffering present to a conception of sin. The writers discussed in this section, Delores Williams and Mary Potter Engel, attempt such a rethinking of sin. Although they do not use the language of "radical suffering" or "horrendous evils," they ground their discussions nonetheless in experiences of suffering that threaten the physical, emotional, and spiritual existence of those

⁷² Marilyn McCord Adams, "Afterword" in *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, 2nd ed., ed. Stephen T. Davis (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 195.

⁷³ Adams, *The Problem of Evil*, 218.

⁷⁴ Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 34, 38.

⁷⁵ Farley, *Tragic Vision*, 127.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 155.

who suffer. They challenge any discussion of sin that frames suffering as justified punishment for sin. While rejecting this conception, however, both writers retain the language of sin, offering alternative understandings that both inform and challenge a feminist conception of personal sin.

b. Attending to the Survival and Suffering of African American Women: Delores Williams's "A Womanist Perspective on Sin"

In her explorations of ideas about sin, Delores Williams focuses on the suffering and survival of African American women. For Williams, suffering is not a punishment for sin. Rather, sin is the language she invokes to condemn the violation and dehumanization of Black women. In her essay, "A Womanist Perspective on Sin," Williams has a tendency, as many thinkers do, to equate individual sin with particular acts or thoughts. Her discussion of individual sin, rather than reflecting on the experience of the self in sin, defines individual sin as participation in social sin.⁷⁷ Williams's concern is less about analyzing the inadequacies of traditional forms of talk about sin within the Christian tradition and more with naming and confronting the systematic harms done to Black women in America and connecting those harms with the African-American community's understanding of sin. This focus on the structural dimensions of sin rather than the personal is not unusual in black or womanist theology. Stephen Butler Murray argues that Williams's theological anthropology, like that of James Cone, Cornel West, and Victor Anderson, "highlights the influence of other people, rather than original sin or personal wrongdoing, in establishing and maintaining this theological sense of fallen humanity."78

⁷⁷ Williams uses the language of social sin, but in light of the distinction I made earlier between relational and structural forms of social sin, I want to note that Williams' seems to be primarily concerned with structural, more systematic forms of sin than relational sin. ⁷⁸ Stephen Butler Murray, "The Dimensions of Sin and Fallenness in the Theological Anthropology of Black and

Womanist Theologies," The Journal of Religion 84 (January 2004): 23.

Williams shapes her examination of the African-American community's ideas about sin and Black women's understanding of sin and suffering into a concept of sin as defilement of Black women's bodies: "A womanist notion of sin claims that defilement of Black women's bodies and the resulting attack upon their spirits and self-esteem constitute the gravest kind of social sin of which American patriarchal and demonarchal society is guilty."⁷⁹ In *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, Williams grounds her concept of sin as defilement in the image of Jesus on the cross. For Williams, "the image of Jesus on the cross is the image of human sin in its most descerated form…the cross thus becomes an image of defilement, a gross manifestation of collective human sin."⁸⁰ For Williams, sin is anything that violates—defiles—the right relations for humankind revealed in the life of Jesus Christ. In order to judge "right relations" and their "defilement," however, Williams needs an additional ethical principle, which she defines in *Sisters in the Wilderness* as the "survival and positive quality of life for black women and their families in the presence and care of God."⁸¹

While Williams's project here is different from my own in that she is developing a particular understanding of social sin, there are aspects of her thought that are important to developing a feminist conception of personal sin. Williams's conception of sin as defilement values human embodiment and sexuality, particularly the bodies and sexuality of Black women. It insists that the dehumanization and violation of these women's bodies is a sin. It focuses attention on Black women's self-esteem as both that which is defiled by sin and that which is

⁷⁹ Delores Williams, "A Womanist Perspective on Sin," in *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, ed. Emilie M. Townes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 145. Williams invents the term 'demonarchy' to stress the ways in which the oppression of black women is distinct from that of white women. While white women suffer from the sexist ideology of patriarchy, they also benefit from the ideology of white privilege that often went unremarked in white feminists' analyses of patriarchal norms. Using the term 'demonarchy' allows Williams to "identify a positive side of patriarchy that white women enjoy but is not extended to Black women (149 n45).

⁸⁰ Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 166.

⁸¹ Ibid., 175.

healed by God through salvation. Although my feminist conception of personal sin attends also to the not-yet of God's promise in Christ, it nonetheless shares Williams's womanist concern for the present quality of Black women's lives. A conception of sin may gesture toward an eschatological promise, but it must also move individuals closer to God whose healing grace touches them now and transforms their present condition. Like the slave spirituals in Williams's study, my work to develop a feminist conception of personal sin is "more concerned about a process of moving toward positive transformation and destination than with identifying individual acts as sinful."⁸²

I do not, however, retain the language of "defilement" in developing a conception of personal sin as condition. Although Williams gestures toward individual sin when she writes, "Participating in the perpetuation of this kind of understanding of Black womanhood [as unserious] and Black women's humanity [as not worthy of serious valuation] constitutes individual sin,"⁸³ In arguing that Black women sin when they do not challenge the ways in which society degrades, dehumanizes, and violates Black women's bodies, Williams defines individual sin exclusively in terms of social/structural sin and in terms of the individual's actions. The individual participates in social/structural sin by accepting or perpetuating the terms of defilement. There is little attention in Williams's work to how the idea of sin as defilement illuminates the experience of the self in sin without turning to actions for which the individual can be held accountable.

Williams demonstrates how defining sin as defilement can be powerful in developing a conception of social/structural sin and naming the harm that has been inflicted on Black women by a patriarchal and demonarchal society. I am concerned, however, that it may not be as helpful

⁸² Williams, "A Womanist Perspective on Sin," 134.

⁸³ Ibid., 146.

when deployed as part of an effort to reflect on the self in sin, particularly for women who have survived sexual violence or experienced other forms of traumatic assault. Linda Mercadante observes that too often Christian attempts to help those who have survived some form of extreme trauma, those who have been "sinned-against," turn too quickly to questions of personal responsibility:

We may have improved from the days when "What did you do to provoke him?" was a common question to a battered woman. And we may know better today than to criticize the clothing choices of a raped woman. But it is tempting, theologically correct, and feels helpful to guide the person to discover the inevitable sin in their own life, whether or not directly related to the victimization.⁸⁴

The language of "defilement," when framed as a tool for reflection on personal sin in the way that Williams has defined it (participating in and perpetuating structural systems of defilement), focuses on the individual's actions and seems to come dangerously close to blame, even if that is not the intention. By using the same language to describe personal and structural sin, we make it difficult for those who have suffered most from these particular forms of structural sin, those who feel most defiled, to see their experience of personal sin as anything other than their contribution to the structural sin that harms them. At the same time, it allows those whose relationship to this particular form of structural sin is less intimate—white women and men, for example—to understand personal sin as something they do or have done to others—Black women. The form of structural sin that Williams names as defilement harms Black women differently than it does white women and men; understanding personal sin as defilement does not, therefore, implicate them in their own harm as it does Black women. Women of color, whose bodies and sexuality have been defiled systematically for centuries, need a different metaphor for considering themselves as creatures broken by sin, one that does not define itself

⁸⁴ Linda Mercadante, "Anguish: Unraveling Sin and Victimization," Anglican Theological Review 82.2 (2000): 292.

exclusively in terms of their contribution to their own harm. They need a different metaphor for exploring the ways in which they are selves fragmented from God, others, and themselves. I attempt to offer such an alternative with my development of personal sin as a condition of estrangement in chapter 5.

Finally, although in chapter 1 I explored the ways in which invoking ideas about sin can function as a form of social control-reinforcing ideas of unworthiness in those least valued by a social system—Williams shows how the idea of sin was empowering for 19th century Black women, both slave and free. The Christian messages of sin and salvation helped these women frame their experiences of degradation in terms of sin (and therefore offensive to God) and made it possible for them to challenge the powerful racist and sexist ideologies that surrounded them. These women's encounters with Christian preaching, often accompanied by some kind of personal vision of Jesus, "helped them put concepts of unworthiness on the side of sin...Thus Black women could survive and achieve well-being in spite of the devaluation of Black womanhood, which white America incorporated into its social ideology of white supremacy."85 Williams illustrates how Christianity's traditional ideas about sin can contradict the messages of a patriarchal and demonarchal society. She recognizes this, not through theoretical speculation, but by attending to the personal conversion narratives of Black women. A feminist conception of personal sin requires a sophisticated awareness of the complexity of the ways in which talking about sin impacts women's lives, the ways in which it both empowers and diminishes women's understanding of their relation with the divine and their sense of agency in the world. Further, it needs to value personal accounts of conversion and faith as a source of truth about Christian belief and practice.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 143.

c. Listening to the Voices of Those Who Have Survived Abuse: Mary Potter Engel's "Evil, Sin, and the Violation of the Vulnerable"

In her essay, "Evil, Sin, and the Violation of the Vulnerable," Mary Potter Engel discusses evil and sin within the context of "the war of the strong against the vulnerable" through sexual and domestic abuse.⁸⁶ Drawing on the voices of those who have survived abuse. Engel proposes six methodological commitments for developing a theology that supports and strengthens victims in seeking liberation from sexual and domestic abuse. A responsive theology attends and responds to the suffering of particular individuals. It privileges those sources-not only texts but also other forms of creative expression-that most directly convey the intensity of those individuals' experiences. It values the contributions that various disciplines—particularly the social sciences—make in helping analyze forms of abuse and the social patterns and values that support abusive behavior. A responsive theology of sin and evil acknowledges "the interlocking sets of oppression that compound the horror of sexual and domestic abuse," what Engel describes as "strands in a cable" (160). It measures its validity in terms of the extent to which it empowers women "as agents and persons" (161), and, finally, it offers its insights as provisional, resisting the temptation to claim to have had the final and all-encompassing word on sin or suffering. Especially with regard to sin, Engel argues, "we must be clear...that any definitions of sin offered must be applied, understood, and evaluated only within precisely determinate contexts, and that the victims themselves have the stronger claim to making final judgments about whether particular actions at particular times are sinful" (161).⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Mary Potter Engel, "Evil, Sin, and Violation of the Vulnerable" in *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*, ed. Mary Potter Engel and Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1990), 159–71.

⁸⁷ While I appreciate Engel's point here, the language of "victim" is problematic for me for much the same reason I resist the language of "sinned-against" employed by Andrew Sung-Park and Susan L. Nelson. It presses us back toward the dualistic compartmentalization I am resisting and also risks discouraging response when it is unclear to what extent a particular individual can be described as a "victim" in a particular situation. Andrew Sung Park and Susan L. Nelson, eds., *The Other Side of Sin: Woundedness from the Perspective of the Sinned Against* (Albany,

Rather than distinguishing between the structural and the personal as two forms of sin, Engel defines the structural forces of oppression as "evil" and "sin" as the personal participation in those forces. Like Williams, Engel understands sin in terms of acts, more precisely, "those free, discrete acts of responsible individuals that create or reinforce these structures of oppression" (162). Although as I discussed in chapter 1, this project began with an interest in questions of evil and suffering, my current focus is on sin, so I resist offering a view of evil that contrasts with Engel's. For now, I argue that structural forms of oppression need to be included in a fully developed conception of sin, not separated out as "evil" that is somehow distinct from (though related to) sin. Although my project develops a concept of personal sin in light of feminist and womanist commitments and concerns, it does so with an awareness of the interrelated nature of personal and structural/relational sin. Retaining structural oppression as a form of sin, rather than defining it as evil, emphasizes its connections with personal sin. Just as important, it reminds us that personal sin is always embedded in and shaped by structural sin and that its effects are social as well as personal (and correspondingly, that any ideas about redemption need to be developed as both social and personal).

With her primary attention on sin as "free discrete acts of responsible individuals," Engel does not develop a concept of original sin, although she concedes the importance of both categories and urges caution in how each concept is interpreted and identified. She describes original sin as having been "understood as inherent guilt or ineradicable shame," a concept that "has been used against women and other socially designated sacrificial victims" (162). Rather than exploring how a concept of original sin might be reinterpreted as part of a liberating theology, Engel instead accepts the universal nature of actual sin as given and turns her attention

NY: State University of New York Press, 2001). For these reasons, as I discussed in chapter 1, I find Alistair McFadyen's discussion of agency and experiences of abuse useful. Alistair McFadyen, *Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust, and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

to four traditional definitions of actual sin: anger, disobedience, pride, and concupiscence. Evaluating each in light of the challenges faced by those who have suffered sexual and domestic abuse, Engel proposes a redefinition for each that, while remaining provisional and potentially problematic, might offer greater insight into experiences of abuse and greater usefulness for liberation and healing. Thus, rather than defining sin as anger, which can be used to teach the abused that they must suffer in silence rather than articulating feelings of rage, Engel suggests we consider sin as moral callousness. Instead of defining sin as disobedience,⁸⁸ Engel suggests we understand sin as one person's betrayal of another's trust. Sin as pride is rejected for a concept of sin as a distortion of the boundaries of one's self in relation to others. Finally, sin as concupiscence is rearticulated as "a distorted relationship to dependence" manifested as either contempt for weakness and abuse of power over others or subjection of one's existence to the will of another (170).

It is, perhaps, not surprising, given Engel's methodological commitment to the concrete that she resists framing her conceptions of sin within an explicitly theological framework. However, her conclusion insists that her discussion of sin requires that larger context:

Unless my comments on sin and evil here are understood in this broader context of God's gracing of the world through justice and love and humankind's active and voluntary participation in that gracing, they will hinder more than help those struggling to free the world of the victimization of the vulnerable." (171)

Engel acknowledges that developing ideas about sin is a distinctly theological undertaking which can be known only through one's encounter with God's grace, yet Engel reworks various

⁸⁸ I share Engel's concerns about the emphasis on obedience in traditional Christian thought and for many of the same reasons. Obedience to God is one of the dominant metaphors shaping Augustine's understanding of the human's relationship to God. In light of the ways in which obedience/disobedience can be deployed to reinforce unjust social relations, I am interested in developing alternative metaphors, including that of "estrangement," which I develop in chapter 5, and "turning away" from God. Such language diminishes the sense of paternalistic ruler and obedient subject or master and slave, both of which a feminist conception of sin will reject as ideal models for social or theological relations. The language of turning away, though not developed here, conveys less a clash of wills than an ontological reality that is arguably more central to Augustine's thought than obedience: the human exists in God. Her soul sins—becomes less itself—when it turns from God, seeks elsewhere what it can find only in God.

conceptions of sin without reference to God, the human need for God's grace, or the hopeful promise of God's faithful and redeeming action. I share Engel's commitment to a theology that is responsive to human experiences of suffering. I also accept her claim that sin is too diverse a phenomenon to be reduced to any one metaphor.⁸⁹ We need rich language to describe human experiences of sin, but this language needs to draw both on human experiences of suffering and human encounters with the divine. Our discussions of sin need to be concrete *and* theological. Engel presents a strong argument as to the harm that particular metaphors for sin can inflict on those who are struggling to survive abusive situations, but she does not develop alternatives that are theologically infused or theologically inspired. It is not enough to acknowledge God's gracious action as an implicit framework for a discussion of sin; the discussion itself, the metaphors we offer, have to reveal something about the human condition that can be understood only in terms of divine-human interrelations. Social theory and social science research are important companions to feminist theology, even essential ones, but they are not sufficient in themselves. A feminist conception of sin, in claiming the language of "sin," has to situate itself theologically as well as socially.⁹⁰

Engel rejects the conception of sin as alienation, arguing that is "altogether too vague to be of much help...[that] it connotes a static, passive condition that does not do justice to the active exploitive structures of a society built for the strong against the vulnerable" (167). She worries that understanding sin as alienation leads to a corresponding idea of redemption as reconciliation, which urges victims of abuse to assume that they must abandon any effort to

⁸⁹ Serene Jones writes, "Calvin defends the breadth and imprecision of his discussion [of sin] by explaining that sin is not a stable or static state but more a furnace burning with ever new flames or a spring unceasingly bubbling up from the earth. Sin is always changing, assuming ever-new forms and traveling into ever new terrain of human experience." Jones, *Feminist Theory*, 100, quoting Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.1.8, 251.

⁹⁰ I am here agreeing with Alistair McFadyen when he writes, "I take the language of sin to be fundamentally a theological language. It functions by building relation to God into its way of speaking of the pathological, by speaking of God and the pathological together" (McFadyen, *Bound to Sin*, 10).

establish protective boundaries—emotional, physical, or spiritual—that separate them from their abusers. Engel seeks a way of understanding sin that leads to women's empowerment, that helps survivors of violence and abuse "develop a sense of power as action and a strong sense of themselves as responsible individuals and to learn appropriate ways to love themselves" (167). Engel is correct to be concerned about conceptions of sin that can be turned against those who suffer abuse and violence, suggesting that to separate oneself, even from abuse, is somehow itself sinful.

My project takes up Engel's concerns as challenges. The feminist conception of personal sin as estrangement I develop in this project cannot be vague, static, or passive. It cannot advocate reconciliation at any price under any conditions. Above all-and here I do not see myself disagreeing with Engel so much as attempting to deliver on her claim—it must be explicitly, passionately theological. It resists the conflation of human and divine relations, holding open the distinction that makes possible a challenge to the distorted and destructive patterns of human social systems and human behavior. It seeks ways of understanding the human-divine matrix of relations that instill hope, enable resistance to injustice, and cultivate compassion for all of creation. A feminist conception of personal sin acknowledges that humans alone cannot heal the brokenness that fractures their existence and their relations with the rest of creation. It values the contribution of social theory and social science but it stakes its claims firmly in theological terrain. It shares Engel's concern for the vulnerable. It embraces her methodological commitment that any attempt to shape a conception of sin must be evaluated in light of particular experiences of suffering, violence, and abuse. But it finds its hope in the theological claim that sin is not the final word on human experience, that an awareness of sin is only the beginning of God's healing and transforming action.

4. A Different Way of Talking About Sin

This chapter has explored a number of concerns feminist and womanist thinkers have raised in regard to certain strands of thought about sin in the Christian tradition. They have rejected the idea that sin provides a justification or rationale for suffering. They have revealed the inadequacy of earlier analyses of sin, grounded firmly in a Western, masculine, white particularity and yet argued to be universal. They have demonstrated the ways in which ideas about sin have been invoked to reinforce patterns of social oppression, particularly when those ideas are grounded in dualistic, oppositional hierarchies that parse humanity into the sinful and saved, evil and good. In addition, these feminist and womanist thinkers have offered alternative conceptions of sin, from Judith Plaskow's development of Reinhold Niebuhr's understanding of sin as sensuality to Serene Jones's conception of sin as unfaithfulness to Delores Williams's articulation of sin as defilement. All of these understandings turn sin in a slightly different direction, reflect on its significance from a slightly different perspective.

The concept I offer here is not meant to replace these conceptions but rather to take a place in their midst, opening further spaces for reflection and growth. My concern with all of these conceptions of sin—traditional, feminist, and womanist—is their tendency to frame sin purely in terms of acts. Even those conceptions that attempt to consider sin separately from a language of guilt and blame, such as Jones's concept of sin as unfaithfulness, still develop lists of particular behaviors or ways of living that qualify as sinful.⁹¹ I suggest that an important complement, indeed a precursor, to discussions of human agency and responsibility or the development of moral conceptions of sin is reflection on sin as a condition, a state in which

⁹¹ Jones, for example, defines unfaithfulness as "a way of living in which women do not flourish but instead experience (and participate in) oppressive forces" (Jones, *Feminist Theory*, 113).

human beings exist. For this, I rearticulate some elements of the doctrine of original sin to develop a feminist conception of personal sin as condition.

As I discussed in chapter 1, I am drawn to some aspects of the doctrine of original sin, not out of an interest in preserving the familiar doctrinal contours that attempt to explain the source and consequence of humankind's first sin in Eden, but rather as a potential counterweight to exclusively moralistic understandings of sin. A feminist engagement with the idea of original sin can appreciate its attunement to the perversion of human existence—something is profoundly wrong in the ways that human beings distort, deceive, and damage themselves and the rest of creation—while recognizing the ways that this particular strand of thought about sin has itself inflicted damage.⁹² The feminist imagination brings new energy and vision to the concept of original sin, opening cracks to make room for an awareness of the complex, intersecting forces of human oppression, domination, and suffering. It embraces reflection on personal sin with the hope of cultivating a deeper awareness of human existence and a greater compassion for that existence.

The following chapters draw on the thought of Julian of Norwich to develop a feminist rethinking of original sin as estrangement. In doing so, they retain an awareness of key claims and commitments gathered from the current chapter's exploration of feminist and womanist thought:

• Resist dualistic indulgences. Resist the language of guilt and blame and the temptation to divide the world into the saved and the damned. Instead, imagine nondualistic, non-polar conceptions that rely on fluid reinterpretations rather than

⁹² Emilie Townes seems to allude to this doctrine and its transmission when she writes of "centuries of inherited messages about the inherent evil of humanity (with a large measure of this brutalizing swill aimed at women)" that "[poses] a wall of judgment and condemnation that is hard for many of us to scale" (Townes, *Womanist Ethics*, 155).

fixed oppositional categories. Cultivate non-dualistic conceptions of human existence and the divine.

- Stress the particularity of all claims about sin, the divine, and the human. Draw on a range of sources and perspectives to surface previously unacknowledged assumptions about human experience. Beware of the dangers of a totality of thought that privileges sameness or celebrates a unity that erases difference.
- Evaluate the potential usefulness and abusiveness of any conceptions of sin in light of women's particular experiences of suffering and healing. A conception of sin must be relevant to women's struggles within and against the forces of oppression. It must be evaluated in light of the way in which it orients the human in the world, with God and in the midst of others. It must cultivate compassion and promote healing; a conception of sin that cultivates hardness of heart or hostility will be rejected.
- Emphasize the value of human embodiment and particular human bodies.
- Even when reflecting on the self in sin, retain an awareness of the complex interlocking dynamics of the self, the social, and structural forms of sin. Recognize that a conception of personal sin cannot meet the previous criteria if it is developed in isolation from an analysis of the structural dynamics of oppression and abuse.

These claims and commitments guide the exegesis of Julian's work over the next two chapters. In the project's final chapter, I revisit these criteria to evaluate my conception of personal sin as condition.

Chapter 3

The Self and God Beyond Dualism—Julian of Norwich

In the previous chapters, I have detailed my interest in developing a conception of personal sin that is both Christian and feminist, focusing on personal sin as condition rather than as act. I have outlined some of my concerns with traditional conceptions of sin and have proposed that rethinking some aspects of the doctrine of original sin from a feminist perspective is a powerful place to begin articulating a feminist conception of personal sin. I have developed a set of criteria emerging from feminist and womanist accounts of sin that I hope will help me avoid some of the ways in which talk about sin has reinforced rather than challenged systems of injustice, ways in which is has intensified the suffering of the most vulnerable individuals within those systems by blaming them for their own suffering.

I turn now to the work of Julian of Norwich because I find it responsive both to the concerns I and others before me have raised about conceptions of personal sin and to my aspirations for something better with regard to how we think about and reflect upon personal sin in Christian thought. In this chapter, I introduce Julian's work and discuss more fully three aspects of Julian's theology that are most important to this rethinking of personal sin: her theological anthropology, her creative use of gender to develop a rich understanding of God's immanence, and her emphasis on the unlikeness of God that prevents these ideas of divine immanence from lulling humans into the mistaken presumption that they can see as God sees and judge as God judges.¹ In chapter 4, after examining what Julian means by "sin," I detail the ways

¹ This presumption is, as some feminists and womanists have rightly observed, more complex than prideful arrogance. The young girl struggling with the knowledge that her body, sexed male at birth, does not reflect the person she knows herself to be may be more, rather than less, inclined to believe she is worthless when she presumes that this judgment is not hers alone but also God's.

in which these theological concepts have profound implications for her thought on sin and for the conception of personal sin I am developing in this project.

The current chapter begins with a brief overview of Julian's life and her historical context and summarizes scholarship on the manuscript tradition of her work. In describing the overall structure of the revelations broadly, I focus more closely on three revelations that are most central to my analysis, in particular the eighth revelation, in which Julian witnesses the drying of Christ's body at the time of the Passion and sees in Christ a "double thirst" for humankind, introducing for the first time the idea of "substance" that becomes essential to her theological anthropology; the thirteenth revelation, in which Julian struggles to reconcile God's assurances that sin is "behovely" and that "all manner of thing shall be well" and begins an extended reflection on the important distinction between divine and human perspectives; and the fourteenth revelation, in which Julian reflects on the nature and purpose of prayer and relates her vision of a lord and a servant that proves to be the key to understanding the revelations. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the three theological concepts that will ground my discussion of Julian's thought on sin in chapter 4: Julian's theological anthropology, which understands humans to consist of substance and sensuality, her creative use of gender to describe God's actions, which emphasizes God's physicality and relationality, and, finally, her emphasis on the unlikeness of God to humans and on the distinction between divine and human judgment.

1. Julian's Life and Writings

Julian of Norwich, a 14^{th} century English woman of indeterminate background, tells us that at the age of thirty, she suffered a serious illness during which she experienced a series of sixteen revelations or "showings." She later recounted this experience in at least two versions which have survived to present day: a concise yet highly descriptive account of the experience, *A* *Vision Showed to a Devout Woman*, often referred to as the Short Text, here referred to as *A Vision*, and a longer, theologically reflective and interpretive account that retains its unwavering focus on the revelations, *A Revelation of Love*, often cited as the Long Text, here referred to as *A Revelation*.²

a. Who was Julian?

We know very little about Julian's life. We find limited auto/biographical references in both *A Vision* and *A Revelation* that scholars have accepted as historically accurate: in the early lines of *A Revelation* we learn that Julian's illness and initial revelations occurred in May of 1373 (2:2, 125), when she was "thirty years old and a half" (3:1, 129); the opening rubric of *A Vision*, most likely written by a scribe rather than by Julian, describes Julian as "a devout woman...who is a recluse at Norwich and is still alive in the year of our Lord 1413;" and, finally, the closing scribal rubric found in one of the surviving manuscripts of *A Revelation*, written in Latin (unlike the rest of both texts, which are written in a vernacular Middle English), which refers to Julian as "anchorite of Norwich."³ A woman named Julian is also mentioned in bequests of several wills from the region during what was likely Julian's lifetime.⁴ Finally, we have Margery Kempe's account of her visit with Julian sometime around 1413.⁵

² I am here adopting the titling conventions used by Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins in their recent critical edition of Julian's writings: 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 (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006) (hereafter W&J).

³ "Explicit liber revelationum Juliane anacorite Norwich, cuius anime propicietur Deus" ("Here ends the book of the revelation of Julian, anchorite of Norwich, in whose soul may God be pleased") (86:24–25, 381). For a discussion of the surviving manuscripts and my conventions in referencing Julian's texts, see "A Note on Manuscripts and Modernization" below.

⁴ Edmund Colledge and James Walsh detail the testamentary evidence in their 1978 critical edition of Julian's work: *A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich*, ed. Edmund Colledge O.S.A. and James Walsh S.J. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978), 33–35 (hereafter C&W). In a 1999 study of Julian's work, Christopher Abbott argues that Colledge and Walsh "quite clearly fail to establish a secure identification of Julian of Norwich as beneficiary" of these four wills from the early fifteenth century, yet in their recent critical edition of Julian's work, Watson and Jenkins find the evidence persuasive and conclude that the bequests "apart from confirming that [Julian] spent more than two decades in her cell...also say something about her local

Scholars have offered a variety of theories regarding Julian's background over the years based on these fragments of information and the works themselves. In their 1978 critical edition of Julian's work, Edmund Colledge and James Walsh conclude that Julian's work reflects an extensive educational background, making it "most probable...that when young-that is, in her teens—she entered a religious house."⁶ Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins in their more recent critical edition agree that "there is a strong possibility [Julian] was a nun at the Benedictine convent at Carrow, a mile from the church at St. Julian's, Conesford, in Norwich."⁷ Denise Baker cites Julian's desire for "three gifts or graces" and the three "wounds" (compassion, contrition, and longing for God), described in section 1 of A Vision and chapter 2 of A Revelation, as evidence of Julian's awareness of "steps in the program of affective spirituality³⁸ that would have been characteristic of organized religious life in the latter half of the fourteenth century. From this, Baker theorizes that Julian was a nun or anchorite when she suffered illness and experienced her visions.⁹ Benedicta Ward argues that, to the contrary, nothing in Julian's texts points toward Julian's identity as a nun. Ward concludes from the textual references to Julian's surroundings in A Vision and from the absence of any historical evidence linking Julian to Carrow priory or any other nunnery that Julian might just as likely have been a widow and head of her own household at the time of the revelations.¹⁰

reputation and her wide (and lofty) social and religious connections." Christopher Abbott, Julian of Norwich: Autobiography and Theology (Suffolk, UK: D. S. Brewer, 1999), 2; W&J, 5.

⁵ For a recent presentation and discussion of Kempe's account and other available evidence, see W&J, introduction

and appendix. ⁶ C&W, 43.

⁷ W&J, 4.

⁸ Denise Nowakowski Baker, Julian of Norwich's Showings: From Vision to Book (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25.

⁹ Ibid., 34.

¹⁰ Benedicta Ward S.L.G., "Julian the Solitary" in *Julian Reconsidered*, Kenneth Leech and Sister Benedicta SLG. (Oxford: SLG Press, 1988). While her argument for Julian as a laywoman reminds us of the tenuous nature of any claim about Julian's historical identity. Sister Benedicta's argument is weakest in her rebuttal of claims that Julian was exceptionally well educated for her time. She argues that what others have identified as sources and influences can be qualified instead as "parallels" with other authors and that "good thinking can arrive at the same answers

I believe it is important to note that some of the evidence being accepted as historical fact by most scholars—Julian's age, the facts of her illness and its connection with the revelations, the dates on which the revelations occurred—originates only with the narrator of *A Vision* and *A Revelation*. It seems simplistic to assume that the narrator's motivation in providing such details was purely historical, particularly when such care has been taken otherwise to avoid any personal or historical context. As Nicholas Watson points out, "The passing of time is not an incidental feature of the Long Text; on the contrary, dates, numbers of years, Julian's own age, are carefully brought before us at the work's most crucial moments, as though they are of thematic significance."¹¹ When we consider the many ways in which both works have been carefully constructed, we have to at least consider the possibility that these biographical "facts" about Julian have been likewise constructed or manipulated in some way. I am persuaded that Grace Jantzen's observation is the most accurate conclusion we can claim with regard to Julian's life: "one cannot develop more than a tissue of speculation about the external events which preceded the revelations and the subsequent writing of her book."¹²

b. Julian the Theologian

Julian is often categorized as a mystic, emphasizing the visionary nature of her experience, usually to the neglect of her complex theology.¹³ As early as 1670, a publication of A

independently" (25). This is an inadequate response to Colledge and Walsh's exhaustive analysis of Julian's work and the education that likely made such work possible (C&W, 43–59).

¹¹ Nicholas Watson, "The Trinitarian Hermeneutic in Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Love*" in *Julian of Norwich: A Book of Essays*, ed. Sandra J. McEntire (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998), 64–65. Watson goes on to describe the key moments in which time and its passing are specified in *A Revelation*: at the beginning of exposition (chapter 2), in chapter 51 (which describes the longest and perhaps most significant addition to *A Revelation*, the *exemplum* of the lord and the servant), near the middle of *A Revelation* (chapter 56), and in its final chapter (chapter 86) (Watson, "The Trinitarian Hermeneutic", 85 n12).

¹² Grace M. Jantzen, Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 25.

¹³ Jantzen references those who have "dismissed [Julian's work] as the uncertain if sincere meanderings of an ecstatic visionary, with 'the accent...on the psychological aspects of...experiences, with no great stress laid on theological foundations or moral presuppositions." Jantzen, *Mystic and Theologian*, 90, citing Dom Francois

Revelation by Serenus Cressy, chaplain in the court of Charles II, presented the text as an experience of "the happy Virgin, the Compiler of these Revelations"¹⁴ that could be used as a catalyst for personal contemplative reflection, rather than a work of interpretive theology.¹⁵ After a long period of relative obscurity, Julian's work emerged as the focus of growing popular interest in "spirituality" in the early 20th century.¹⁶ It is only in the latter half of the 20th century and increasingly in the 21st century that Julian is being treated more seriously as a theologian.¹⁷

A closing rubric included in one manuscript of *A Revelation*¹⁸ suggests that Julian's work in its earliest transmissions was meant to be considered systematically and holistically within the

context of the Christian faith:

I pray almighty God that this book comes only to the hands of those that will be his faithful lovers, and to those that will submit themselves to the faith of holy church and obey the wholesome understanding and teaching of [the] men that are of virtuous life, sober age, and profound learning; for this revelation is high divinity and high wisdom, wherefore it may not dwell with him that is in thrall to sin and to the devil. And beware you do not take one thing according to your affection and liking and leave another, for that is the condition of a heretic. But take everything with the other and truly understand that all is according to

Vandenbroucke in *A History of Christian Spirituality Volume II, The Spirituality of the Middle Ages* by Jean Leclercq, Francois Vandenbroucke, and Louis Bouyer (London: Burns & Oates, 1968), 425–6. ¹⁴ W&J, 16 and 450. Watson and Jenkins describe the Cressy edition of *A Revelation* as "the most important document in the history of the work's reception and of perceptions of its author, fixing the image of Julian for

centuries to come" (16). For a complete presentation of Cressy's introductory materials and the exchanges arising out of the controversy with Edward Stillingfleet, the Anglican bishop of Worchester, that followed publication of the Cressy edition, see W&J, 448–55.

¹⁵ Cressy is confident that the text is appropriate for a reader such as Lady Mary Blount of Sodington, the book's intended recipient, for she "will not be induced to the perusing of [the book] by Curiosity, or a desire to learn strange things, which afterward they will at best vainly admire, or perhaps out of incredulity contemn" (W&J, 449). ¹⁶ W&J, 24.

¹⁷ Jantzen, *Mystic and Theologian*; Joan M. Nuth, *Wisdom's Daughter: The Theology of Julian of Norwich* (New York: Crossroads, 1991); Baker, *From Vision to Book*; David Aers and Lynn Staley, *The Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics, and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press. 1996); Nicholas Watson, "Yf wommen be double naturelly': Remaking 'Woman' in Julian of Norwich's Revelation of Love," *Exemplaria* 8 (1996): 1–34; Watson, "The Trinitarian Hermeneutic"; Abbott, *Autobiography and Theology*; Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, *Julian of Norwich and the Mystical Body Politic of Christ* (South Bend, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1999); *Julian of Norwich: Showings*, ed. Denise N. Baker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005); Marilyn McCord Adams, "Julian of Norwich: Problems of Evil and the Seriousness of Sin," *Philosophia* 39 (2011): 433–47; Denys Turner, *Julian of Norwich, Theologian* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011).

¹⁸ For a discussion of the surviving manuscripts of *A Vision* and *A Revelation*, see "A Note on Manuscripts and Modernization" below.

holy scripture and grounded in the same, and that, Jesus our very love, light, and truth shall show to all clean souls that with meekness ask perseveringly this wisdom of him.¹⁹

Watson and Jenkins suggest this rubric presents A Revelation "as a systematic theology, any statement of which has to be read in its total context."²⁰ My work presumes and hopes to advance this consideration of Julian as theologian. Julian's commitment to contemplative prayer is an integral part of a larger theology, one I believe we are justified in calling "systematic" in the sense defined by Joan M. Nuth, in which a "comprehensive system" of thought emerges "as the end result of a process of addressing particular questions of moment. Here a unified system gradually emerges by the recurrence of certain basic themes and ideas that become ever more closely interwoven in the discussion of particular theological issues."²¹ Such a definition of systematic theology. Nuth goes on to note, would include in the category not only Julian but also Augustine.²² Grace Jantzen describes Julian's theology as "a theology of integration," stressing the centrality of Christ's passion—the first revelation—to the entirety of Julian's thought.²³ If we are tempted to dismiss or minimize Julian's theology due to its incompleteness, Denys Turner argues that this incompleteness itself is both systematic and theological because Julian "knows that what alone completes the theological is also what transcends its powers, namely, the beatific vision."24

¹⁹ The closing rubric is found in the Sloane manuscripts. The modernization here is mine, working from Marion Glasscoe's 1976 critical edition of the Sloane 1 manuscript. Julian of Norwich: A Revelation of Love, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter, 1976), 103.

²⁰ W&J, 11.

²¹ Nuth, Wisdom's Daughter, 23.

²² Ibid., 180 n2. Also included are Anselm, Luther, and Rahner. Nuth's work is exceptional for its close and accurate readings of both Julian and Augustine and her analysis of their resonances and distinctions. ²³ Jantzen, *Mystic and Theologian*, 89–93.

²⁴ Turner, Julian of Norwich, xii.

c. When Did Julian Write?

Dating the composition of A Vision and A Revelation proves challenging, if not impossible. A Vision may have been written soon after Julian's experience in 1373. This date, suggested by Edmund Colledge and James Walsh in their critical edition of Julian's work published in 1978 and embraced by a number of scholars after them, is based on A Vision's tight descriptive focus on the experience and its limited theological exegesis.²⁵ Nicholas Watson argues, to the contrary, that A Vision is not a spontaneous recording of the revelations but reflects years of "thought and anxious hesitation" that unfolded within a conservative religious environment.²⁶ Watson observes that the conservative stance of England's religious and political hierarchies, particularly toward personal spiritual experiences, would have exerted tremendous pressure on Julian's work as a writer: "We have allowed our awe at the assurance that characterizes so much of the *Revelation* in its longer version to blind us to the forces which circumscribed the lengthy history of its composition," including the composition of the shorter text. Given the context in which she was writing, Watson concludes, it is likely that A Vision was finished around fifteen years after the original revelations are reported to have taken place in 1373.27

 ²⁵ C&W, 18–25. See also Baker, From Vision to Book and Julian of Norwich: Showings, Jantzen, Mystic and Theologian, and Sandra J. McEntire, ed., Julian of Norwich: A Book of Essays (New York: Garland, 1998).
 ²⁶ Nicholas Watson, "The Composition of Julian of Norwich's Revelation of Divine Love" in Speculum 68 (1993): 658.

²⁷ Julia Bolton Holloway is the one scholar who has argued that *A Vision*, the shorter text, was composed *after* the longer text, *A Revelation*, and should be understood as a response to the Constitutions of 1407–1409, issued by Archbishop Chancellor Arundel, which sought to make illegal any form of unsanctioned spiritual or religious instruction, including the translation of Christian scriptures into English. Holloway argues that *A Vision* was crafted as a safer, less controversial account of the revelations. Her argument depends in large part on the scribal rubric at the start of *A Vision*, referenced above. Holloway interprets the reference to 1413 in the rubric not as the year in which the manuscript was copied from an earlier manuscript but instead as a date of original composition. Watson, Staley, and others agree this is an unlikely scenario. See Holloway's preface to Julian of Norwich, *Showing of Love*, trans. Julia Bolton Holloway (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2003), xiv–xv; W&J, 32; see also Holloway's on-line discussion of her conclusions regarding the timing of the compositions and her evidence for these conclusions, available at http://www.umilta.net/anchor.html, last accessed 22 December 2014. Although Staley concurs with Watson that *A Vision* was composed before *A Revelation*, she disagrees with Watson's conclusion that

Julian's second account of her experience, what Watson and Jenkins describe as "a fullscale expansion and rewriting of A Vision," is "more than four times the length of A Vision,"²⁸ and, in Watson's proposed chronology, was likely finished much later than Colledge and Walsh have suggested, probably early in the fifteenth century.²⁹ This longer text differs from the shorter version in a number of interesting ways, particularly when we assume that the shorter preceded the longer so that departures from the former can be read as signs of maturing thought.³⁰ Most significantly, A *Revelation* offers extensive theological reflection and commentary on the visions. As Watson and Jenkins have characterized the difference between the two accounts, in A Vision, Julian can be understood primarily as a participant, while in A Revelation, she is both participant and interpreter.³¹ Christopher Abbott marks this distinction as "a self-conscious disjunction between the remembered and the remembering self," a disjunction that allows us to perceive what he calls the "intrinsic autobiographicality" of the text. Reading passages of A Vision and A Revelation together, Abbott argues, allows us to sense "a certain vitality, rhetorical and theological, [that] has expanded the dimensions of Julian's work from within."³² In ARevelation, we find evidence of Julian's double perspective (Abbott's "disjunction between the remembered and remembering self"). Julian seems aware both of herself as she experienced the revelations (the remembered self) and of herself as she continues to reflect and interpret these experiences (the remembering self). From this double perspective, we can discern, if only indirectly, something of Julian's life and growth.

A Revelation was composed in the early 1400's and instead maintains it is more likely to have been written in the late fourteenth century. Lynn Staley, "Julian of Norwich and the Late Fourteenth-Century Crisis of Authority," *The Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics, and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture*, David Aers and Lynn Staley (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 126–7. ²⁸ W&J, 2.

²⁹ Watson, "Composition," 641.

³⁰ As Denise Baker has done in her study of Julian's theology, tracing Julian's development "from a visionary into a theologian" (Baker, *From Vision to Book*, 5).

³¹ W&J, 1–2.

³² Abbott, *Autobiography and Theology*, 16–17.

d. A Note on Manuscripts and Modernization

Scholars workings with Julian's texts must confront the complexity and inadequacy of the manuscript tradition with regard to both *A Vision* and *A Revelation*. None of the original manuscripts of either *A Vision* or *A Revelation*, manuscripts Julian might herself have created, reviewed, or approved, have survived. The one complete surviving manuscript of *A Vision* (British Library MS Additional 37790, sometimes also referred to as the Amherst manuscript after its last private owner) is the earliest record we have of Julian's work and appears to have been copied around the mid-1400's.³³ The two complete manuscripts of *A Revelation* (Bibliothèque Nationale MS Fonds Anglais 40, known as Paris, and British Library MS Sloane 2499 and MS Sloane 3705, known as Sloane 1 and 2, respectively, which appear to be copies from a single source³⁴) are dated to the 17th century and are different enough that some scholars believe Paris was copied from a different exemplar than either of the Sloane manuscripts.³⁵ Paris is the earlier of the two, likely copied in the early 17th century, with the Sloane manuscripts dating sometime in the mid-17th century.³⁶ Rather than limiting their critical edition to either Paris or Sloane 1 as previous scholars have done.³⁷ Watson and Jenkins offer what they describe

³³ W&J, 10; Baker, *Julian of Norwich: Showings*, xx. The Additional Manuscript includes *A Vision* as one of several texts that seem to have been compiled for the spiritual guidance of contemplatives. See also Colledge and Walsh's introduction to their Modern English translation of Julian's works, which describes the Paris manuscript as "the most important long-text manuscript" and argues that Serenus Cressy's text was "undoubtedly made from it." *Julian of Norwich: Showings*, ed. Edmund Colledge O.S.A. and James Walsh S.J. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978), 21 (hereafter C&W, *Showings*).
³⁴ Colledge and Walsh describe Sloane 2 as "a discreetly modernized transcript" of Sloane 1 (C&W, 19); however,

³⁴ Colledge and Walsh describe Sloane 2 as "a discreetly modernized transcript" of Sloane 1 (C&W, 19); however, Denise Baker, citing more recent research done by Sister Anna Maria Reynolds, C.P., and Julia Bolton Holloway, concludes that Sloane 2 is actually the earlier of the two copies (Baker, *Julian of Norwich: Showings*, xx). The differences between them, in any event, appear to be minimal and the editorial choice focuses then on Paris and Sloane.

³⁵ Baker, *Julian of Norwich: Showings*, xx. Watson and Jenkins note that the pattern of "occasional northernisms" in Paris (word usage that was found most commonly in the dialects of Northern England in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries) clearly links it with both Additional and Sloane, suggesting that the manuscript tradition that eventually produced Paris once shared language close to that of Additional and Sloane (W&J, 36).

³⁷ In particular, some scholars, such as Marion Glasscoe and, more recently, Elizabeth Spearing and Elisabeth Dutton, have worked primarily from the Sloane 1 manuscript, arguing that its language more closely resembles the dialect found in 14th century Norwich than the Paris manuscript. Dutton also observes that because "the Paris

as "a synthetic edition."³⁸ Working with Paris as their primary manuscript, they consult and incorporate comparisons with Additional, the Sloane manuscripts, and the Westminster manuscript. The latter of these (Westminster Cathedral Treasury MS 4) consists of a series of excerpts from A Revelation, bound with selections from other religious works in Middle English, most likely compiled between 1450 and 1500, making this our earliest, though incomplete, copy of A Revelation.³⁹ The later dates of these surviving manuscripts require us to keep in mind that even with close textual and linguistic analysis and careful conjecture, we do not "know" how and what Julian wrote.

I follow Watson and Jenkins's practice of referring to the short text as A Vision (shortened from the opening scribal rubric of the Additional manuscript, "Here is a vision shown by the goodness of God to a devout woman") and to the longer text as A Revelation (found in the opening lines of both the Sloane and Paris manuscripts: "This is a revelation of love which Jesus Christ, our endless bliss, made in sixteen showings"). In reading Julian, I have worked primarily from Watson and Jenkins's critical edition of her works (2006), though I have consulted Colledge and Walsh's critical edition of A Vision and A Revelation (1978) and Denise Baker's critical edition of *A Revelation* (2005) as needed. For the convenience of my readers, I have

manuscript contains more explanatory comment than the Sloane manuscripts...the Sloane manuscripts might seem likely to be closer to an authorial original." Others, including Colledge and Walsh and, more recently, Denise Baker, have preferred the Paris manuscript, Colledge and Walsh because it is the earliest surviving manuscript of A Revelation and Baker because its language is closer to Modern English than that of Sloane 1 or 2. Julian of Norwich: A Revelation of Love, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1976); Julian of Norwich; Revelations of Divine Love, trans. Elizabeth Spearing (New York: Penguin Books, 1998); Julian of Norwich: A Revelation of Love, ed. Elisabeth Dutton (Plymouth, UK: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008), 4; C&W, 7; Baker, Showings, xx. Watson and Jenkins observe that the language in Paris appears not to be a modernization as Glasscoe has argued (Glasscoe, Julian of Norwich, viii-x) but rather an attempt to translate into a different Middle English dialect (W&J, 37). ³⁸ W&J, 40.

³⁹ Watson and Jenkins believe that the excerpts of *A Revelation* found in the Westminster manuscript may have been compiled in the first half of the fifteenth century (W&J, 417). Colledge and Walsh date the compilation to around 1500 (C&W, 9), while Denise Baker and Hugh Kempster situate it between 1450 and 1500. Kempster argues that the Westminster text descends not from an ancestor shared with Paris or Sloane but marks a distinct third manuscript tradition of A Revelation. Baker, Julian of Norwich: Showings, xx; Hugh Kempster, "Julian of Norwich: The Westminster Text of A Revelation of Love," Mystics Quarterly 23:4 (1997): 178.

modernized Julian's Middle English throughout, guided by Watson and Jenkins's critical notes and two other modern translations of the texts done by Colledge and Walsh and Elizabeth Spearing, respectively. I have chosen to modernize rather than translate Julian's Middle English, which means that I have made a series of changes that will make the texts somewhat more accessible to modern readers, but I have resisted recasting the texts entirely in contemporary language. I have replaced Middle English spellings with modern conventions throughout, although I have retained Julian's patterns of capitalization as found in Watson and Jenkins's critical edition (so terms such as Creator, Trinity, Incarnation, Passion, Lord, Holy Church, which are typically capitalized in modern Christian thought are not capitalized in my modernizations of the texts). I have also, when I suspect that a Middle English term will be foreign to my readers (such as *cleve*, *forthbringing*, or *mekille*), replaced it with a term common in Modern English (*cling, birthing*, and *greatly*). Although I agree with Christopher Abbot that modernizing Julian's texts is "intrinsically unsatisfactory,"40 I wish to minimize the need for my readers to develop a familiarity with Middle English terms and conventions in order to follow my analysis and arguments in these two chapters. Where these conventions are particularly relevant to my argument, I cite them. In modernizing rather than translating the texts, I also attempt to retain, as much as possible, the rhythm and structure of Julian's language, even when these structures at first seem awkward to an ear accustomed to Modern English.

My references to *A Revelation* are cited by chapter and line number(s) and include the page number in Watson and Jenkins's 2006 critical edition of the texts. My references to *A*

⁴⁰ Abbott writes that modernization "effectively precludes discussion about Julian's distinctive linguistic achievement, but more importantly about the way language itself might be regarded as a constituent of meaning in Julian's case. This is particularly serious because Julian's writing, lexically and syntactically, is highly-wrought, highly coherent, but also quite strange and peculiar" (Abbott, *Autobiography and Theology*, xii).

Vision cite section, line, and page number in the same edition and are preceded by "section" to distinguish them from references to *A Revelation*.

2. The Revelations

On a day in early May, in the year 1373, a woman of thirty years lay ill in bed, her body consumed by great pain. She and those around her believed she was dying. Her curate came to her bedside and set a cross before her. "I have brought thee the image of thy savior," he said. "Look thereupon and comfort thee therewith" (3:19–20, 131). Although the woman believed she was doing well to keep her eyes turned to heaven, "where I trusted to come by the mercy of God" (3:21, 131), she consented to shift her gaze to the crucifix before her, thinking it would be easier for her to look straight ahead than keep her gaze turned upward. Her sight began to fail. Darkness enveloped her as if it were night. The only light that remained came from the cross, though the woman did know how this was possible. Her breath began to fail. She felt the life seeping from her body. Then, suddenly, the pain ceased. The woman was uneasy at this change. She had her heart focused on leaving this world to be with God. She recalled that earlier in her life she had prayed for "three wounds": "the wound of very contrition, the wound of kind compassion, and the wound of willful longing to God" (2:34–36, 129).⁴¹ As she stared at the

⁴¹ Watson and Jenkins suggest the three wounds can be translated as "true sorrow for sin, natural compassion for Christ's suffering, active longing toward God" (W&J, 128). I have resisted translating "kind compassion" in this context in order to highlight the complexity and nuance of the term, "kind," as Julian employs it throughout *A Revelation*. Janet Soskice stresses the interchangeability of "kind" and "kin" in the Middle Ages: "...to say that Christ is 'our kinde Lord' is not to say that Christ is tender and gentle, although that may be implied, but to say that he is kin—our kind. This fact, and not emotional disposition, is the rock of our salvation." Janet Martin Soskice, *Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5. The electronic *Middle English Dictionary* published by the University of Michigan illustrates the wide range of meanings that could be invoked by "kind" or "kinde": in accordance with nature, natural, instinctive, normal, inherent, genuine, uncontaminated, prescribed, having rights by birth, kinship, having normal or natural affections, obedient, loving, affectionate, generous, gracious, or noble. I include this extensive (though not exhaustive) list so that my readers can appreciate that with any invocation of the word, Julian may intend primarily one sense of the term or another, though I believe she is aware of this array of meanings each time she uses the word and deliberately plays with its varied meanings to enrich the complexity of her thought. Translating "kind" to "natural," as Watkins and Jenkins suggest in this context, or to "loving," as Colledge and Walsh do in this context, denies readers of what

crucifix, her pain gone for the moment, she renewed her longing for the wound of kind compassion, that her body would feel the pain of Christ's passion, that through this shared pain she would be filled with compassion. In that moment, the figure on the crucifix became Christ himself in the time of his crucifixion; the woman saw blood begin to "trickle down" (4:1, 135) from beneath the garland of thorns on his head. This is the start of the first revelation, followed over the course of that day and night by fifteen other revelations, "bodily" sights, and showings. In manuscripts copied years later, sometimes hundreds of years later, scribes will name this woman "Julian."

Julian did not, as she and others expected, die at that time. She lived to record and reflect upon her experience (for how much longer, exactly, we do not know, although in *A Revelation* she tells us that almost twenty years have passed since she first experienced the revelations [51:73, 277]). In this section, I provide a brief overview of the sixteen revelations as they are recounted in *A Revelation*, pausing to explore more fully the three revelations that are most significant to my subsequent discussion of Julian's theology: the eighth, thirteenth, and fourteenth revelations.

a. The First Revelation

As recounted above, the first revelation begins with the sight of blood flowing from beneath the garland of thorns pressed to Christ's head. Rather than being horrified at the sight, Julian is filled with joy and understands that this sight is a revelation of the Trinity:

And in the same showing, suddenly the trinity filled my heart most with joy. And so I understood it shall be in heaven without end, to all that shall come there. For the trinity is God, God is the trinity. The trinity is our maker, the trinity is our keeper, the trinity is our everlasting lover, the trinity is our endless joy and

I believe is an intentionally invoked and significant ambiguity. C&W, *Showings*, 179; *Middle English Dictionary*, ed. Robert E. Lewis (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1952–2001), available on-line: http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/, hereafter MED.

our bliss, by our lord Jesus Christ and in our lord Jesus Christ. And this was shown in the first sight and in all. For where Jesus appears the blessed trinity is understood, as to my sight. (4:6–12, 135)

This passage introduces what Nicholas Watson argues is the "'trinitarian hermeneutic' which underpins Julian's interpretation of her revelation." In this passage, Julian sees the blood trickling, then receives additional understanding from the Trinity, and concludes with an interpretive key to the whole series of showings. What at first seems to be an interpretive problem for Julian, Watson explains, that of distinguishing between the original revelations and Julian's subsequent interpretation of them and what level of authority Julian can claim for each stage, "becomes [Julian's] most important argument for the authority of her work."⁴² Julian constructs a sophisticated analysis of her experiences and interpretations that argues the Trinity is present at each stage of construction—showing, reflection, and analysis—evidenced by the difficulty she has in distinguishing one from the others. This exegetical strategy, Watson argues, of marking distinctions between experience and interpretation and then allowing the distinction to become blurred is no accident but reflects what Julian understands to be a significant theological truth:

On the one hand, it corresponds to the paradoxically triune nature of the godhead: in which, for example, the Father 'gives birth' to the Son as his Word, and the procession of the Spirit acts as a further 'stage' in the divine self-articulation, but in which all the persons are to be seen as constituting a single essence. On the other hand, it corresponds to the triadic structure of Julian's soul, which, until it is united with God in heaven, can only experience the truth partially, not as accomplished and completed revelation but as *process*.⁴³

The correspondence between the distinct/unified actions of the Trinity and Julian's development of the different stages of her text (in each of which the Trinity is operative) allow her to claim an

⁴² Watson, "The Trinitarian Hermeneutic," 81.

⁴³ Ibid., 82.

authority for every stage of her work that otherwise might arguably be limited to the initial revelations.

After this initial sight, still in contemplation of the first revelation of Christ's bleeding head, Julian says that God brought to her understanding the thought of Mary, "little more than a child" at the time she conceived Christ. Julian notes the "wisdom and truth" of Mary's soul, for Mary's "reverent beholding" of God reveals that Mary understands full well how miraculous it is for God to be born of "a simple creature of his making" (4:24–35, 137). As Julian continues to observe the sight of Christ's bleeding head, she receives a spiritual vision of God's "homely loving" as God brings to her mind "a little thing the quantity of a hazelnut" that appears to rest in her palm, "as round as any ball" (5:1–8, 139). From this sequence of a physical vision and subsequent intellectual insights/associations, Julian concludes that the human soul finds its being in the goodness of God. This first revelation, far more complex and nuanced than my brief description can convey, is more than simply the first in a sequence. It provides the theological foundation of the entire showing, introducing key themes that will be developed throughout the subsequent showings. As Julian writes, "For the strength and the ground of all was shown in the first sight. For of all things, beholding and loving the maker makes the soul to seem least in its own sight, and most fills it with reverent dread and true meekness, and with plenty of charity toward its evencristen" (6:55–58, 145).⁴⁴

⁴⁴ In retaining Julian's language of "evencristen," both here in my modernization of her text and elsewhere in my discussion of it, I have intentionally resisted translating the term as "fellow Christians" and have avoided adopting the practice of other scholars such as Denise N. Baker in using "the elect" when discussing this aspect of Julian's text. There is a confident exclusivity associated with these terms in their present use that conflicts with what I believe are Julian's consciously imprecise references to "God's lovers." She is open enough in moments to have cultivated an ongoing debate among scholars of her tendency toward universalism. Baker argues that God's response to Julian in the midst of the thirteenth revelation ("That which is impossible to you is not impossible to me" [32:41, 223]) is evidence of Julian's "optimism" about the possibility of universal salvation (Baker, *From Vision to Book*, 79–82). I am inclined to agree with Joan M. Nuth's nuanced reading of Julian, which acknowledges that Julian "keeps eternal damnation as a possibility," while also seeming to encourage us to conclude "that it is at least much more probable that everyone will be saved than that some will be damned" (Nuth, *Wisdom's Daughter*,

b. The Second Revelation

In the second revelation, Julian observes "the bodily sight" of Christ's face on the crucifix before her, changing color as dried blood appears to cover one side of his face, vanish, and then cover the other side. At the same time, Julian tells us, she sees scenes of Christ's humiliation and suffering in this face that hung before her. The opening images of the revelation are difficult to follow, confusing, and Julian wishes for more light that she might see this vision more clearly:

And I was answered in my reason, "If God desires to show you more, he will be your light. You need none but God." For I saw him and sought him. For we are now so blind and so unwise that we can never seek God until that time when he of his goodness shows himself to us. And when we see anything of him by grace, then are we moved by the same grace to seek with great desire to see him more blissfully. And thus I saw him and sought him, and I had him and wanted him. And this is and should be our common working in this life, to my understanding. (10:8–15, 159)

Again, Julian introduces a primary theme of the revelations: humans are created to desire and seek God and this desire, itself, comes from God through grace. Instead of granting Julian more light in response to her request, God instead "leads her understanding" beneath the sea and Julian realizes that even if a man or woman were there, at the bottom of the sea, he could have sight of God for "God is with man continually" (10:19, 159).

c. The Third Revelation

In the third revelation, Julian sees "God in a point…by which sight I saw that he is in all things…that he does all that is done" (11:1–3, 163).⁴⁵ This causes Julian to wonder about the

^{162–69).} Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt argues, and I agree, that Julian believes Christ's body is larger than the church; the boundaries of the saved cannot be established in this life except as God's secret (Bauerschmidt, *Julian of Norwich*, 108–19). Julian maintains a crucial ambiguity about the identity of her "evencristen" that is easily lost when we speak of the "elect" or the "predestined." The unfamiliarity of the term "evencristen" further serves to remind us of the gulf of history and context that separates us from Julian's work and her worldview.

⁴⁵ Watson and Jenkins reject Colledge and Walsh's modern English translation, "I saw God in an instant of time" (C&W, *Showings*, 197), arguing instead that Julian means she sees God in a point in space, not time, which appears

nature of sin. If God does all that is done, then what is sin? Julian's reflections on sin become another of the primary recurring themes of *A Revelation*. Here, she makes clear that such reflection can take place only within the context of God's unending love for all of creation. She understands God to be saying to her,

See, I am God. See, I am in all things. See, I do all things. See, I have never taken my hands from my works, and I never shall without end. See, I lead everything to the end that I ordain for it, from without beginning, by the same might, wisdom, and love that I made it with. How should anything be amiss? (11:42–46, 165).

Julian confronts the tension that will remain with her for the rest of *A Revelation*, indeed, for the rest of her life: she has experienced sin and its suffering, witnessed the suffering of her evencristen, and yet God reveals to her here (and will do so repeatedly in the remaining revelations) that nothing is amiss.

d. The Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Revelations

The next four revelations, each a brief chapter, give us a succession of images that alternate between suffering and joy. In the fourth revelation, Julian sees Christ's body bleeding profusely as if it has been ripped open with scourging, the flow so heavy that she can see neither skin nor wound, only the hot rush of blood. She is amazed that this heavy flow does not soak the covers on her bed or flood the room but instead vanishes before it falls, even as it continues to flow. Instead of focusing on Christ's suffering at the time of his scourging, Julian is led to focus on the overflowing goodness of God's love made manifest in Christ's blood, "this precious plenty of his dearworthy blood" (12:17, 167).

In the fifth revelation, Julian seems to pause to absorb what she has seen and understood so far. As she does so, she does not so much "see" another vision as experience words formed in

consistent with her statement a short time later that "God is in the mid point of all thinges" (11:16, 163), translated by Colledge and Walsh as "he is at the centre of everything."

her soul by God: "Herewith is the fiend overcome" (13:4, 169). God assures Julian that all the "woe and tribulation" that the fiend has done to humankind will be transformed into an "increase of their joy without end. And all the pain and the sorrow that he would have brought them to shall endlessly go with him to hell" (13:38–41, 171).

In the next revelation, Christ thanks Julian for her "service and labor of her youth" and, with this, Julian's "understanding" is "lifted up into heaven" where she sees God as a lord in his own house who has invited all his dearest friends to a feast (14:1–5, 173). The lord of this house does not assume a seat at the center of the feast but instead focuses his attention on his friends and fills the house with joy and bliss for their comfort and happiness. Julian understands that this bliss awaits each soul that "willfully has served God in any degree on earth" (14:11, 173).

After this, in the seventh revelation, Julian begins to experience alternating feelings of a solid, secure peacefulness and a desolate weariness. In the first, the feelings of peace, ease, and rest are so strong "that there was nothing in earth that should have grieved me," while when overcome by the second, Julian can feel no comfort or peace: "I was turned and left to myself in heaviness and weariness of my life and disgust of myself" (15:1–8, 175). Again and again, her feelings shift from one to the other, secure bliss replaced with painful sadness, and Julian recognizes that neither experience seems to be connected to anything she might deserve. God seems to be telling her, she concludes, that the pain of sorrow and mourning is temporary and that during those times of loss, when souls believe they have been left to themselves, God wants them to "hold themselves in the endless liking that is God" (15:28, 177). Throughout this sequence of revelations, Julian is reminded repeatedly of the love of God that continually surrounds and sustains her evencristen, even in the midst of suffering and sin.

e. The Eighth Revelation

The eighth revelation is particularly significant to my discussion of Julian's theology, for it is here that Julian begins to develop her theological anthropology of substance and sensuality, a development I discuss in greater detail later in this chapter. The revelation centers around images of Christ's drying/dying body as it hangs on the cross. At first, Julian sees the body "while the flesh was fresh and bleeding" (17:12, 181), his wounds sagging open from the weight of his flesh. Slowly, the body's appearance begins to change. Christ's flesh on his skin and body grows wrinkled and takes on "a tawny color, like a dry board when it is aged" (17:29, 183). His nose "clung together and dried…and the sweet body waxed brown and black" (16:7–8, 179). Julian's elaborates on the gruesome, painful drying of Christ's body over a series of chapters. Unlike her response to images of Christ's bleeding head and body, her witness here does not turn quickly to contemplations of joy but lingers in the painful reality of Christ's suffering as moisture seeps from his body and his flesh hangs in dry pieces.

Earlier in her life, Julian had asked to share in Christ's suffering, a common request among those who committed themselves to the spiritual calling of the contemplative life. But now, in the presence of Christ's drying body, Julian is overwhelmed by his pain. For a moment, she regrets her earlier request and knows that had she known what kind of pain she was asking to share, she might never have prayed for the experience. Julian immediately regrets her lapse, and wonders if this pain is like the pain of hell. In her moment of despair, God answers Julian "in her reason" and tells her that hell is a different kind of pain because in it, there is despair. Her pain now, God tells her, is so great because it is the pain that comes from seeing one you love suffer: "How might any pain be more than to see him that is all my life, all my bliss, and all my joy suffer?"" (17:49–50, 183). The vision and experience of Christ's drying body leads Julian to an extended reflection on compassion (initiated by the thought of Mary and how great her suffering must have been as she witnessed the drying body of her beloved son) and the compassion between humankind and Christ that is made possible through God's embodiment and this experience of Christ's suffering body. Sharing in Christ's suffering gives Julian a deeper appreciation for Christ's action toward humankind:

And I, beholding all this by his grace, saw that the love in him was so strong which he has to our souls that willfully he chose it with great desire, and mildly he suffered it with great joy. For the soul that beholds thus when it is touched by grace, it shall verily see that the pains of Christ's passion surpass all pains: that is to say, which pains shall be turned into everlasting joy by the virtue of Christ's passion. (20:23–28, 191)

At the conclusion of the eighth revelation, Julian waits for the drying to end and Christ to die. Suddenly, in the moment when she expects to see death, Julian sees the expression on Christ's face transformed into one of great joy. Julian is likewise filled with joy as Christ seems to speak in her mind: "Where is now any point of your pain or grief?" (21:11, 193). Julian recognizes she has been given a glimpse of the joy in heaven that places all the pain and grief of this life into a larger, eternal context: "And for this little pain that we suffer here, we shall have a high endless knowing in God, which we might never have without that" (21:23–24, 193).⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Marion Glasscoe describes this moment of Christ's change in "chere" (his facial expression) as "one of the most moving epiphanies in medieval writing." She argues that the eighth revelation is at the center of Julian's work for it is this "changing of chere" that marks its turning point. "The remaining revelations unpack what is concentrated in this change of *chere*," Glasscoe writes, "the glory of a life-giving energy that brought it about, and the capacity of this energy to process all the works of darkness to feed its own light…Changing of *chere* is the quick of the whole revelation and at the heart of the eighth showing." Glasscoe further argues that Colledge and Walsh's treatment of the text in their 1978 editions, both critical and modern translation, obscure the importance of the eighth revelation (both editions move the "changing of chere" from the end of the eighth revelation to the start of the ninth). Marion Glasscoe, "Changing Chere and Changing Text in the Eighth Revelation of Julian of Norwich," *Medium Aevum* 66.1 (1978): 117.

f. The Ninth, Tenth, Eleventh, and Twelfth Revelations

As *A Revelation* transitions to the ninth revelation, Christ asks Julian, "Are you fully satisfied that I suffered for you...If you are satisfied, I am satisfied. It is a joy, a bliss, an endless liking to me that ever I suffered passion for you. And if I might suffer more, I would suffer more" (22:1–5, 194). These words lift Julian's understanding into heaven and she sees three heavens, each of which relates one of Christ's claims to a person of the Trinity: the first heaven, joy, is the father's pleasure at what Christ's suffering has accomplished, the second heaven, bliss, is the endless worship of the son, and the third heaven, endless liking, is the work of the holy ghost. In this vision, redeemed human souls are Christ's "bliss, reward, worship, and crown." Julian marvels that lowly humankind would be the source of such joy in heaven.

In the tenth revelation, Christ emphasizes that his love for humankind is what motivated his choice to endure such suffering. He looks into the wound in his side and draws Julian's understanding into "a fair, delectable place, and large enough for all mankind that shall be saved to rest in peace and in love" (24:3–4, 201). Christ says, "Lo, how I loved you" (24:11, 203).

Next, in the eleventh revelation, Christ asks Julian if she would like to see Mary and, when Julian assents, shows her not a bodily vision of Mary but a deeper understanding of Mary's virtues, her "blessed soul—her truth, her wisdom, her charity—whereby [Julian] may learn to know [herself], and reverently dread [her] God" (25:15–17, 205). This revelation of Mary's glory "as she is now, in liking, worship, and joy" (25:34, 205) transitions in the twelfth revelation to further glorification of Christ.

In the twelfth revelation, Julian tells us that in this she learns "that our soul shall never have rest until it comes into him, knowing that he is the fullness of joy: intimate and courteous and blissful and very life" (26:3–4, 207). Christ tells her repeatedly, more times than she can number, "I it am, I it am. I it am that is highest. I it am that you lovest. I it am that you likest. I it

am that you servest. I it am that you longest. I it am that you desirest. I it am that you meanest. I it am that is all" (26:4–7, 207). The words surpass Julian's understanding but she is confident that "the joy that I saw in the showing of them passes all that heart can think or soul may desire" (26:10–11, 207). Again, Julian stresses the centrality of joy and divine love in her revelations before she turns, in the thirteenth revelation, to an extended reflection on the reality of sin and the challenge it presents to her understanding of divine love.

g. The Thirteenth Revelation

Like the eighth and fourteenth revelations, the thirteenth revelation is particularly significant to my discussion. Where in the third revelation Julian asked about the nature of sin, in the thirteenth revelation she begins by asking whether the world wouldn't have been better had sin never been: "If sin had not been, we should all have been clean and like to our lord as he made us" (27:3–4, 207). So much suffering could have been prevented if God had never allowed sin to come into the world. Julian tells us that before she experienced these revelations, she had been deeply troubled by this thought for some time, often wondering over it with "mourning and sorrow" (27:7–8, 209). But now, she says, Christ "informed me of all that I needed" when he says to her, "Sin is behovely, but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well" (27:9–11, 209).⁴⁷ Julian spends the next fourteen chapters wrestling with these

⁴⁷ Most translators choose "necessary" as the Modern English for "behovely," a term that is etymologically related to our contemporary use of "behove" or "behove," in which something is considered proper or due. Watson and Jenkins explain that this instance of "behovely" in adjectival form is the sole such use in *A Revelation* and it can mean "necessary or fitting, also good or opportune" (W&J, 208). Denise Baker writes that sin, for Julian, is "both necessary and beneficial to the divine plan for salvation" (Baker, *From Vision to Book*, 73). Joan Nuth likewise observes that for Julian sin is "necessary" in the sense that it "is a fact of human temporal existence, universally affecting the whole human race, that must be accepted and endured" (Nuth, *Wisdom's Daughter*, 121). Elizabeth Spearing, however, uses "befitting" in her translation of *A Revelation* (Spearing, *Revelations*, 79) and this comes closer to capturing the sense of behovely that Denys Turner discusses in his recent reflections on Julian's theology. Julian's use of "behovely," Turner argues, lies somewhere between the distinction we might draw today between that which is necessary and that which is contingent. Turner writes that "behovely" for Julian would have been similar to the Latin *conveniens* and that neither term argues for a necessity in the logical or analytical sense in which certain causal factors make the existence of sin required or that sin is required as a means to advance some end.

words and what she perceives to be their many layers of meaning. She explores the pain and harm of sin, the ways in which it benefits those who will be saved, and God's response to this suffering, that "all shall be well." She tells us that in all of the revelations, she never sees sin, for she believes "it has no manner of substance nor part of being, nor might it be known except for the pain it causes" (27:22–23, 209). This emphasis on the pain of sin, rather than sin (or sins) is an important one that I explore more fully below and in the next two chapters.

Likewise important to my discussion is Julian's recognition of "a high, marvelous secret hidden in God" that God "shall openly make known to us in heaven. In which knowing we shall verily see the reason why he allowed sin to come, in which sight we shall endlessly have joy" (27:33–36, 211). From this recognition, Julian understands that there are two "parts" related to sin: one revealed to humans by God for their benefit, that is, Christ and the salvation of "all humankind that is of good will and that shall be" (30:1–3, 215), while the second is "hidden and kept from us." This second part Julian understands to be God's "privy counsel," something known only to God that God desires humans to leave to God and not struggle to know for themselves, for doing so is of no profit to them in this lifetime (30:10–11, 217).

Throughout the thirteenth revelation, even as Julian wrestles with the pain of sin, her struggle never takes her far from the reassurance of divine compassion, divine comfort, and divine love. When she beholds "all the pains that ever were or ever shall be," Julian tells us "all this was shown in a touch and quickly passed over into comfort. For our good lord would not have the soul frightened by this ugly sight" (27:18–22, 209). As I discuss more fully below, Julian never sees any anger or wrath in God as she contemplates human sin. Seeing that Christ

Instead, Turner describes "behovely" and *conveniens* as fitting the narrative plot, being "just so" in that sequence of events, part of a particular salvation history: "It is *conveniens*...not on account of being explained by a universal and timeless causal hypothesis, but on account of its fitting within a narrative bound by the particularities of time and place." Denys Turner "Sin is Behovely' in Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love*," *Modern Theology* 20.3 (2004): 416. See also Turner, *Julian of Norwich*, 32–67.

has compassion on humans because of sin fills Julian with compassion for her evencristen (28:1– 3, 211). She knows that she will "do nothing but sin" but not even sin can prevent God's goodness from working in her (36:4–5, 231). Sin is the "sharpest scourge" that afflicts the human soul, beating it down, breaking it, teaching it to think of itself as nothing (39:1–4, 239). Sin is "so vile and so greatly to be hated that it can be compared to no pain except the pain that is sin" (40:32–33, 245).

Yet Julian's acknowledgments of the horror of sin are always conscious of Christ's promise that "all shall be well." Her analysis throughout the thirteenth revelation moves from the horror of sin and its pain back to this promise and all that flows from it: Christ's thirst, introduced in the eighth revelation, in the thirteenth is taken up again to become Christ's "spiritual thirst...a love-longing to have us all together, whole in him to his endless bliss" (31:11–15, 219); God's attention to even the smallest, most humble detail when he makes all things well, his desire for us "to know that the least thing shall not be forgotten" (32:7, 221); God's efforts in the revelations to overcome the blindness and ignorance that keep humans from knowing him, loving him, and clinging to him (34:5–11, 227); Julian's recognition that "mercy is a working that comes of the goodness of God, and it shall continue working as long as sin is allowed to pursue righteous souls" (35:32–33, 231); the introduction of "the godly will" in humans that is so important to Julian's theological anthropology, discussed more fully below; the showing that "sin shall be no shame, but worship to humans" in heaven (38:1, 237), that God "beholds sin as sorrow and pain to his lovers, in whom he assigns no blame for love" (39:28–30, 241). This close affinity between sin and divine love is central to Julian's theology and proves central, likewise, to my development of a feminist conception of personal sin. The overarching themes of the thirteenth revelation are the realities of sin (its unavoidability, the pain humans

suffer as a result of sin), God's loving response to sin, and the ways in which this knowledge is to be used by humans in this life to draw them closer to God's love.

h. The Fourteenth Revelation

The dilemma that Julian confronts in the thirteenth revelation—the seeming impossibility of reconciling her knowledge of sin with God's promise that "all shall be well"-remains a challenge for her in the fourteenth revelation and is one she resolves, to the extent it is resolved, only after years of reflection and study, subsequent revelations, and her acceptance of the centrality of the *exemplum* of the lord and servant to the entirety of the revelations and her theology.⁴⁸ In A Revelation, Julian tells us that when she first encountered the vision of the lord and the servant years ago, she did not understand it. She does not mention it at all in A Vision and her commentary in A Revelation tells us that while the vision stayed with her over the years, she could not, at first, make any sense of it. In brief, she sees two men, the first is a lord, "sitting solemnly in rest and in peace," while the second, a servant, "stands before his lord reverently, ready to do his lord's will" (51:8–9, 273). The lord looks upon the servant lovingly and sends the servant to "a certain place" to do the lord's will (Julian's text is silent at this point as to what the lord requested or commanded or the place to which the lord directed the servant, although later she tells us, as she explains the "double meaning" of the servant as both Adam and Christ, that the servant, as Christ, runs to bring the lord "a treasure in the earth which the lord loved" (51:157, 281) which was the worship of humankind). The servant, in his haste to do his lord's will out of love, runs quickly and falls into a ditch, injuring himself seriously. The vision lingers

⁴⁸ Although Watson and Jenkins's critical edition uses "example" in the text, they translate it as *exemplum* and I have chosen to use this word, rather than "example" or "parable" as is often done in discussions of Julian's work (W&J, 272). Joan Nuth explains that *exempla* were often incorporated into medieval sermons as "a short illustrative story used to make more graphic or understandable the point of a sermon." Joan M. Nuth, "Two Medieval Soteriologies: Anselm of Canterbury and Julian of Norwich," *Theological Studies* 53 (1992): 612. Referring to the vision of the lord and the servant as an *exemplum* reminds us that by incorporating this traditional homiletical practice, Julian's text is, in an important sense, "preaching" to a particular audience with particular needs.

over the suffering of the servant as he lies in the ditch and then vanishes, leaving Julian to wonder at its meaning.

Over time, she tells us, for at least twenty years, God has been teaching her to see the vision more fully and to understand its many layers of significance. The "beginning of teaching" that she experienced with her first encounter of the vision, has been deepened through years of "inward learning" and God's repeated showing of the whole revelation to her, "from the beginning to the end, which our lord God of his goodness brings oftentimes freely to the sight of my understanding" (51:64–72, 277). Again, we can see Watson's "trinitarian hermeneutic" at work in Julian's thought, for she is confident that God not only revealed God's self to her in the original showings, God has continued to shape her learning and understanding in the years since. These three (the initial teaching, her ongoing inward learning, and God's continuing revelation), she tells us, are "so unified, as to my understanding, that I cannot nor may not separate them" (51:67–8, 277). She explains at length that while she saw these figures "in bodily likeness," each can be understood spiritually as well, and both the physical vision and its layers of spiritual meaning are important. She understands that the lord is God and the servant, with a "double meaning," is both Adam (all humankind) and Christ. The suffering of the servant in the ditch corresponds with humanity's condition in sin (though Julian does not attribute guilt to the servant, only haste that arises from love and a desire to serve). Cut off from any awareness of the lord's loving gaze, the servant suffers a series of pains, the most excruciating of which to Julian is the servant's belief that he lies abandoned and alone (51:20–26, 275). Yet the servant also represents Christ, who "fell" into a human body in order "to do the worshipful deed by which mankind was brought again into heaven" (51:201–2, 283).

The *exemplum* of the lord and the servant is presented in the middle of the fourteenth revelation and for the discussion that follows, it is helpful to understand what precedes and follows it. Julian begins the fourteenth revelation with a discussion of prayer as a means through which humans are connected to God. Prayer unites the human soul with God (43:1, 255), who is the ground and source of the soul's longing for God (41:8, 249). Julian encourages her evencristen to share their desires with God and to give thanks to God, but she does not lead them to believe that God stands ever ready to grant whatever they desire. Prayer, for Julian, as Denys Turner writes, "is not how we get God to do things for us. Prayer is how God gets things done by means of us."

Julian transitions from this discussion of prayer to a development of her ideas about human substance and sensuality, her theological anthropology, which I take up in the following section. The distinction she develops between human substance and sensuality allows her to develop a corresponding distinction between divine and human judgment and it is this distinction—that God judges individuals in their substance and its goodly will, while humans and the church judge individuals in their sensuality—establishes a tension and an apparent contradiction that Julian finds she can negotiate only by way of "the wonderful example of a lord that has a servant" (51:1–2, 273). The *exemplum* of the lord and the servant allows her to more fully develop her theological anthropology and the significance of God's physicality for human salvation, themes I discuss more fully below. In developing her ideas about God's physicality, Julian takes up the idea of God's motherhood, a concept that was not unusual for her time but one which Julian develops in ways that are unique.

⁴⁹ Turner, Julian of Norwich, 162.

i. The Fifteenth Revelation and the First Attack of the Fiend

As she begins to recount the fifteenth revelation, Julian tells us that before experiencing her revelations, she had begun to long for death, "for oftentimes I beheld the woe that is here and the happiness and the blessed life that are there" (64:2–3, 323). God addresses this desire in the fifteenth revelation, saying to Julian:

Suddenly you shall be taken from all your pain, from all your sickness, from all your disease, and from all your woe. And you shall come up above, and you shall have me as your reward, and you shall be filled with joy and bliss. And you shall never more have any manner of pain, any manner of sickness, any manner of displeasure, any wanting of will, but ever joy and bliss without end. What should it grieve you to be patient for a while, since it is my will and my worship? (64:9–15, 323)

Julian sees "a body lying on the earth, which body looked heavy and fearful and without shape and form, as if it were a bog of stinking mire" (64:24–25, 325). As she watches, a small creature springs from the bog, "a little child, fully shaped and formed, swift and full of life and whiter than the lily" (64:26–27, 325). The creature rises to heaven. Julian understands the revelation to be assuring her that the pain of mortal flesh will one day come to an end and be replaced with comfort and bliss. She and her evencristen are not to wish for death and an end to the pain in this life, but instead are to "take our lingerings and distresses as lightly as we may take them" (64:51, 327). God wants them to know that "when we fall again to ourselves, by heaviness and spiritual blindness, and feelings of pains, both spiritual and bodily in our frailty" (64:43–45, 325), God has not forgotten them.

These fifteen showings, Julian tells us, began in the early morning hours, around four o'clock, as she lay staring at the crucifix, and continued until noon or later. During these revelations, Julian felt as if the illness had left her body, but with the end of the fifteenth revelation, the pain and sickness returned. A "religious person" approached her as she lay and asked how she fared. "I said I had raved today," Julian responds, much to her shame, for when

she relates something of what she saw, the person marvels at her words and she regrets dismissing the visions as ravings. Night comes and she sleeps, only to be attacked by "an ugly showing...a visage near my face like a young man...his hair was as red as rust...[and] he grinned upon me with a shrewd look...with his paws he held me by the throat and wanted to strangle me, but he could not" (67:1–8, 333). Because the creature attacks her in her sleep, Julian is clear she does not consider him to be a vision like the ones she experienced earlier in the day. During the dream, she trusts God to save and protect her. She wakes and is comforted by those around her and concludes she has been tempted by "the fiend." She recalls the visions God showed to her earlier in the day and turns to them for comfort: "And soon all vanished away, and I was brought to great rest and peace, without sickness of body or dread of conscience" (67:20–21, 335).

j. The Sixteenth Revelation and the Return of the Fiend

In the sixteenth revelation, God opens Julian's "spiritual eye." In the middle of her heart, Julian sees her soul, "as large as if it were an eternal citadel and a blissful kingdom" (68:1–3, 335). In the middle of this city that is her soul, Julian sees Christ sitting like a lord and king: "He sits in the center of the soul in peace and rest, and he rules and judges heaven and earth and all that is" (68:7–8, 335). Julian wonders at the vision and its significance and hears God speak in her mind: "Know it now well, it was no raving that you saw today. But take it and believe it, and keep yourself therein, and comfort yourself therewith, and trust yourself thereto, and you shall not be overcome" (68:45–47, 339).

With this, the fiend visits Julian again "with his heat and with his stench" to tempt her into doubting her faith and the visions. Throughout the night, he torments her, but Julian keeps her eyes focused on the crucifix that is still before her, recites the prayers of the church, and keeps her heart "fastened on God with all the trust and the might that was in me" (69:12–14, 341). By early morning, the fiend is gone.

In the remaining chapters of the sixteenth revelation, the end of *A Revelation*, Julian revisits the primary themes of the revelations as a whole: the faith and comfort that God wishes to cultivate in individuals in this life, God's promises of the life to come, the ways in which sin interferes with the human capacity to recognize, respond to, and participate in the divine love that creates and sustains. She tells us that long after she experienced the revelations for the first time, she "desired oftentimes to know what was our lord's meaning." After more than fifteen years, she receives an answer when God gives her spiritual understanding: "Know it well, love was his meaning. Who showed it to you? Love. What did he show you? Love. Why did he show it to you? For love. Hold yourself in love, you shall know more in the same. But you shall never know in love anything different without end" (86:11–16, 379). Love was his meaning. Keeping these words in mind, I turn now to a closer reading of Julian's work with the goal of developing a feminist conception of personal sin.

3. Julian's Anthropology: The Substance and Sensuality of the Human

To understand Julian's ideas about sin, I begin with her theological anthropology. For Julian, humans consist of substance and sensuality. To call these "parts" of the human is to suggest they are discrete and distinct. That, however, would not be consistent with Julian's theology; therefore, even though Julian frequently uses the language of "partes" herself, I opt instead for the language of "dimension" in order to make her thought clear. These dimensions of substance and sensuality do not map onto traditional ideas of soul and body. To view them as such is to miss much of the complexity, fluidity, and nuance of Julian's theology. It is also to miss the tension she creates with these two categories, a tension she cultivates in others areas of her theology. By refusing to draw a clear boundary between substance and sensuality or to parse them cleanly into the traditional categories of spirit/soul and body, Julian complicates those familiar categories and cultivates a sense of movement and interconnection between the dimensions of human existence: substance, that dimension which is whole and stable (45:1–2, 259), knit to God (53:15, 293), and sensuality, the changeable dimension of the human that results from embodiment in time (55:13, 299), a dimension that, while vulnerable to suffering and sin (57:6–8:303), is also a part of the human soul (56:17–19, 301) and capable of relationship with God through Christ (55:18–23, 299). As Julian makes clear, sin has damaged the relationship between substance and sensuality, but even in a state of sin, the boundary between the dimensions is less easily defined than we might have thought. This imprecision fosters ways of thinking about human nature, human life, and sin that support feminist commitments.

a. "Human Substance" in the Eighth Revelation

The human's substance is linked most closely to God, even in a state of sin. In Julian's first reference to this substance, within the context of the eighth revelation, one of the revelations that is most central to my discussion, she describes it as a "substance of kind love, continued by grace" (18:3, 185). The human is created with this natural love for God that is cultivated and strengthened by grace. This love draws the individual toward Christ, into a "great unity" (18:11, 185) that will prove to be the source of human joy and the means of salvation. In Julian's text, moments of insight are always intertwined with those that precede and follow, so much so that to trace a pattern in search of its fuller meaning is often to find oneself moving back and forth through the entire text. Here, with her first reference to the concept of a human "substance" that is a source of love and joy, Julian is clear, as she witnesses the drying of Christ's face, that being

"oned" with Christ is also an experience of great pain and suffering: "For ever the higher, the mightier, the sweeter that the love is, the more sorrow it is to the lover to see that body that he loved in pain" (18:6–7, 185). She sees in a Christ a "double thirst, one bodily, the other spiritual" (17:2, 181). Christ's longing is physical suffering as the moisture leaves his body, but it is also, spiritually, his motivation.⁵⁰

Confronted with Christ's thirst, Julian is confronted by Christ's love. Yet she is overcome by the physical pain of her vision. As a young woman, Julian had prayed to experience Christ's pain.⁵¹ Now, confronted with the vision of Christ's body sagging on the cross, his flesh "broken in many pieces" (17:15, 181), his skin withering until it looked like "a dry board when it is aged" (17:29, 183), Julian is overwhelmed by the pain and regrets having prayed for it. She imagines there can be no greater pain. In this moment of regret, she senses God's response: "Hell is another pain, for in it there is despair" (17:47–48, 183). Julian then observes, "Here I saw in part the compassion of our lady, Saint Mary" (18:1, 185),⁵² as Mary witnesses the Passion. It is in Mary that Julian first becomes conscious of the "substance" of natural love, a love that makes Mary all the more vulnerable to suffering because her love for Christ draws her into his suffering. In Mary's love for Christ, and subsequently in the love that Christ's disciples have for him as they witness the Passion, Julian recognizes the substance of natural love all creatures have for Christ. When Julian is encouraged "in this time" to look from the cross to heaven, she

⁵⁰ Nuth, *Wisdom's Daughter*, 48: "Christ's spiritual thirst puts Julian in touch with his motivation for such suffering. He ardently longed to participate in human salvation and 'voluntarily' went to his death (10:194)." See also the thirteenth revelation: "For as verily as there is a property in God of pity and compassion, as verily there is a property in God of thirst and longing. And because of this longing in Christ we are able to long for him in return, without which no soul comes to heaven" (31:34–35, 221).

⁵¹ In the opening passages of *A Revelation*, Julian explains that she had "desired before three gifts by the grace of God. The first was recollection of the passion. The second was bodily sickness. The third was to have of God's gift three wounds" of contrition, compassion, and longing for God (2:3–4, 125).

⁵² I resist translating this passage as Colledge and Walsh and Spearing do: "Here I saw part of the compassion of our Lady Saint Mary" (C&W, *Showings*, 210; Spearing, *Revelations*, 67), because I believe Julian is relating she has only partial understanding of Mary's compassion, not that she sees part of Mary's compassion clearly.

realizes that her heaven *is* Jesus: "For I would rather have been in that pain until domesday than have come to heaven any other way than by him. For I knew well that he who had bound me so tight, he should unbind me when he would" (19:9–10, 187).

Julian now confronts the double nature of her response to the suffering she experienced as she encountered Christ's suffering. In one moment, overwhelmed by pain, she regrets having ever prayed for the experience. In another, she chooses to remain in the pain because doing so means she is choosing Christ for her heaven. It seems to Julian she experiences these two "contrarites…both in one at that time." She attaches these impulses to two "parts":

And these be two parts, that one outward, the other inward. The outward part is our mortal flesh, which is sometimes in pain, sometimes in woe, and shall be so in this life, whereof I felt much in this time. And that part was the part I repented. The inward part is a high and a blissful life, which is all in peace and in love, and this is more privately felt. And it was in this part that I mightily, wisely and willfully chose Jesus to be my heaven. (19:22–7, 189)

Julian elaborates that the inward or interior "part" is "master and sovereign to the outward," attaching no importance, paying no heed to what the outward "part" may desire, but forever fixing its intention and will upon being "united to our lord Jesus."⁵³ The "outward part" is associated with the experience of pain, one Julian connects with "mortal flesh." The "inward part" is unchanging, constant, always directed toward a desire for Christ. Julian describes the eternal relation between these dimensions as one of unity, a relation made possible by grace: "both shall be united in bliss without end by the virtue of Christ" (19:32, 189).

Watson and Jenkins conclude from this passage that "sin can be defined as the submission of the inner self to the outer, spirit to flesh," (W&J, 188), but I suggest we progress more slowly toward any conclusion with regard to sin's definition in Julian's theology (a topic I

⁵³ Colledge and Walsh equate these two "partes" with the two parts of the soul of Augustinian psychology (C&W, 94; see my discussion of this Augustinian concept in note 64 below). Later, in the fourteenth revelation, Julian refers to these two parts of Christ's soul, which "are only but one soul" and "were seen and felt in the eighth showing" (55:41–44, 299).

discuss more fully in the following chapter). Concluding that Julian's definition of sin is improper submission (a sovereign who is submissive to her servant) too easily suggests that Julian endorses social hierarchies of domination and control. Julian does not mention sin in this passage. She is referencing the experience of intense pain when she describes the outer "part" that swayed her to regret having prayed for the experience of Christ's suffering. While intense suffering is associated with sin throughout Julian's thought, it is the suffering that concerns her, not the influence of the "outward part" over the "inward part."⁵⁴ Watson and Jenkins are correct that Julian is here suggesting a proper order of influence (pain should not divert the will from love of God) but this is easily misunderstood when articulated as "submission" of the outer to the inner.

As I discuss in the following chapter, Julian's concern with sin is less about the loss of proper *order* and more about the loss of proper *relation*. Sin is both the cause and consequence of the separation of the "outward" from the "inward." I mark these terms in quotes because even they have to be considered with care. They are not terms Julian will use consistently to describe this phenomenon of simultaneous contrary impulses, nor will substance and sensuality be described as opposites. Her use of the terms here is connected to the context: pain is experienced by the individual as an outer force, an assault on her mortal flesh. The unwavering love of God, this substance of a natural love that Julian first comprehends through her partial sight of Mary's compassion, is "privately" experienced. It cannot be observed or assessed by another but only recognized by the individual as a kind of homing beacon that, through grace, draws her out of her pain and into eventual eternal union with Christ.

⁵⁴ In her reading of a later passage in *A Revelation*, Graze Jantzen concludes similarly that it is not the flesh itself that concerns Julian but its suffering: "The foulness and wretchedness of which [Julian] speaks is not a moral description but a physical one, the miserable state to which we can be reduced by certain forms of disease" (Jantzen, *Mystic and Theologian*, 145).

The eighth revelation has laid the foundation for work that is yet to come. As we see below, Julian more fully develops her ideas of this substance of natural love in the individual, what it means for the individual in understanding her present suffering and the security it promises through hope. She interweaves the concept of human substance with her ideas about the Trinity's actions of creation and redemption. She draws out the tension we see in this passage among pain, joy, and love and makes clear that it is not a tension that arises from opposition. Julian's brief reference to substance in the eighth revelation and her subsequent discussion of the outer and inner "parts" also signal the ways in which she will subtly challenge traditional understandings of human nature, the nature of relations both within the individual and between the individual and God, and the ways in which gender does and does not map onto these relations.

b. The "Godly Will" in the Thirteenth Revelation

Although Julian does not take up her discussion of substance and sensuality in earnest until the fourteenth revelation in conjunction with her examination of the *exemplum* of the lord and the servant, toward the end of the thirteenth revelation she introduces a concept that is essential to her later development of substance and sensuality: the godly will. In every soul that will be saved, she writes, there "is a godly will that never assented to sin, nor never shall" (37:14–15, 237). Julian locates this godly will "in the higher part," contrasting it with the "beastly will in the lower part that may will no good" (37:15–16, 237). Julian introduces this godly will to explain how God continues to love those who will be saved even in the midst of their present sinful condition. God loves them now as God will love them when they are saved.

Julian does not, here, treat the godly will and its relation to human substance, but she repeats these words verbatim within the context of her interpretation of the *exemplum* of the lord

and the servant: "In which showing I saw and understood full securely that in each soul that shall be safe is a godly will that never assented to sin, nor never shall" (53:8–10, 293). Within her discussion of the *exemplum*, Julian explicitly links the godly will and the substance:

Therefore our lord desires that we know it in the faith and the belief and specifically and truly that we have all this blessed will whole and safe in our lord Jesus Christ. For each kind that shall fill heaven had of necessity and of God's righteousness so to be knit and united in him, that therein was kept a substance which might never nor should never be parted from him... (53:12–16, 293)

Returning to the eighth revelation in light of this knowledge, we can see that this godly will is

integrated into the individual with her creation by God. It assures her that she is loved, even as

her "beastly will" continues to sin. Whatever the pain, the "scourging" of sin that an individual

experiences as a result of sin (39:1, 239), human existence remains anchored in the love of God

which creates the individual and sustains her, even when she believes herself "almost forsaken

and cast away" (39:15, 241), deserving to suffer because of her sins.⁵⁵

It is important to remember at this point that Julian has earlier drawn a distinction

between God's judgments and human judgments:

[A]ll God's judgments are easy and sweet, and it brings great ease to the soul that is turned from contemplating the blind judging of humankind to the fair, sweet judging of our lord God.

For man beholds some deeds as well done and some deeds as evil, and our lord beholds them not so. For as all that has being in kind is of God's making, so are all things that are done have the property of God's doing. (11:27–32:165)

⁵⁵ Denise Baker stresses Julian's idea of ontological union with God and contrasts it with Walter Hilton's "emphasis on the disparity" between God and the soul. Instead, Baker argues, Julian employs images of "enclosure and interlacing" to emphasize that "the elect and God are ontologically intertwined in a union that cannot be severed by mortal sin." Denise N. Baker, "The Image of God: Contrasting Configurations in Julian of Norwich's *Showings* and Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*," in *Julian of Norwich: A Book of Essays*, ed. Sandra J. McEntire (New York: Garland, 1998), 52–5. I agree with Baker's claim that Julian offers a more optimistic vision for the eventual union of substance and sensuality with God and that she describes an unsevered ontological relation between God and the human soul. Julian also, however, underscores the impact of sin and the spiritual blindness it has inflicted on humans in this life. There is, as I argue in greater detail below, still an important role for the dissimilarity between God and human in Julian's theology.

The individual sees herself as having sinned greatly and believes she deserves her suffering because of her sins, but God lifts her "full high in God's sight by his grace" (39:17, 241). God's sight and human sight are two radically distinct perspectives, a point I develop further below. Joan M. Nuth observes that the revelations allow Julian to speak at times from her own perspective and at others from God's perspective in which all time is already accomplished. "The distinction between what is in God's mind as an intention or idea and what actually has existence is a useless one in such a perspective."⁵⁶ The individual experiences her suffering in time; God sees her suffering within a larger context that has already drawn suffering into joy. Within the context of the thirteenth revelation, Julian's reference to the godly will is a form of assurance, a comfort in the midst of suffering and sin.

c. "Human Sensuality" and the Development of Julian's Theological Anthropology in the Fourteenth Revelation

Julian's introduction of human sensuality and her full development of both human substance and sensuality occur in the context of the fourteenth revelation. The revelation begins with a reflection on prayer as the means by which Julian and her evencristen long for and regard God in this life, then moves to an extended exposition of the *exemplum* of the lord and the servant, and concludes with reflections on the dynamic movement of the Trinity and its inclusion of humankind. The significance and realities of human substance and human sensuality emerge in each phase of Julian's discussion.

Prayer is necessary because the soul, "ever like to God in kind and in substance, restored by grace, it is often unlike in condition, by sin on man's part" (43:1–3, 255). Julian has not yet used the language of sensuality but her discussion of prayer anticipates it, for it is premised on the distinction between humans as they are created to be and continue to exist in their

⁵⁶ Nuth, *Wisdom's Daughter*, 107.

substance—united to God—and humans as they are in condition or sensuality, buffeted by the concrete realities of bodily existence. This disparity makes prayer necessary. As Julian explains within the context of her discussion of the *exemplum* of the lord and the servant, sin creates a condition in which the individual loses her consciousness of this godly will, the divine love woven into her being that is the source of her life (51:89–97, 279). The longing for God that emerges through prayer is a signal to the individual that she is being drawn to God. Prayer, for Julian, "is a proper understanding of that fullness of joy that is to come, with true longing and secure trust" (42:45–6, 253). It is the human substance, that, through the medium of grace, alerts the individual to the possibility of this "fullness of joy that is to come" and makes her long for God: "The failing of our bliss, to which we are ordained, makes it natural for us to long" (42:47, 255). This kind of prayer "unites the soul to God…[and] a witness that the soul desires as God desires" (43:1–3, 255). Prayer, enabled by grace, helps the individual remember what she has forgotten because of sin.

The idea of the soul continually connected with God's will becomes the hinge that allows Julian to connect her opening discussion of prayer with the development of her ideas about human substance and sensuality, a development that begins with her recollection of all the revelations, in particular the sight she received in the first revelation of Mary at the time she conceived Jesus. Julian is given the spiritual understanding to see that Mary understands what is happening when she accepts the news brought to her by Gabriel:

Also God showed me in part the wisdom and the truth of her soul, wherein I understood the reverent contemplation with which she beheld her God, who is her maker, marveling with great reverence that God was willing to be born of her who was a simple creature of his making. (4:26–29, 137)

Julian's sight of Mary's true beholding of God provides support for Julian's argument that some part of the human will remains in this state of unity with God's will. It is this godly will, "God

judges us upon our kindly substance, which is ever kept one in him, whole and safe without end" (45:1–2, 259) that God judges when God judges that humans do not deserve blame for their sins. This judgment is "from God's own great endless love" (45:11, 261) and though Julian is comforted by this insight she is also deeply disturbed. This judgment of love that assesses no blame on the part of humankind appears to be a direct contradiction, not only of the teachings of the church but also of her own feelings: "For I knew by the common teaching of holy church and by my own feeling that the blame of our sins continually hangs upon us, from the first man until the time that we come up into heaven" (50:9–11, 271). Julian is convinced that there are times when she and her evencristen are deserving of blame and anger, yet she can see no anger in God's judgment, only love. Julian determines that there is a radical difference between the judgment of God and the judgment of humans (including the church). I discuss the importance of this distinction between God's judgment and human judgment and the relationship between them more fully in the final section of this chapter. Here, it is important to note that it is this distinction that leads Julian to discuss the other aspect of human nature: human sensuality.

Human sensuality does not have access to the individual's true identity before God except through faith and the workings of grace: "But the transitory life that we have here in our sensuality does not know what our self is except in our faith" (46:1–2, 261).⁵⁷ Julian and her evencristen in this life can only long for God with all their being, recognizing that they do not now know themselves fully because of their condition of sin. Julian stresses that it is because they do not know their true status as creatures created and loved by God with a love that is without beginning or end, that they believe themselves deserving of God's wrath. She does not

⁵⁷ Colledge and Walsh translate "sensuality" in this passage as "in our senses" (C&W, *Showings*, 258). Their translation loses the more complex nuances of Julian's "sensualite" and suggests that it can be reduced to physical sensations. I have opted to retain "sensuality" because it reminds us that Julian's concept of sensuality is more complex than physical sensations.

suggest that she and her evencristen do not in this life fall far short of what they could be. To the contrary, she says, "I thought it was necessary to see and to know that we are sinners and do many evils that we ought to leave, and leave many good deeds undone that we ought to do, wherefore we deserve pain, blame, and wrath" (46:20–23, 263). But the pain, blame, and wrath that they experience as the result of sin do not come from God.

Between God and the soul, there is neither wrath nor forgiveness from God's perspective: "For our soul is so completely united to God of his own goodness that between God and our soul can be nothing at all" (46:31–32, 263), not even sin. Joan Nuth highlights the connection here between Julian's thought and Augustine's. Through the substance, humanity shares in God's nature: "[T]here is nothing more like God than the human soul in the hierarchy of being." This makes the human soul the image of God, a mirror of "God's might, wisdom, and love in its own faculties."⁵⁸ The substance of the soul is unchanging, always united to God, while the soul's sensuality encompasses everything about the individual in this life that is changeable. Grace Jantzen describes Julian's concept of sensuality as the "union of consciousness with embodiment."⁵⁹ This means sensuality cannot be equated with the body such that the spirit and body can be considered and treated separately. Sensuality encompasses both as they are experienced by humans in this life. In distinguishing substance and sensuality, Julian is not marking out discrete, opposing categories. Substance and sensuality are neither separate nor oppositional. Lynn Staley notes how Julian consistently resists binary oppositions in her thought:

Rather than establish terms that seek to contain—and inevitably delimit the objects they signify, Julian creates a system wherein identities flow almost imperceptibly into one another. In so doing, she provides an arresting and creative

⁵⁸ Nuth, Wisdom's Daughter, 105–6.

⁵⁹ Jantzen, *Mystic and Theologian*, 143. Watson and Jenkins observe that it was unusual in Julian's time to associate consciousness with sensuality, "for although 'sensuality' is often used of the part of the soul that interacts with body and sense, consciousness itself is usually associated with the substance" (W&J, 296).

response to her contemporaries, who too often defined chaos and sin as a fluidity that threatened to overtake those controls established by all forms of authority.⁶⁰

Substance and sensuality are distinguished, but not in a way that suggests substance should be understood as dominant over sensuality or that sensuality is somehow an evil to be overcome and left behind.

Julian writes of the time when the soul and the body will be fully grown together and capable of receiving the gifts that God has given Jesus for those who will be saved:

And all the gifts that God may give to the creature he has given to his son Jesus for us. Which gifts he, uniting with us, has beclosed in him until the time that we be waxen and grown, our soul with our body and our body with our soul, either of them taking help from the other until we be brought up in stature, as kind works in us. And then, in the ground of kind, with the work of mercy the holy ghost graciously breaths into us gifts leading to endless life. $(55:26-31, 299)^{61}$

While it may seem surprising for Julian to say that the soul might take help from the body in this life, she has already challenged and complicated traditional notions of distinct parts (soul/body) that can be treated separately. Human substance is grounded in God, but God also holds a place in human sensuality: "For in the same point that our soul is made sensual, in the same point is the city of God, ordained for God without beginning, into which city he comes and never will leave. For God is never out of the soul, in which he shall dwell blissfully without end" (55:21–24, 299). Elsewhere, Julian speaks of both substance *and* sensuality as being "rightly called our soul" (56:17, 301). Substance and sensuality are joined together by God when soul is "knit to our body, in which knitting we are made sensual" (57:5–6, 303). Through this joining, made possible by the work of grace and mercy of God in the Holy Spirit, "virtues by measure" (57:5, 303) flow from the substance to benefit the soul during this life in its sensuality. Repeatedly Julian suggests

⁶⁰ Staley, "Crisis of Authority," 178.

⁶¹ This passage illustrates the challenge of working with multiple manuscripts of *A Revelation*. Sloane reads "neyther of them" while Paris reads "either of them" when describing the relationship between body and soul in this life. Watson and Jenkins report the discrepancy but retain "either", which I believe is more consistent with Julian's discussion in this passage and her overall "theology of integration" (Jantzen, *Mystic and Theologian*, 89–93).

a relationship and sense of movement between the different dimensions of human existence: substance, sensuality, soul, body, higher and lower, inner and outer "parts." Julian and her evencristen are vulnerable to sin in their sensuality ("in our sensuality we fail" [57:7, 303]) but this is not to suggest that they should somehow strive to leave their sensuality behind in their ascent to God. Julian is clear that human sensuality is not only a dimension of human experience during this life; it is restored in eternity to perfect relation with the substance by God through the work of Christ (58:37–40, 309).⁶²

d. A Non-Gendered Model of the Human

Nowhere in her discussion of human nature—substance, sensuality, soul, body, higher and lower "parts"—does Julian invoke gendered metaphors to describe the human condition or the ways in which humans are made in God's image. Denise Baker argues that Augustine's theology and anthropology remained a strong influence in Christian thought of the late Middle Ages. She cites Augustine's *The Trinity* as a significant source for the ideas about the *imago Dei* dominant in Julian's time: "Woman, according to Augustine, is literally created in the image of God insofar as she is identical to man in spirit; but insofar as she is different in body, she is a metaphor for the lower reason." Pointing to the works of William of St. Thierry in the 12th century and Walter Hilton, a contemporary of Julian's in the 14th century, to illustrate "the vigor of the gendered model of the essential self" during Julian's time, Baker argues that Augustine's thought in *The Trinity* "both gives voice to women and silences them. Created in the image of God, females are equal to males spiritually; but as a sign of the lower reason, the feminine must be subordinated to the masculine in the self and in the society."⁶³

 ⁶² See also 56:9–11, 301: "God is nearer to us than our own soul. For he is the ground in whom our soul stands, and he is the means that keeps the substance and the sensuality together, so that it shall never be separated."
 ⁶³ Baker, *From Vision to Book*, 126–28.

Julian retains Augustine's ideas about the higher and lower soul, to an extent, but she does not employ his gendered metaphors to define the relationship between the dimensions of the soul and God.⁶⁴ Even more important, given the established view of the two-part soul as symbolically male and female with the higher male soul needing to control the lower female soul, Julian suggests a greater value for the feminine and the body than was traditionally granted when she draws human sensuality squarely into the center of humankind's relation to God. As Denise Baker observes, "By enhancing the status of the sensuality or lower reason in the human soul, Julian also elevates the bodily and the feminine."⁶⁵ As a result of this elevation, "the body is cherished and enfolded in the love of God, and reintegrated in a spiritual whole-making."66

⁶⁴ Augustine, On the Trinity: Books 8–15, ed. Gareth B. Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 89-92. Augustine's "inner man" is the reason that distinguishes man from the beasts. Part of this reason, the higher, spiritual part, is directed to eternal things (wisdom/sapientia), while another part is "turned aside to regulate temporal things" (knowledge/scientia). Both parts are found in man and woman, and both man and woman are made in the image of God ("For [the Apostle Paul] says that human nature itself, which is complete in both sexes, has been made in the image of God, and he does not exclude the woman from being understood as the image of God"). Augustine attempts to reconcile this idea of both men and women made in the image of God with Paul's admonition to women to veil their heads while men are forbidden to do so because the man is the image of God. In doing so, Augustine explains that Paul is referring to the "hidden mystery" of the higher and lower parts of man's mind and suggesting that the lower part, signified by the female sex, needs to be restrained from losing itself in temporal things. Although Augustine employed metaphors with care and cautioned against a literal (mis)understanding, his gendered imagery for both the divine and the *imago dei* in human nature nonetheless contributes to a misogynistic view of humankind ("...the woman together with her husband is the image of God, so that the whole substance is one image. But when she is assigned as a helpmate, a function that pertains to her alone, then she is not the image of God, but as far as the man is concerned, he is by himself alone the image of God, just as fully and completely as when he and the woman are joined together into one"). Yet Augustine is less dualistic in his thinking than most feminists have acknowledged. He valued the body as part of God's creation and, in City of God, insists that it is the will, not the body, that has caused humankind's desperate situation: "Those who suppose that the ills of the soul derive from the body are in error...For the corruption of the body, which pressed down the soul, was not the cause of the first sin, but its punishment: nor was it corruptible flesh that made the soul sinful, but the sinful soul that made the flesh corruptible." Augustine, The City of God against the Pagans, trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 585. For further discussions of the ways in which Augustine argues for the body's importance in his early writings, see Catherine Conybeare's study of the Cassiciacum dialogues: The Irrational Augustine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). For a study of the ways in which Augustine's thought on the body evolved over the course of his life's work, shifting from "the tendency to view the body as the ground of existential alienation to affirmation of the whole person," see Margaret Ruth Miles, Augustine on the Body (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), 7. ⁶⁵ Baker, *From Vision to Book*, 130.

⁶⁶ Grace M. Jantzen, Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 151. In this study of power and gender in Christian mysticism, Jantzen points out that Julian's positive valuation of the body manifests itself in a lack of interest (exceptional in its time) in ascetic practices that focus on punishing the body. "Julian's teaching concerning spiritual progress has everything to do with receiving and trusting the faithful love of God, and nothing to do with standard themes of distrust of the body and especially sexuality...She nowhere

Sandra McEntire argues that Julian inherited an "authoritative discourse"⁶⁷ that not only associated the female with lower human reason and the body but also associated women with sin, drawing in large part on Eve's role in Genesis 3. Julian's non-gendered model of the human being, then, has powerful implications for her discussion of sin, particularly in light of her creative interpretation of humanity's fall in her discussion of the *exemplum* of the lord and the servant.

As we have seen, Eve is noticeably absent from Julian's account of humanity's fall into sin, as are blame and disobedience, while Adam is explicitly representative of all those who will be saved, among whom Julian believes women and men are included. "All that I say about myself," she says about her revelations, "I mean to be interpreted as referring to all my evencristen, for I have learned in the spiritual showing of our lord God that he means it to be understood this way" (8:31–32, 153). In her vision of the lord and the servant, Julian understands Adam to represent not the historical Adam of Genesis but humanity in the sight of God: "[O]ne man was shown that time, and his falling, to make thereby to be understood how God beholds all mankind and his falling. For in the sight of god all mankind is one man, and one man is all mankind" (51:87–89, 277). Julian stresses here the solidarity of humanity before God, a solidarity that includes Julian as the recipient of these visions, a woman. When Julian employs

mentions any sort of mortification. Neither fasting nor celibacy, well-worn themes both, as we have seen, get so much as a mention" (240).

⁶⁷ Sandra J. McEntire, "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 J. McEntire (New York: Garland, 1998), 5. McEntire here draws on Mikhail Bakhtin: "The authoritative word is located in a distanced zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. It is, so to speak, the word of the fathers. Its authority was already *acknowledged* in the past. It is a *prior* discourse. It is therefore not a question of choosing it from among other possible discourses that are its equal..." M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), 342.

the masculine pronoun or speaks of "men" and "man," we can be confident her references encompass women as well as men who will be saved.⁶⁸

Nicholas Watson argues that Julian does more than eliminate references to gender with regard to her account of the human soul. She appropriates the misogynistic assumptions of her day and transforms them into a set of claims about the human condition. She "renders generally applicable to everyone, female and male, a set of assumptions and images that misogynistic discourse applies only to women. Actively accepting the terms of that discourse, she extends it far beyond its original boundaries, strips it of its gendered particularity, and in the process radically alters its meaning."⁶⁹ Julian's ideas about substance and sensuality, Watson observes, bear a strong resemblance in places to the medieval theological commonplace of describing the soul in terms of Wit and Will, in which Wit, as reason, is "the virtuous husband who can do no wrong, and Will (the affections and passions) [is] the unruly wife who can do nothing right except, when properly disciplined, to be quiet."⁷⁰

Woman's changeability, in the theological discourse of Julian's day, is what distinguished woman as less like God than man in man's natural stability.⁷¹ Julian draws this idea of changeability into the development of her ideas about human sensuality without, in turn, associating sensuality as somehow more closely aligned with or more influential in women than men. As Watson demonstrates, Julian makes "consciously gendered" choices when she embraces

⁶⁸ Elsewhere Julian is even more explicit about her inclusion of women as the intended audience and beneficiaries of her revelations: "And thus I understood that the man or woman who willfully chooses God in this life for love may be secure that he is loved without end, with endless love that works in him that grace" (65:1–2, 327).
⁶⁹ Watson, "Yf wommen be double," 24.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 22.

⁷¹ Yet Caroline Walker Bynum notes that male writers of the late Middle Ages frequently used the concept of "woman" to describe their goal of radical conversion as men into "the meek who inherit the earth." This use did not, however, eliminate the misogynistic impulses of the time. Some male writers elevated weakness to such a level of "superior lowliness" that they could claim "women were too weak to be women." Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 165–66.

these stereotypes and transforms them into a universal model for humankind.⁷² She subverts "the claims of the dominant, masculine theological discourse of her times through her incorporation of all humanity within the concept of the feminine, her insistence that a normative human is ignorant, feeble, womanishly frail." Yet as Watson concedes, this transformation, by keeping the binary intact, reinforces even as it challenges those cultural assumptions about men and women,⁷³ leaving modern theologians, particularly those with feminist commitments, to tread carefully as they seek guidance and inspiration in Julian's thought.

Nonetheless, Julian's development of a non-gendered model of the human has significant implications for a conception of sin, both the one Julian subsequently develops and any modern conception developed within a feminist framework. A conception of sin premised upon a non-gendered human norm does not distinguish woman from man with regard to sin: a human woman cannot be more closely aligned with or more vulnerable to sin, nor can a human man be more closely aligned with God and less closely aligned with sin. This model of the human and sin eliminates the false elevation of men which cultivates pride and indulges the impulse to blame. By resisting the hierarchy of gender, this model stresses human solidarity. The only hierarchy Julian recognizes is the one that situates divine above human, and even her development of this hierarchy, as I discuss in the final section of this chapter, is a creative undoing of traditional human models of hierarchy. Above all, for Julian, this solidarity means that humans, men and women, are equally "changeable in this life," equally disposed "through frailty and ignorance to fall into sin," equally "weak and foolish" in themselves. Humans are lost to "sorrow and woe" because they cannot see God, "For if [they] saw God continually, [they]

⁷² Watson, "'Yf wommen be double," 16 and 24.

⁷³ Ibid., 32–3.

would have no mischievous feelings, nor any kind of impulse or sorrow that inclines [them] to sin" (47:13–17, 265).⁷⁴

4. A Creatively Gendered God

We cannot fully appreciate either Julian's decision to develop her ideas about human nature without resorting to gendered metaphors or the significance she ascribes to human sensuality without detailing her development of the Trinity and its relations with humankind. Julian takes up this task in earnest in the later chapters of the fourteenth revelation, following her discussion of the *exemplum* of the lord and servant. In developing her understanding of the triune God, Julian employs gendered imagery with a creativity that distinguishes her from her peers.

a. Jesus/God As Mother: Relational and Physical

Invoking maternal imagery for the divine was not particularly unusual in Julian's time. Caroline Walker Bynum notes that God's mothering had been associated with God's nurturing and loving care by other thinkers in the Middle Ages prior to Julian. Likewise, images of Jesus as lactating and giving birth can be found elsewhere. Julian's originality emerges in the connection she develops between God's motherhood and creation: "a taking on of our physical humanity in the Incarnation, a kind of *creation* of us, as a mother gives herself to the foetus she bears."⁷⁵ This is more than simile, Bynum points out. The motherhood of God "expresses a theological truth that is, Julian holds, better said in female than in male images."⁷⁶ Christ, in assuming human sensuality, draws it into participation with the divine and restores its relation with human substance: "For in that same time that God knit him to our body in the maiden's

⁷⁴ I take the liberty here of modifying Julian's pronouns toward inclusion, given my argument above regarding Julian's use of gendered masculine pronouns and my desire here to stress the inclusivity of her claims regarding human nature.

⁷⁵ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 266.

⁷⁶ Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 96.

womb, he took our sensual soul. In which taking—he having beclosed us all in him—he united it to our substance" (57:35–38, 305). Christ, the second person of the Trinity, recreates and restores humanity by assuming human sensuality. Humans are "blissfully united" to their substance through Christ's activity (58:56, 309): "Thus Jesus Christ, who does good against evil, is our very mother: we have our being from him, where the ground of motherhood begins, with all the sweet keeping of love that endlessly follows" (59:6–9, 309). While Christ is foremost in Julian's discussion of divine motherhood, it is the whole of the Godhead that assumes the activity of motherhood:

I understand three ways of beholding motherhood in God. The first is the ground of our kind making. The second is the taking of our kind, and there begins the motherhood of grace. The third is motherhood in working, and therein is a forthspreading by the same grace, of length and breadth, of high and of deepness without end. And all is one love. (59:37–41, 311)

This physical dimension of divine activity, as Bynum explains, "is appropriately symbolized not by 'father,' who related to and is responsible for the soul or reason or spirit of the child, but by 'mother,' from whom the child's physicality comes and whose existence therefore makes possible its wholeness."⁷⁷

However, where Bynum and others suggest that Julian is part of a larger pattern of medieval women who employed gendered imagery of Christ in order to feminize God,⁷⁸ I

⁷⁷ Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast, 267.

⁷⁸ See Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*. See also 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, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 142–67. Robertson argues that the medical views of women's bodies in Julian's day (women's bodies were cold, wet, and incomplete in comparison to men's) shape understandings of women's sexual desires and, in turn, their spiritual needs (women required completion/union with Christ in a way that men did not). While I agree with some of Robertson's claims (for example, that Julian's ideas about redemption and sensuality are particularly redemptive for women), I am not persuaded that Julian's discussion of sensuality is "specifically [about] women's sensuality" (157). In addition, her central claim that Julian's images of Christ's blood "blur the boundaries between Christ's blood and her own" (156) are not supported by her reading of Julian's work. See also David Aers's discussion of the work of Bynum and Elizabeth Robertson in this regard, in which he concludes, "Nothing could be of less interest to Julian than cultivating images of the 'feminine' as 'flesh,' of Christ as the kind of 'maternal' body illustrated by Bynum and Robertson." David Aers, "The Humanity of Christ: Reflections on Orthodox Late

suggest that in developing the metaphor of God as mother, Julian is not stressing the femaleness of God but rather God's relationality and physicality.⁷⁹ For Julian, the relationship between mother and child was likely the most powerful image at her disposal to convey embodied love in relation. It captures aspects of creation, incarnation, and redemption that are central to Julian's theology. Joan Nuth describes the image of Christ's motherhood as the "summary symbol" of Julian's soteriology.⁸⁰ It is an unavoidably embodied relationship: the female body enfolds the embryo until it matures into a child and emerges into the world; the mother's breast becomes the point of reconnection and nourishment. Julian weaves this embodied imagery into her discussion of God's actions toward every soul that will be saved.

b. Divine and Human Physicality in the Work of Salvation

As we saw above, humans are "double by God's creating," consisting of both substance and sensuality. Although sensuality is not identical to the physical body, Julian is clear that it involves human physicality. Human sensuality encompasses all aspects of the individual that

Medieval Representations," in *The Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics, and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture*, David Aers and Lynn Staley (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 98. Aers goes on to assert that Julian "chooses 'the officie of moderhode' as, at least ideally, a model of love in loyalty and selfless commitment." I argue she is less concerned with the ideals of motherhood than with Christ's relation to and concern for human embodiment. Chapter 60 of *A Revelation*, which Aers cites to support his reading of Julian, can also be read as a systematic deconstruction of any attempt to link God's "fatherhood and motherhood" to a human ideal.

⁷⁹ Liz Herbert McAvov challenges Aers's reading of Julian's text and presumably would challenge mine as well. Drawing on the work of Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, McAvoy argues that "Julian's poetics are firmly dependent upon such semiotics of the 'female' and the 'feminine': firstly as articulated overtly and traditionally within the language of the male Imaginary; and, secondly, as Julian develops her own treatment of them." 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, UK: D. S. Brewer, 2008), 178. While I share McAvoy's interest in the ways in which Julian can be read as "experimenting with and prising open language in order to find a suitably expressive connotive register" (179), I am not convinced that Julian develops a "persuasive hermeneutic of the female body" (167) or that such a hermeneutic is necessary for Julian's work to be helpful to a feminist project. Nor am I convinced, with Sandra McEntire, that Julian, in introducing the motherhood of God, is drawing on "the most human of human relationships, a mother and her child" as a way of affirming that "women are incorporated into the redemptive plan as persons and, as such, valued" (McEntire, "The Likeness of God," 25). I agree that Julian values women as persons and sees them as fully part of the redemptive plan, but I am not persuaded that she introduces the motherhood of God primarily as a way of advancing this claim. ⁸⁰ Nuth, *Wisdom's Daughter*, 65–69. I am in agreement with Nuth's reading of the theological significance of Christ's motherhood in Julian's theology but my reading diverges from hers in stressing the dissimilarity between human mothers and fathers and the motherhood and fatherhood of God, a point Nuth does not address.

participate in this life. As Julian develops her ideas about God's interactions with humankind's "doubleness," she emphasizes the physicality of God's actions in the second person of the Trinity. God created human nature, "knitting and oneing" it to Godself. It is this "oneing" that accounts for the "godly will" in human substance. Julian associates this first making with God as father, mother, and holy spirit: "And thus in our making God almighty is our kindly father, and God all wisdom is our kindly mother, with the love and the goodness of the holy ghost, which is all one God, one lord" (58:9–11, 307). The entire Godhead participates in humankind's first making. The second person alone, however, takes human sensuality into himself:

[T]he second person, who is our mother substantially, the same beloved person is now become our mother sensually... And the second person of the trinity is our mother in kind in our substantial making, in whom we be grounded and rooted, and he is our mother of mercy in our sensuality taking. (58:30–36, 309)

By assuming sensuality, the second person of the Trinity unites human substance and sensuality and works on individuals to "reform and restore" and unite the dimensions of substance and sensuality in those souls who will be saved.

In assuming human sensuality, Christ assumes human physicality. He becomes vulnerable flesh and there is no doubt Julian intends for her evencristen to appreciate the embodied nature of Christ's suffering. Her first vision in *A Revelation* is one of Christ's blood:

And in this, suddenly I saw the red blood trickle down from under the garland, hot and freshly, plenteously and lively, right as it was in the time that the garland of thorns was pressed on his blessed head. Right so, both God and man, the same that suffered for me, I conceived truly and mightily that it was himself that showed it me, without any intermediary. (4:1–5, 135)

Recall that in the hours prior to the start of the revelations, Julian has endured prolonged suffering as the result of an illness. Believing she is about to die, Julian has fixed her gaze upon the face of a crucifix held before her. Her pain intensifies, her sight begins to fail, then her pain vanishes and she suddenly recalls the prayer she had made in earlier years, that "my body might be filled with the recollection and feeling of his blessed passion, as I had before prayed. For I would that his pains were my pains, with compassion and afterward longing for God (3:37–39, 133). She desires to suffer with him. The image of Christ's blood then "suddenly" appears. Julian's vision of Christ's physicality begins with an acute awareness of her own.

"And in this, suddenly I saw the red blood trickle down from under the garland, hot and freshly, plenteously and lively." Presented with this opening, those familiar with medieval meditations on the Passion might prepare for excruciating, detailed examinations of Christ's suffering body. As David Aers observes, however, Julian does not follow the expected form.⁸¹ Julian may seem to be "reproducing a conventional version of Christ's humanity, figured through the tortured, wounded, bleeding body on the cross. But only seems. For while Julian does undoubtedly set out from the dominant commonplace of late medieval devotion...her distinctive rhetorical strategies actually resist it, unravel it, estrange us from it and, gradually but decisively, supersede it."⁸² Rather than shifting her focus toward greater detail of Christ's crucified body with the aim of cultivating an affective imitation of and identification with the crucified Christ⁸³ (practices that Aers convincingly argues reinforced particular power dynamics in late 14th century England), Julian describes how she is filled with an overwhelming sense of joy upon seeing this blood flowing so freely: "And in the same showing, suddenly the trinity filled my heart most with joy. And so I understood it shall be in heaven without end, to all that shall come there" (4:6–7, 135). She recognizes that in Christ, she encounters the entirety of the Trinity, that,

⁸¹ Aers, "The Humanity of Christ," 82. Aers situates what he believes is Julian's radical use of a conventional image within the larger context of power relationships in 14th century England, where images of the suffering Christ were used by those in positions of authority within the church and the political system to reinforce existing power structures. Aers and Lynn Staley together propose that "we need to recognize ways in which an image might appear to be serenely conventional when, in fact, convention can be used strategically and pointedly as a means of opening up a subject of potential threat to prevailing systems of order" (Aers and Staley, *Powers of the Holy*, 262).

⁸³ Similarly, Bauerschmidt writes that "Julian 'reads' Christ's crucified body as her revelatory text; what is primary is not the subjective response aroused by meditation on Christ's body, but the message of love that is revealed there" (Bauerschmidt, *Julian of Norwich*, 36).

in fact, "where Jesus appears the blessed trinity is understood" (4:11, 135). In these concise opening moves of *A Revelation*, Julian tightly connects human physicality with the physicality of Christ and both with endless joy through participation in the Trinity.

c. The Limits of the Motherhood Metaphor

It is within the context of this intense awareness of human and divine physicality that Julian introduces the metaphor of motherhood later in *A Revelation*. As Watson and Jenkins argue, however, Julian introduces the metaphor of God as mother only to undermine it. In response to Julian's claim that "This fair, lovely word, 'mother,' it is so sweet and so kind in itself that it may not verily be said of anyone, nor to anyone, but of him and to him that is very mother of life and of all" (60:39–41, 313), Watson and Jenkins observe, "With this turn, 'mother' is claimed to be more than a metaphor for Christ, and earthly mothering emerges as only a shadow of, or at best a passive participant in heavenly mothering."⁸⁴ Julian undermines the metaphor in order to stress the unlikeness of God to human. She wants the metaphor to do important work for her but she does not want her readers lulled into equating their mothers with God, even analogically. What is not metaphoric for Julian is embodiment—Christ's and humanity's. These bodies are real, they are related, and the relationship between them draws humans—bodies included—ultimately into the full enjoyment of God.

Thinking about Julian's imagery in this way allows us to recognize the importance of her gendered imagery and the theological work it is doing for her, without faulting it for not being inclusive of all women (including those whose experiences are not circumscribed by the experience of giving birth and nursing a child) or even of all humans who have responsibility for a child (including those whose experiences do not resemble the loving mother laying her child

⁸⁴ W&J, 312.

"tenderly to her breast" [60:33, 313]). The metaphor of "motherhood" does not encompass "human" or "woman" any more than it encompasses "divine." Instead, it points toward the intense physical bond between God and human in the second person of the Trinity.

In developing maternal imagery to describe God's relationship with humankind, Julian is not only alluding to an essential aspect of divine action, she is also emphasizing the metaphoric nature of all divine imagery. What she and her evencristen can understand of divine action must be premised in some way on their understanding of human action, but Julian's fluid imagery, which enfolds paternal and maternal, asserts the unlikeness of God to human. At moments, she is explicit about this unlikeness. Even if God shows Godself to Julian as a lord sitting in a desert, she knows this is in deference to human understanding, which could not otherwise comprehend anything of God, yet she stipulates, "I saw truly we ought to know and believe that the father is not man" (51:122, 279). At other times, Julian draws motherhood and fatherhood together in describing the action of God: God "is the ground, he is the substance, he is the same thing that is being, and he is very father and very mother of kinds" (62:10–12, 319).

Julian does not map gender stereotypes onto the three persons of the Trinity. We do not find in Julian's work God the Father as harsh disciplinarian whose rule is law and whose wrath is softened by the "feminine" indulgences of Christ the Mother. Julian may refer frequently to Jesus as mother, but motherhood is a function and property of the triune God: "To the property of motherhood belong kind love, wisdom, and knowing; and it is God" (60:41–42, 313). Julian weaves references to gender throughout her development of a trinitarian understanding of God such that motherhood and fatherhood cannot be separated. God makes, remakes, and increases the individual, acting as father, mother, and savior. "And thus in our making God almighty is our kindly father, and God all wisdom is our kindly mother, with the love and the goodness of the holy ghost, which is all one God, one lord," making all humans, men and women, God's "loved wife and his fair maiden" (58:9–13:307). The metaphor of mother makes it possible for Julian to underscore both God's dissimilarity *and* intimacy with humankind. God is both radically different from humankind and "nearer to us than our own soul" (56:9, 301).

Each of these claims about God and God's relation to humans, in turn, cultivates a conception of personal sin that serves as an important corrective to conceptions that collapse sin into judgment and divine into human so that talk about sin understands its primary, if not exclusive, purpose to be equipping individuals to judge others and the self in the name of God. In the following chapter, I explore how Julian's emphases on the physicality of God and God's connection with human physicality shape her thought about sin. But first, in the final section of this chapter, I explore how her emphasis on the dissimilarity between God and human leads to a critical distinction between divine and human judgment, a distinction that cannot be resolved in this life but must be endured as a productive, if uneasy and uncertain, tension, particularly with regard to personal sin.

5. Perspective and Judgment: The Unlikeness of God

Michelle Karnes argues that awareness of difference and distance, particularly the distance between human and divine, is at the center of Julian's interpretive method. "Difference is an inevitable obstacle to anyone who would relate things human and divine," Karnes writes, "but Julian renders it productive."⁸⁵ Using "discord as a hermeneutic tool," Julian "displays the unlikeness between earthly and eternal things, between human and divine understanding, in order to uncover the link between them."⁸⁶ Julian's interpretive method also, however, recognizes that

⁸⁵ Michelle Karnes, "Julian of Norwich's Art of Interpretation," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 42 (2012): 333.
⁸⁶ Ibid., 338.

divine meaning always exceeds human interpretation of it.⁸⁷ Julian cultivates difference in her efforts to glimpse deeper understanding of the paradoxical nature of God's teachings, but she also emphasizes the unlikeness of God in order to chasten human claims to divine knowledge and stress the primacy of God's action. Any link that Julian discerns between divine and human is a result of the miraculous event of God's bridging the unlikeness by assuming human sensuality. In this section, I trace the development of Julian's thought as it relates to the distinction between divine and human knowledge, a distinction that, as we will see in the following chapter, is particularly important with regard to Julian's ideas about sin.

a. The Limits of Human Perspective and Earthly Judgments

Julian's first significant discussion of the distinction between God and human occurs in response to her question, "What is sin?" in the third revelation. She sees "God in a pointe" (11:1, 163) and realizes God is in all things and does all things. If God is in all things and does all things, Julian thinks, if nothing is done by chance and everything is done by God's wisdom, she wonders, what is sin? The answer, she realizes, is one of perception and perspective. God's perspective allows God to see the entirety of existence, all time, all being, and it is this perspective Julian glimpses when she sees God in a point. Human perspective is limited, so it misperceives things as chance or accident when "those things that be in the foreseeing wisdom of God exist without beginning" (11:7–8:163).⁸⁸

This distinction between divine and human perspective is far from original with Julian, but she develops the distinction in such a way as to radically limit the value of earthly judgment. She severs even the analogical relationship between human and divine judgment. Human

⁸⁷ Ibid., 356.

⁸⁸ This is not to say, however, that Julian dismisses sin as an issue of perception. Sin may be "no deed" (11:17, 163) but the pain of sin is quite real.

judgment is in no way like God's judgment, just as human perspective and perception are in no way like God's. Even the actions of God's creatures seem to Julian to be distinct in some way from the actions of God, for Julian is able to say that in her revelations, "the working of creatures was not shown, but only that of our lord God in the creature" (11:15–16, 163). When Julian sees that everything is well done, she is glimpsing the work of God in in humankind; she is not being shown human acts. God is continuously working in humans ("See, I never removed my hands from my works and never shall without end" [11:43–44, 165]), but human actions are not the actions of God. This distinction opens a space for the workings of creatures that, while they cannot derail God's workings, can inflict real suffering on God's creatures and creation.

The distinction is nothing more than a suggestion in Julian's thought, leaving many questions unanswered, in particular, the exact nature of the relationships between God's work and the actions of creatures and what these various relationships tell us about human actions. How do we, for example, distinguish between human acts that result from God's work—God's influence over the human heart, for example—and those that appear to resist God's work? Julian does not take up these questions. She is clear that no human action or suffering is beyond the reach of God's saving, healing action, but she is also clear that the primary focus of the revelations is not on the sinful actions of individuals: neither sin nor "the working of creatures" was revealed. The distinction between divine and human acts creates a space that is intriguing for feminist thought to develop further, both theologically and ethically, but to the extent our interest is in classifying and interpreting human actions, we proceed, in large part, without Julian's help.

b. "I Saw No Wrath in God": Julian and the Teachings of the Holy Church

Julian's understanding of the distinction between divine and human perspective is further challenged, then deepened, when she repeatedly, in the course of her revelations, sees no wrath

in God. Even in light of human sin, God attributes no blame to those who will be saved (27:31, 211). Julian knows from the teachings of the church that "sinners are sometimes worthy of blame and wrath" but "these two [she] could not see in God" (45:18, 261). It is the apparent conflict between what Julian sees of God's judgment and what she knows of the church's judgment that causes her anxiety. Her vision of God's judgment "from his own high, endless love" in which God attributes no blame to humans is a consistent theme throughout the whole of the revelation, yet Julian writes: "And though this was sweet and delectable, yet only in the beholding of this I could not be fully eased. And that was because of the judgment of holy church" (45:11–15, 261). God's judgment that assigns no blame appears to be a direct contradiction of the church's teachings.

Although some scholars argue that Julian's commitment to the church's teachings is a practical necessity of her day,⁸⁹ the text suggests otherwise.⁹⁰ Julian not only insists that her showing did not lead her away from the general teaching of the church in any way ("For by the showing I was not steered nor led therefrom in any way, but I had therein teaching to love it and like it, whereby I might, with the help of our lord and his grace, increase and rise to more

⁸⁹ Abram Van Engen argues that all that can be said of Julian's orthodoxy is that "she *once* was orthodox; her position may have shifted, and *A Revelation* might actually conflict with Holy Church." Abram Van Engen, "Shifting Perspectives: Sin and Salvation in Julian's *A Revelation of Love*," *Literature and Theology* 23:1 (2009): 3. To the contrary, holy church remains a strong presence in *A Revelation* but Van Engen is correct that the church's presence in *A Revelation* is less an authority to which Julian submits and more a means of God's work in the world, work which she describes and situates within the context of her theology.

⁹⁰ Here, I am indebted to and in agreement with Grace Jantzen's reading of Julian. Jantzen discusses the crucial distinction in Julian's thought between "the empirical Church which is soiled and corrupt and the Church as God sees it." Jantzen highlights the important parallel in Julian's thought between this distinction and the distinction Julian draws between humankind's life as it is fractured by sin and humans as they are viewed by God. "Julian's account of the Church, therefore," Jantzen concludes, "is integral to her total theological understanding: it is not token loyalty to avoid a heresy hunt" (Jantzen, *Mystic and Theologian*, 100–1). Joan Nuth likewise accepts Julian's commitment to the church's teaching as sincere, concluding that Julian "provides a courageous example of one who, based upon her own experience of God, dared to question a church teaching, in a spirit of love and loyalty to the church, in a day when such questioning was often construed as heresy punishable by death" (Nuth, *Wisdom's Daughter*, 22). Julian may challenge the church's teachings in strategic ways, but, at the same time, she sincerely embraces those teachings. The struggle for her is genuine, even if her presentation of it is strategic and politically astute.

heavenly knowing and higher loving" [46:18–20, 263]), she tells us elsewhere that she knows "by the common teaching of holy church and *by my own feeling* that the blame of our sins continually hangs upon us, from the first man until the time that we come up into heaven" (50:9– 11, 271, emphasis added). This is more than strategic concession to a powerful church alert for signs of heresy. Denys Turner explains that we misunderstand Julian when we believe she thinks out of an oppositional space created between the church's teachings and her experience of revelation. For Julian, Turner argues, there is no opposition but instead "a single, complex, indivisible whole—*her shewings as mediated to her through the teaching of the Church*."⁹¹

The conflict between Julian's vision of God's love for humankind free of any wrath and her belief that humans do sin and deserve blame for that sin is a genuine one for her. Her longing to understand how both judgments are true for her "was more than I can or may tell" (45:19, 261). Like the servant in the *exemplum* who is "blinded in his reason and stunned in his mind" (51:22–23, 275), Julian's reason is "greatly travailed by [her] blindness" and cannot make sense of these contradictory claims: "For either I had to see in God that sin was all done away, or else I had to see in God how he sees it, whereby I might truly know how it belonged to me to see sin and the manner of our blame" (50:16–19, 273). How can it be true that humans can be judged blameless by God even though they "sin grievously all day and are very blameworthy" (50:7, 271)?

Julian tells us that she has spent years reflecting on this tension and that God gave her an answer in "the marvelous example of a lord and of a servant" (45:26–27, 261), although even this *exemplum* was not fully revealed and seemed to retain more secrets than it revealed. She acknowledges the tension between the two judgments as one in which she continues to live, even after years of reflecting on and writing about the revelations:

⁹¹ Turner, Julian of Norwich, 82 (emphasis original).

And yet I stand in desire and will until my life's end, that I might by grace know these two judgments as they belong to me. For all heavenly things and all earthly things that belong to heaven are comprehended in these two judgments. And the more knowing and understanding by the gracious leading of the holy ghost that we have of these two judgments, the more we shall see and know our failings. And ever the more that we see them, the more kindly by grace we shall long to be filled with endless joy and bliss, for we are made thereto. And our kindly substance is now blissful in God, and has been since it was made, and shall be without end. (45:28–35, 261)

These judgments remain distinct, differentiated throughout human existence in this world, and part of the individual's work in this life is to desire to understand how both judgments relate to her. Through the grace of the holy ghost, the individual can long for and develop a deeper understanding of the two judgments, through which she comes to see her failings and her bliss.

Even after Julian has worked out the ways in which human substance and sensuality are related to divine essence and action, explaining in part how God's judgment relates to human substance and human judgment to human sensuality, she continues to hold the two judgments in tension without conflating or reconciling them: "For otherwise is the beholding of God, and otherwise is the beholding of man" (52:58, 291). Like the lord looking at the servant with an alternating expression of pity and love ("This fair looking showed a fitting mixture, which was marvelous to behold. That one was compassion and pity, that other joy and bliss [51:111–12, 279]), God regards humans with a double expression that reflects the double nature of the human condition, both fallen and saved.

Humans do not judge themselves as God judges them. Human judgment is not a less perfect version of divine judgment. The relationship between human and divine judgment is not one of analogy. As I argue in the next chapter, the space that Julian defines between divine and human judgment, a space that is not bridged analogically, becomes critical to her ideas about sin, particularly human knowledge about sin and the productive functions and limits of that knowledge. This chapter has examined three important theological concepts in Julian's work: her theological anthropology of substance and sensuality, developed in such a way that it resists the traditional binary oppositions that have proven so problematic from a feminist perspective; her creative use of gender in developing a doctrine of God who is both father and mother and her use of the metaphor of motherhood not, as I have argued, to feminize God but to emphasize the crucial role of divine physicality in human salvation; and finally, the distinction she develops between divine and human perspectives and judgments. In the next chapter, I demonstrate how each of these three concepts shape Julian's ideas about sin and subsequently, are likewise important in shaping the feminist conception of personal sin I develop in chapter 5.

Chapter 4

Julian's Thought on Sin

In the previous chapter, I introduced three elements of Julian's theology that are important to her thought on sin: her anthropology of substance and sensuality, her creative treatment of gender in God in order to emphasize God's physicality, and her strong distinction between divine and human knowledge. In this chapter, I draw on these elements to demonstrate how Julian's thought on sin is especially helpful to the development of a feminist conception of personal sin. I organize my discussion of Julian's thought on sin into four areas. First, Julian redefines sin in terms of love. Sin is less a set of particular bad behaviors in Julian's thought and more a condition that restricts and distorts the individual's capacity to recognize, receive, or participate in love. Second, Julian's development of the relationship between human sensuality and divine physicality situates sin physically and spiritually within the context of God's loving embrace, an embrace made possibly not only by Christ's assumption of human sensuality but by human sensuality itself. Through sensuality, individuals are vulnerable to suffering and sin but it is also through sensuality, a sensuality they share with Christ, that individuals can be embraced by God. Third, Julian's strong distinction between divine and human knowledge means that human knowledge of sin, including the ways in which people suffer from and participate in sin, is always only partial. Human judgments about sin serve an important function in Julian's ideas about spiritual growth, but they are never the final word on sin or human worth, even temporarily. Fourth and finally, Julian offers a way of thinking about sin that is both individual and collective. Sin and salvation are not individual phenomena, but neither is the individual absorbed into and erased by the collective in Julian's thought. As she does in so many areas, here Julian cultivates a tension that is not meant to be resolved. I conclude the chapter with a brief

summary of the ways in which Julian's ideas about sin challenge and inform my efforts to develop a feminist conception of personal sin.

1. "What is Sin?" Sin as Condition

In the opening passages of the third revelation, Julian sees that God does all things and wonders, then, "what is sin?" If God does all things and God does not sin, what is sin? As I discussed in the previous chapter, this passage can be read as a reference to the distinction between the divine and human perspectives, as well as divine and human actions. God's perspective is not the human perspective and God's work is not the work of creatures. Julian goes on to conclude: "And here I saw truly that sin is no deed, for in all this, sin was not shown" (11:17–18, 163). Later, at the beginning of the thirteenth revelation, she elaborates on this point, "But I saw not sin. For I believe it has no manner of substance nor part of being, nor might it be known except for the pain it causes" (27:22–23, 210). In defining sin as having no substance or share of being, Julian aligns herself with the Augustinian orthodoxy of her day that understood evil not as a malevolent god or force in creation (Manichaean dualism) but rather as nothingevil as privation.¹ Sin is not a creation of God as humans are; it has no substance kept whole in God. Sin is instead a nothingness, a reduction of God's creation. In this sense, sin is not something Julian could "see" in the revelations. And yet sin is a persistent preoccupation throughout Julian's writings.

¹ Denise Baker discusses the resonance between Julian and Augustine's thought on this point and cites the Fourth Lateran Council's use of the "evil as privation" argument in 1215 to illustrate "the pervasiveness of this definition throughout the Middle Ages." Baker argues that Julian challenges the "juridical paradigm" of "the orthodox medieval solution" to the problem of evil, a paradigm Baker attributes to Augustine. While a close analysis of Baker's reading of Julian's thought in comparison to that of Augustine is beyond the scope of this project, I find that the contrasts Baker draws between the two are not nearly so pronounced as she argues. For example, Baker writes that "departing from Augustinian theodicy, Julian does not concentrate on Adam's transgression as the cause of evil, but rather on Christ's reparation as the consequence." This is not entirely a departure from Augustine. It is true that Augustine, influenced in large part by his readings of Paul, attributes the origin of sin to Adam's disobedience, but he emphasizes even more strongly the saving action of Christ. Denise Nowakowski Baker, *Julian of Norwich's* Showings: *From Vision to Book* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 65–70.

a. The Suffering of Sin: How Can All Be Well When There is Sin?

In the opening chapter of the thirteenth revelation, Julian acknowledges she has often wondered why sin was not prevented in creation so that humans might have retained the closeness with God that was their original creation: "And thus in my folly before this time, often I had wondered why, by the great foreseeing wisdom of God, the beginning of sin was not prevented. For then I thought that all would have been well" (27:4–6, 209). Jesus responds by telling her that sin is "behovely" but all shall be well. Much later, in the final chapters of *A Revelation*, as Julian is describing what it will mean to dwell with God eternally and to see God clearly, although she does not mention sin explicitly, she alludes to her earlier wondering about it: "And then shall none of us be moved to say in any thing: 'Lord, if it had been thus, it would have been well.' But we shall all say with one voice: 'Lord blessed may you be, because it is thus, it is well" (85:10–12, 379). With this reference, Julian signals an essential evolution in her thought on sin, an evolution we can trace throughout *A Revelation*, beginning with the third revelation, when she asks "what is sin?"

After seeing God "in a point" and knowing from that vision that God is in all things and that God does all that is done, Julian feels compelled to acknowledge that "all things that are done are well done" (11:14, 163). Her acknowledgment in the third revelation anticipates the assurances she will receive in the thirteenth revelation, that "all shall be well," and her final conviction in the closing chapters that "because it is so, it is well." Along the way, Julian circles back repeatedly to her concern with sin and the pain it causes, trying to understand how all can be well when there is so much pain and suffering among God's creatures. In this section, I trace the evolution in Julian's thought that emerges as she circles around these ideas of sin and suffering and the promise that "all shall be well."

In the thirteenth revelation, when Christ tells Julian that "sin is behovely, but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well" (27:9–11, 209), Julian reports that with this word, "sin," Jesus brought "to [her] mind generally all that is not good," all of his pain and suffering and all the pain and suffering of "all his creatures" (27:11–14, 209). Julian does not see sin but rather the suffering caused by sin. Throughout *A Revelation*, Julian discusses sin at great length and yet rarely does she cite specific sins. Grace Jantzen suggests "it is important…not to confuse 'sin' in Julian's sense with 'sins' or moral failures. Although these are not trivial, they are only symptoms of the deeper problem, the fracturing of our sensuality from our substance which is united to God."² Julian's revelations deal less with sin as human action or perverted choice and more with sin as a condition that inflicts tremendous pain on individuals. This is not to say, however, that Julian does not discuss sin as perversion or a state of mind. She does both, but her doing so is designed to reinforce her larger emphasis on the individual's need for God—a desperate need created by sin—and God's loving action on individuals in the midst of their suffering from sin.

Julian defines sin as the "contrariousness" that is in humans because of "the old root of our first sin with all that follows from our own continuance of it" (47:35–36, 267). This "contrariousness" is a feeling of opposition or perversion within the individual, more specifically a resistance—resistance even to the point of rejection—to the peace and love which would overfill her if it were not for sin: "For we by sin and wretchedness have in us a wrath and an ongoing contrariousness to peace and love" (48:8–10, 267). Instead, this perversion causes pain, shame, and sorrow for her in this life.³ It comes from a failing of might, wisdom, or goodness,⁴

² Grace M. Jantzen, Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 205.

³ "For I saw full securely that ever as our contrariousness makes for us pain, shame, and sorrow in this life, right so, to the contrary, grace makes for us solace, worship, and bliss overpassing in heaven" (48:33–35, 269).

failings that are not God's but the individual's: "Our failing is dreadful, our falling is shameful, and our dying is sorrowful" (48:19–20, 267). Individuals lack the strength, the insight, and the goodness to remain always aware of God's love for them—they fail—and so they fall from God and die: "For it must be that we die inasmuch as we fail to see and feel God, who is our life" (48:18–19, 267). Julian refers to this "contrariousness" also as a wrath, which allows her to contrast human's fear of God's wrath—a prevailing concern in the late fourteenth century—with the reality revealed to her: it is humans, not God, who are filled with wrath: "For I saw no wrath but on humankind's part, and that wrath God forgives in us. For wrath is nothing but a rebelliousness and a contrariousness to peace and to love" (48:5–7, 267).

b. The Impossibility of Divine Wrath: Defining Sin in Terms of Love

Tracing Julian's references to wrath in *A Revelation*, in particular, noting the point at which she ceases to reference it, illuminates an important shift in her thinking about sin. Julian first mentions wrath earlier in *A Revelation*, in conjunction with the fifth revelation when God assures her that with Christ's passion, "the fiend is overcome." Julian does not describe the fiend as filled with wrath. She writes instead of his malice and his impotence, for all that God allows him to do is turned to joy for those who will be saved. God gives leave to the fiend to do his work, but the fiend cannot do as much damage as he wishes, "for his might is all locked in God's hands." Julian continues, "But in God may be no wrath, as to my sight" (13:14–15, 169). Not even in response to the fiend does God become angry.

Julian mentions wrath next at the end of the thirteenth revelation. The thirteenth revelation, as we have seen, consists of Julian's extended reflection on how sin prevents her and

⁴ Julian reprises this language of might, wisdom, and goodness in the sixteenth revelation when she sees "our lord Jesus, very God and very man" sitting in the city that she sees in her soul in the middle of her heart (68:1–5, 335). In this vision, "the soul is wholly occupied with the blessed godhead; that is, sovereign might, sovereign wisdom, and sovereign goodness" (68:10–11, 337). Might, wisdom, and goodness—Trinitarian properties that humans cannot sustain on their own—fill the human soul as a result of the integrated relationship with Christ.

her evencristen from being as they were created to be and God's loving response to these failings. In the concluding chapter of this revelation, she assures her readers that God keeps them tenderly in the midst of their sin. God shows them their sins "by the sweet light of mercy and grace. But when we see ourselves so foul," she continues, "then we expect that God were wroth with us for our sin" (40:3–5, 243).⁵ Julian's evencristen expected God's anger in response to their sinful condition.⁶ They confessed their sins and "desire[d] to amend themselves with all their might" in order to "slake the wrath of God" (40:5–6, 243). Julian responds here by repeatedly assuring her readers that God desires they be "like him in wholeness of endless love for [themselves] and for [their] evencristen" (40:40–41, 247), but we soon see in the fourteenth revelation that she has not done correcting human misapprehensions about the wrath of God or even the idea that their sin should be understood primarily as wrath.

Julian takes up an extended discussion of wrath early in the fourteenth revelation, after she has elaborated on the importance of prayer in drawing her evencristen into an authentic relationship with God, one that is premised not on fear but on love.⁷ Here we begin to see that

⁵ It is worth attending here to Julian's unmodernized text from the critical edition edited by Nicholas Watkins and Jacqueline Jenkins: "And ferthermore he toucheth us fulle prevely, and sheweth us oure sinne by the swet light of mercy and grace. But when we se ourselfe so foule, then we wene that God were wroth with us for oure sinne." Watson & Jenkins and Colledge & Walsh both translate "wene" here as "believe" while Spearing translates it as "think." In a later passage, they translate "wene" as "imagine," "understand," and "believe," respectively. In the guide to her 2005 critical edition of the texts, Denise N. Baker defines "wene" as "think, expect, hope." I have translated "wene" in this context as "expect" because it better anticipates the development of Julian's thought in chapters 45–49, discussed below. *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and A Revelation of Love*, ed. Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 40:2–5, 243 (hereafter W&J); *Julian of Norwich: Showings*, ed. Edmund Colledge O.S.A. and James Walsh S.J. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978), 246 (hereafter C&W, *Showings*); *Julian of Norwich; Revelations of Divine Love*, trans. Elizabeth Spearing (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 97; *Julian of Norwich: Showings*, ed. Denise N. Baker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), xxvii. ⁶ In his exhaustive study of religious texts of Western Christianity during the 13th–18th centuries (sermons, hymns,

⁶ In his exhaustive study of religious texts of Western Christianity during the 13th–18th centuries (sermons, hymns, letters, catechisms, and other writings), Jean Delemeau documents the relentless emphasis on fear, guilt, and divine anger that permeated the world of all Christians: "The terrifying doctrine of the Father enraged against His Son was not confined to the upper echelon of the church. It descended to the ground level of everyday Catholics and was widely promulgated by a concerted theological campaign." Jean Delumeau, *Sin and Fear: The Emergence of a Western Guilt Culture, 13th–18th Centuries*, trans. Eric Nicholson (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 420. ⁷ Julian speaks here of a "reverent dread" (43:20, 257). As she explains in greater detail in the sixteenth revelation, this reverent dread is to be distinguished from false dread, which Julian associates with "the enemy who will set us

human expectations about the wrath of God in response to sin need to be qualified. These expectations of wrath are associated with humankind's judgment or the judgment of the church, which Julian contrasts with the judgment of God. The two judgments, human and divine, each play an important role in drawing Julian and her evencristen closer to God, but, as I discussed in the previous chapter, the distinction between them is crucial. God's judgment assigns no blame to humans for it judges their substance, "which is ever kept one in God, whole and safe without end" (45:1–2, 259). The church's judgment teaches Julian that "sinners are sometimes worthy of blame and wrath" and yet Julian reiterates that "these two I could not see in God" (45:18–19, 261). Julian struggles to reconcile the two judgments with her vision that there is no wrath in God. She believes it is necessary for her to know that humans are sinners, doing many evil deeds they shouldn't do and leaving good deeds undone that they should do, "wherefore we deserve pain, blame, and wrath," and yet she sees "truly that our Lord was never wroth, and never will be" (46:24–25, 263).

Julian presses the point further by insisting that not only is there no wrath between God and humans, there is also no forgiveness, "for our soul is so completely united to God of his own goodness that between God and our soul can be nothing at all" (46:31–32, 263). Julian continues the discussion of forgiveness in the following chapter, explaining that she had been taught to understand mercy as the forgiveness of God's wrath—individuals sin; they become aware of their sin and fear God's wrath; they pray to God for mercy and receive it in the form of forgiveness; through merciful forgiveness, God's wrath comes to an end. She had understood that "forgiveness of God's wrath should be one of the principle points of God's mercy" (47:9, 265).

back with his false dread of our wretchedness" (76:34–35, 363). False dread makes humans fear being seen by God, while reverent dread draws them closer to God in search of loving comfort.

The "working of mercy" is a theme Julian develops in great detail in the remainder of *A Revelation*, but here, her initial insight is that God's mercy does not, after all, involve wrath. It is at this point that Julian realizes wrath originates not in God but in humans:

For I saw no wrath but on humankind's part, and that wrath God forgives in us. For wrath is nothing but a rebelliousness and a contrariousness to peace and to love, and either comes of a failing of might, or of a failing of wisdom, or of a failing of goodness, which failing is not in God but on our part. For we by sin and wretchedness have in us a wrath and an ongoing contrariousness to peace and love... (48:5–10:267)

Julian speaks again of forgiveness but here it is invoked not as an end to God's anger but as part of God's cure for what ails the human soul. Wrath is distinguished as that which is "contrarious" to peace and love in humans. God's mercy is not the forgiveness of God's wrath; God's mercy "is a sweet, gracious working in love, mingled with plenteous pity" (48:14–15, 267). Mercy and forgiveness, Julian now sees, are not necessary components of an end to God's anger. Instead, they work to "slake and waste *our* wrath" (48:40–41, 269, emphasis added).

Julian's final references to wrath come in chapter 49, in which she synthesizes the insights of the previous four chapters. Not only has she seen no wrath in God, she realizes that it is impossible for God to be angry: "For truly as to my sight, if God were to be wroth a touch, we should have neither life, nor home, nor being" (49:12–14, 269). Julian and her evencristen have their existence in the love that is God: "For this was shown: that our life is all grounded and rooted in love, and without love we may not live" (49:3–5, 269). Were that love to become angry even for a moment, she and her evencristen would no longer exist. The impossibility of divine anger makes divine forgiveness also impossible: "For this was a high marvel to the soul, continuously shown in all and contemplated with great diligence: that our lord God, as regards himself, may not forgive, for he may not be wroth" (49:1–3, 269). Julian goes on to stipulate that wrath is contrary to friendship, to love, and to peace. When Christ appears in her visions, there is

no wrath, she asserts, but only peace: "For I saw full securely that where our lord appears, peace is received and wrath has no home" (49:11–12, 269). She and her evencristen feel themselves filled with "wrath, debate, and strife" in this life, yet at every moment, as Julian now sees, they are "all mercifully enclosed in the mildness of God" (49:17–18, 269). God's work on the human soul is to bring an end to this wrath, allowing the soul to be at peace with itself, its evenchristen, and all of God's works and judgments (49:28–32, 271).

Julian writes of both wrath and "contrariousness" in humans and, during the course of the chapter, shifts subtly from the first to the second as her primary focus: "And though we, by wrath and the contrariousness that is in us, be now in tribulation, distress, and woe as a result of our blindness and our frailty, yet we are securely safe by the merciful keeping of God, so that we perish not" (49, 25–28, 271). After this reference, Julian makes one final mention of wrath, this time reiterating that in God, there is no wrath, which is how she and her evencristen can trust they are "securely safe," always enclosed in God, no matter how unsettled and turbulent they feel themselves to be. From this point forward in *A Revelation*, it is "contrariousness," not wrath, that Julian will reference in her discussions of sin. The "contrariousness" in humans in this life is the source of all their tribulation and woe (49:40, 271).

Julian makes no further reference to wrath—divine or human—in the remainder of *A Revelation*. This shift in language reflects a profound reorientation of the conception of sin. Sin is defined not in terms of anger but in terms of love. Sin is understood not primarily as the wrath that is in humans but as their inability to recognize, receive, and participate in love. Julian focuses less on sin as a particular set of human actions and more on sin as a condition in which humans suffer. As Denise Baker and Joan Nuth have noted, Julian is less concerned with the

origins of sin and more concerned with its consequences and healing.⁸ Sin is what interferes with our capacity to long for and experience God: "And I saw that nothing prevented me [from longing for God] but sin" (27:2, 207). Joan Nuth describes this loss of faith in God's love as "the most pernicious effect of sin" in Julian's thought.⁹ Julian offers an alternative reading of humanity's fall with her *exemplum* of the lord and the servant, stressing the servant's suffering as a result of his haste to do his lord's will, rather than representing the servant as a disobedient creature who rejects his creator's love. Yet an inability to receive, recognize, and participate in love is nonetheless the condition of sin in which Julian and her evencristen find themselves: "But for a failing of love on our part, therefore is all our suffering" (37:21, 237).

c. Believing We Are Unloved: Defining Sin as Condition

"Man is changeable in this life," Julian writes, "and through frailty and ignorance falls into sin. He is weak and foolish in himself, and also his will is clouded in this life. He is in turmoil, sorrow, and woe. And the cause is blindness, for he does not see God" (47:13–16, 265). The changeability of human sensuality, the changeability of this life, creates the opportunity for individuals to fall away from God. Sin divides sensuality from substance so that the individual experiences life without access to the benefits of the godly will that binds her to God. She cannot see God continually and so she "falls into herself" and finds only the "contrariousness" that is in her (47:34, 267). She encounters so much unrest and suffering that she believes herself to be dead (50:2–3, 271): "And by Adam's falling we are so broken in our feelings in different ways by sin and various pains, we are so far in darkness and blindness, that we can hardly receive any comfort" (52:10–12, 289). Like the servant who falls and believes himself to be abandoned

⁸ Baker, *From Vision to Book*, 69–70; Joan M. Nuth, *Wisdom's Daughter: The Theology of Julian of Norwich* (New York: Crossroads, 1991), 134. Both contrast Julian with Augustine in this respect.

⁹ Nuth. Wisdom's Daughter, 124.

because he lies alone in a hard and grievous place, humans have "almost forgotten [their] own love" (51:23:275). Julian and her evencristen perceive themselves to be alone and unloved. Those who experience themselves as sinners believe they are beyond hope, beyond love. This is sin for Julian-the condition of experiencing oneself as separated from, even believing oneself to have been abandoned by, God.

In his 2009 study of different strands of thought about human and divine agency, sin, grace, and Christ in the Middle Ages, David Aers concludes that Julian's teaching on sin "systematically diminishes human responsibility for evil," because she "never represents sin as 'a perversity of will,' as rebellion against the grace of God, as disobedience to God's gift of covenant."¹⁰ Aers is concerned with Julian's failure to treat sin as willful human choice, evil acts of the will that result in evil acts and accordingly deserve blame. Aers contrasts Julian's thought on sin with Augustine's, as Denise Baker and Joan Nuth have done previously, though where Baker argues that Julian's thought on sin is an important corrective to Augustine's thought and Nuth understands it as an important development of Augustine's thought, Aers disagrees with both and concludes that Julian "combines Augustine's arguments about evil as privation with a doctrine that is incompatible with Augustine and Augustinian traditions of Christianity."¹¹

Aers argues that Julian's doctrine of the godly will leads inevitably toward the temptation Augustine describes rejecting when he rejected Manichean thought: "Augustine says that this belief made him think that when he had done something wrong he remained 'free of blame' [extra culpam]. He observed the sin as caused by something accompanying him while he felt that he did not sin and remained unstained by the enacted sin (V.10.18)."¹² I hope that my readings of

¹⁰ David Aers, Salvation and Sin: Augustine, Langland, and Fourteenth-Century Theology (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 161 and 155.

¹¹ Ibid., 155. ¹² Ibid., 164.

Julian's work above and in the previous chapter make clear that Julian never considers herself and her evencristen to be anything other than mired in sin. She cautions her evencristen several times about the dangers of using the revelations of love to dismiss the seriousness of sin or excuse future sins.¹³ She acknowledges that she is buffeted by external forces as well as internal ones as she experiences herself as a sinner,¹⁴ but never does she attribute sin to, in Aers's words, "something accompanying her" in such a way that she "feels she did not sin and remained unstained by the enacted sin."¹⁵

Aers's reading of Julian hinges in large part on Julian's single reference to "a beastly will" in the thirteenth revelation. Aers equates this reference to the beastly will (Julian's only mention of it in the whole of *A Revelation*) with Julian's subsequent development of human sensuality, assuming that all Julian has to say about human sensuality can be understood within the context of "a beastly will in the lower part that may will no good" (37:15–16, 237). Denys Turner argues that Aers misreads Julian when he understands her reference to the higher and beastly wills as two powers of the soul that are at war with one another. Turner concedes that Julian's metaphor of "parts" only contributes to this kind of misreading, for it lends itself to the sort of Manichean dualism that Aers accuses Julian of moving toward. Julian is, instead, Turner argues, distinguishing between the individual as she was created by God, with a will that is oned with God, and the individual as she is fallen, unable to do any good without the assistance of grace and mercy. In Julian's anthropology, the human is not "partly" fallen—she is entirely fallen; yet she remains a creature created by God and therefore connected to God, even if it is in

¹³ 40:22–25, 245 and 79:19–26, 369, discussed below.

¹⁴ 76:26–27, 363

¹⁵ Aers, *Sin and Salvation*, 164.

such a way that she cannot access that connection alone.¹⁶ As Turner observes, in terms that could just as accurately be used to describe Augustine's thought, "insofar as I am created I am indefeasibly 'oned' with God, and at the same time insofar as I am fallen my selfhood has become fractured and ambiguous because my desires, my will, have been torn away from their moorings in the will endowed to me as a created being."¹⁷

Turner is right to challenge Aers's interpretation of the "beastly will," and that, in part, explains the difference in Aers's reading of Julian's work and my own reading of it, but there is more here that needs to be emphasized because it speaks to the distinction I am drawing throughout this project between sin as action and sin as condition. In his discussion of Augustine and Julian, Aers is focused primarily on sin as action—sin as "habitual opposition to God [and] rebellion against divine love for humans;" "the human will 'takes the initiative' and that initiative is to forsake God 'in disobedience"; "evil acts are generated by evil acts of the will"; "the individual and collective habits of will and intellect that bind us in iron fetters composed out of practices we have chosen."¹⁸ Aers believes Julian wishes "to set aside the issues of will, of choice, or sin as a chosen separation from God, and of the social consequences of sin."¹⁹ He is looking for her to address "individual and collective agency, individual and collective choices, in such as way as to show us how our city, our institutions, and our practices constitute forms of life in which demonic evil can be habitualized, made part of an ordinary working day."²⁰

¹⁶ Aers also faults Julian for her omission of obedience and disobedience as the central virtue and vice developed by Augustine. While Julian does not use the language of obedience and disobedience, her thought is not incompatible with the ideas. Certainly a will that is perfectly aligned with God's, desires what God desires, a concept Julian develops at some length in her discussion of prayer. Julian's discussion eliminates any suggestion that this alignment is a form of divine domination that requires the erasure of human agency, a suggestion that is sometimes attributed to Augustine's thought, inappropriately so, as Aers rightly argues elsewhere in his book.

¹⁷ Denys Turner, Julian of Norwich, Theologian (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 186.

¹⁸ Aers, *Salvation and Sin*, 85, 142, 143, and 155.

¹⁹ Ibid., 156.

²⁰ Ibid., 151–2.

I do not disagree that these are important tasks for Christian theology to take up and I share Aers's admiration for the ways in which Augustine does so. However, Julian is not reflecting primarily on the nature of sinful acts. She is concerned with the condition in which humans find themselves and how this condition can be reconciled with God's assurance that "all shall be well." Focusing on sin as condition does not require a rejection of the idea that sin, whether as condition or act, is the result of human choices, but our larger understanding of various forms of sin likewise need not be limited to that which is clearly traceable to human choices. As I discuss above, Julian retains the idea that sin is connected with the "contrariousness" and perversity that is in humans, but in focusing on sin as condition, Julian concentrates her discussion on suffering rather than blame. She does not, however, conflate pain and sin as Aers argues.²¹ Julian may observe that she and her evencristen know sin only by the pain it causes, but this is not to say that sin is pain or that pain is sin. It is, instead, to emphasize the unknowability of sin in this life. As Denys Turner puts it, "sin makes us misperceive the nature of sin."²²

Julian repeatedly tells her readers that they "shall see" sin ("For we shall truly see in heaven without end that we have grievously sinned in this life" [61:18–19:315]). There is an eschatological suspension of human knowledge of sin that I discuss more fully below within the context of the unlikeness of God. In focusing on sin as condition, Julian is not minimizing human responsibility for sin; she is, instead, stressing the primacy of God's loving action in healing it. In doing so, she focuses less on human fault and more on human need. Although we have little historical context regarding the writing of *A Revelation* or its intended audience, it seems that Julian's intended reader is less the prideful Pharisee of Luke Luke 18:9, whose prayer to God is,

²¹ Ibid., 156.

²² Turner, Julian of Norwich, 88.

"God, I thank you that I am not like other people," and more the prodigal son of Luke 15:21, who confesses, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son."²³ Julian seems less concerned with breaking her evencristen of their pride (though she does acknowledge that such breaking is necessary for some people at times) and more concerned with convincing them that they are kept safely by God even in the midst of their sinful, broken condition.

d. The Sin of Despair

Despair is a major concern for Julian and her treatment of it, while it makes no mention of wrath, relies on and extends her earlier moves to shift her evencristen away from a definition of sin that is steeped in anger toward one that is defined in terms of love. Despair is one of only two specific sins that Julian warns against in *A Revelation*²⁴ and she stresses that God revealed these two sins in particular so that her evencristen might know and resist them. Of the two— impatience and despair—despair receives the greatest attention, for it is linked to the "doubtful dread" against which Julian warns. Learning to recognize sin is an essential component of spiritual growth but this knowledge should not cultivate a "false fear" of God, for such false fear leads one into the sin of despair. One does not learn to see sin in order to fear and despair; one sees sin as part of the process of being drawn in love toward God, one's true self, and others.²⁵

²³ Turner discusses the ways in which Julian's *exemplum* of the lord and servant glosses Jesus's parable of the prodigal son. His reading raises the implicit suggestion that Julian's *exemplum* is best understood not, as Aers characterizes it, a "correcting" of Genesis 3 (Aers, *Salvation and Sin*, 147) but an integration of Genesis 3 with the parable of the prodigal son.

²⁴ "God showed me two kinds of sickness that we have. The one is impatience or sloth, for we bear our suffering and our pain heavily. The other is despair or doubtful dread, as I shall discuss later. Generally, he showed sin, wherein all sin is comprehended. But in particular, he showed none but these two. And these two most torment and assail us, as by that our lord showed me, of which he desires we be healed. I speak of such men and women that for God's love hate sin and commit themselves to do God's will. Then, by our spiritual blindness and our bodily heaviness, we are most inclined to these two sins. And therefore it is God's will that they be known, and then shall we refuse them, as we do other sins" (73:7–15, 351).

²⁵ "All dreads other than reverent dread that are offered to us, though they come under the color of holiness, they are not so true. And hereby may they be distinguished. The dread that makes us hastily to flee from all that is not good

Despair, or "doubtful dread," is introduced explicitly within the context of the sixteenth revelation as Julian attempts to more fully describe the "ghostly" or spiritual dimension of her revelation (73:1–6, 351), yet we can see her building toward this discussion in the fifteenth revelation when she introduces the idea that reverence toward God consists of a "holy, courteous dread of our lord, to which meekness is knit" (65:7–8, 327). Immediately, she qualifies that this dread the individual experiences in response to God is the only dread he should feel, for God "sets all other dreads among passions and bodily sickness and imaginations" (65:21–22:329). Humans experience all kinds of dread, Julian acknowledges, but reverent dread for God who loves them is different. This difference is so important that Julian devotes much of the sixteenth revelation to clarifying and reinforcing it.

Despair, or "doubtful dread," is particularly insidious for those who have dedicated themselves to loving God and cultivating the "reverent dread" that is intertwined with that love. Doubtful dread can appear as submissive meekness that one might mistake for reverent dread. The individual is deceived into thinking that this "doubtful dread" is meekness and cannot recognize it as sin that "comes of the enemy and is against truth" (73:35, 353). The enemy (the devil) colludes with the individual's own "folly and blindness" to convince her that she "is a wretch, a sinner, and also untrue" because she promises God repeatedly that she will not sin and then continues to do so (76:25–30, 363). There is a hopelessness in this conviction, a suggestion that the individual will never be good enough for God, that she will always fail in her good intentions. This makes the individual "fear to appear before our courteous lord" (76:30–33, 363). Learning to see oneself as sinful and needy is an essential dimension of spiritual growth, but

and fall into our lord's breast, as the child into the mother's bosom, with all our intent and with all our mind knowing our feebleness and our great need, knowing God's everlasting goodness and his blissful love, only seeking to him for salvation, clinging to him with secure trust—the dread that brings us into this working, it is kind and gracious and good and true. And all that is contrarious to this, either it is wrong, or it is mixed with wrong. Then is this the remedy, to know them both, and refuse the wrong." (74:27–36, 357).

knowledge of sin should not leave the individual in despair. To the extent it does so, it is false knowledge.

Julian does not mention wrath in these passages but her language nonetheless invokes her earlier discussion and rejection of it. She insists that "all that is contrarious to love and to peace, it is of the fiend" (77:1–2, 363), echoing her earlier observation that "wrath is nothing but a rebelliousness and a contrariousness to peace and to love" (48:5–7, 267). The idea of anger, particularly God's anger, hovers in the background of Julian's text even after she ceases to acknowledge it explicitly, an ongoing opposition to the primary themes of *A Revelation* and an ever-present threat to the well-being of her evencristen. Julian's discussion of despair reinforces her efforts to reorient her evencristen to an idea of sin that is situated firmly within their confidence in God's love, rather than their fear of God's anger.

Late in the thirteenth revelation, Julian writes that "God brought to my mind that I should sin" (37:1, 235).²⁶ She admits that she was so distracted by her delight in beholding God, that she at first does not attend to God's revelation of human sin. When she finally focuses on God's revelation that all humans will sin, she is filled with "a soft dread."²⁷ God immediately responds, "I keep you full securely" (37:8–9, 235). Human falling does not prevent God from loving humans (39:34, 243). The individual that sees herself "so foul" and anticipates God's anger is led into contrition by the holy ghost and welcomed by God (40:5–12, 243). God urges her not to blame herself inordinately: "Do not accuse yourself too much, judging that your tribulation and your woe is all your fault; for I do not want you to be heavy or sorrowful without discretion. For I tell you, whatever you do, you shall have woe" (77:27–30, 365). At the same time, it is

²⁶ Julian clarifies a few lines later that she at first thought God meant this revelation of sin to be for her alone but that later, as she understood all the comfort that followed the revelation of sin, she realized that God's revelation of sin was not for her alone but rather for all her evencristen (37:3–7, 235).
²⁷ In the sixteenth revelation, Julian describes "reverent dread" as the dread that God is pleased to see in us. This

²⁷ In the sixteenth revelation, Julian describes "reverent dread" as the dread that God is pleased to see in us. This dread is "full soft, for the more it is had, the less it is felt, for sweetness of love" (74:15–17, 357).

important that the individual does not allow herself to grow complacent about her sin.

Redefining sin in terms of love rather than anger does not mean that Julian takes sin lightly. To

the contrary, she cautions her evencristen to guard against this inclination:

But now because of all this spiritual comfort that has been mentioned, if any man or woman be steered by folly to say or to think, "If this be true, then it would be good to sin in order to have greater reward," or else to charge the less to sin, beware of this steering. For truly if it comes, it is untrue and of the enemy. (40:22–25, 245)

All this intimate showing of our courteous lord, it is a lovely lesson and a sweet, gracious teaching of himself in comforting our soul. For he desires that we know, by the sweetness of his intimate love, that all that we see or feel, within or without, which is contrarious to this, that it is of the enemy, and not of God. As thus, if we be steered to be more reckless in our living, or of the keeping of our heart, because we have knowing of this plenteous love, then we need greatly to beware of this steering. If it comes, it is untrue, and greatly we owe to hate it, for it has no likeness of God's will. (79:19–26, 369)

Assurance of God's love in the face of human sin brings comfort but it does not erase the

horror of sin or give us license to sin freely. Sin may be nothing, but it also draws us into its nothingness, as Michelle Karnes observes: "Sin is nought but it also noughts: it is a consuming force that, in the fashion of a black hole, absorbs its subjects into its own absence."²⁸ Sin separates us from God, ourselves, and others. It leaves us lying on the ground, in a "long, hard, and grevious" place, blinded by pain and loneliness, bruised and weak. It causes us, like the servant after his fall, to forget our own love and that of God. Julian understands that God needs for humans to see their sin, but not in such a way that they are completely broken by the

revelation:

And when we have fallen through frailty or blindness, then our courteous lord, touching us, steers us and keeps us. And then he desires that we see our wretchedness and meekly acknowledge it. But he does not desire that we abide therewith, nor does he desire that we busy ourselves greatly about our own accusing, nor does he desire that we be too full of our own misery. But he desires

²⁸ Michelle Karnes, "Julian of Norwich's Art of Interpretation," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 42 (2012): 355.

that we hastily attend to him. For he stands all alone, and waits for us continuously, anxiously, and sorrowfully, until the time we come. (79:26–32, 369)

We are led to "see our wretchedness" as a result of God's protective movement toward us with the goal of drawing us back into right relation. Awareness of sin is kept always within perspective, cultivating the fine balance between presumption and despair, the tension in which we are able to live in this time through the work of mercy and grace: "And thus in the dread, I have cause for meekness, that saves me from presumption. And in the blessed showing of love, I have cause for true comfort and joy, that saves me from despair" (79:15–18, 369).

Redefining sin in terms of love rather than anger does not soften the harsh realities of pain and suffering of Julian's time, nor does it eliminate human responsibility for sin, personal and social. It does, however, allow Julian to draw a sharp distinction between a human society that is driven by its inability to love and God who is eternal love. It also shifts attention from the idea that sin is a collection of behaviors that must be regulated against, confessed, and punished toward the idea that sin is a condition in which we find ourselves as we are awakened to the possibilities of God's love.

2. God's Embrace: Sensuality, Sin, and God's Physicality

In chapter 3, I introduced Julian's anthropology of substance and sensuality. In this section, I argue that her development of the relationship between human sensuality and divine physicality situates sin physically and spiritually within the context of God's loving embrace. Further, I argue that this embrace is made possible not only by Christ's assumption of human sensuality but by human sensuality itself. Through sensuality, we are vulnerable to sin and suffering, but it is also through sensuality, a sensuality we share with Christ, that we can be embraced by God.

Julian's concern with sin is a primary focus of both the shorter version of her revelations, *A Vision*, and the longer version, *A Revelation*. Attending to the differences between the two texts allows us to speculate on the ways in which Julian's thought developed in the years following her near-death experience. In both texts, early in the first revelation, Julian expresses awe that God, "so reverent and so dreadful will be so homely with a sinful creature living in this wretched flesh" (4:15–16, 137). Julian's use of the word "homely" is important to her thought, particularly when she employs it, as here, in close connection with her thought on sin. It suggests an intimacy between God and humans. Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins explain that "to treat people in a 'homely' way is to treat them as equals."²⁹ As they go on to note, Julian uses variations of the word almost thirty times in *A Revelation*, often, as here, within the context of her reflections on sin.

Julian's awareness of herself as a sinful creature suffering in her flesh is surrounded by images of joy and love. Her heart is filled with the greatest joy. She receives a "spiritual sight of [God's] homely love" and sees that "he is our clothing, who for love wraps us and winds us, embraces us and all encloses us, hangs about us for tender love, that he may never leave us" (5:2–5, 139). The physical imagery of God's love enfolds the individual, drawing her body into its embrace. Julian's images for loving connection with the divine do not suggest that the flesh, wretched in this life, is to be somehow separated from the soul and left behind. From the beginning, Julian suggests that human physicality not only experiences sin's pain but also participates in the loving reunion with God.

In *A Revelation*, the longer and most probably the later of her two texts, Julian explains that what she saw in her second revelation—an image of Christ's face covered with dried blood,

²⁹ W&J, 136.

first on one side, then on the other as the blood vanished from the first—was "so low and so little and so simple" (10:25, 159) that she spent much time worrying it was, perhaps, not a revelation. This concern is not mentioned in *A Vision*. In *A Revelation*, Julian explains how God, at several different times (presumably during the years since Julian's illness and revelations), has given her greater understanding to see that "it was a figure and a likeness of our foul, black, dead skin which our fair, bright, blessed lord bore for our sin."³⁰ Here, sin and flesh, literally skin, are connected, this time with Christ's saving action. By expanding on this point in *A Revelation*, Julian indicates that this emphasis on physicality has grown more significant to her thought in the time that has passed since she first began recording and studying the revelations. But how does Christ's "bearing skin" relate to human salvation?

b. The Importance of Christ's Physicality

Julian is clear that humans are not left to themselves in this life. For "those who will be saved," there is a mercy working at all times, a mercy that is one of the primary actions of God: "For the ground of mercy is in love, and the working of mercy is our keeping in love" (48:10–11, 267). The work of mercy, an action of the entire Trinity, is intertwined most closely with the work of the second person, whose embodiment makes this work possible.

As we saw in my previous chapter, Christ's physical existence in time is the centerpiece of Julian's theology. Her revelations arise when she encounters Christ's embodied suffering

³⁰ "It was a figur and a liknes of our foule, black, dede hame which our faire, bright, blessed lord bare for our sinne" (10:29–30, 159). Following the guidance of Watson and Jenkins and the MED, I have translated "hame" as "skin." Colledge and Walsh translate this passage: "It symbolized and resembled our foul, black death, which our fair, bright, blessed Lord bore for our sins" (C&W, *Showings*, 194), which loses the emphasis on physicality which is an important dimension of Julian's insight here. Watson and Jenkins note that "hame" was "often used of skin that is sloughed" and that its use here anticipates Julian's reference in the next sentence to "the holy vernacle," which, according to legend, was the cloth used by St. Veronica to wipe the sweat from Christ's face as he suffered before his death. The cloth was reputed to have retained an image of Christ's face: "It made me to think of the holy vernacle of Rome, which he protrude with his own blessed face when he was in his hard passion, willfully going to his death, and often changing of color" (10:30–32, 159). This context lends further support to the translation of "hame" as "skin" rather than Colledge and Walsh's "death."

within the context of her own. In her *exemplum* of the lord and the servant, Julian understands the servant to represent both Christ and all humanity (51:179–80, 283). When God created humankind and "oned" humankind to Godself,³¹ this connection not only bound the godly will in human substance to God, it created an unbreakable bond between Christ and humankind, so that "when Adam fell, God's son fell. Because of the perfect oneing which was made in heaven, God's son could not be separated from Adam, for by Adam I understand all humankind" (51:185–87, 283). Christ is the source of humanity, "the ground and head of this fair kind out of whom we are all come, in whom we are all enclosed, into whom we shall all go" (53:26–27, 295). Christ, in Mary's womb, is "knit" to a human body and made sensual: "he took our sensual soul and enclosed us all in himself, joining our sensual soul and our substance, in which joining he was perfect man" (57:35–38, 305). Christ unites substance and sensuality, restoring their relationship, a relationship that encompasses the entirety of human experience in this life.

Julian's vision in the tenth revelation emphasizes the importance of Christ's physicality in reintegrating human souls, and again, the changes between *A Vision* and *A Revelation* reinforce this emphasis. In *A Vision*, Christ looks into his side and says, "Look how I loved you." In this shorter text, Julian interprets Christ to be saying, "My child, if you cannot contemplate my divinity, see here how I allowed my side to be opened and my heart to be cloven in two and let out all the blood and water that was therein. And this is a delight to me, and I desire that it be a delight for you also" (section 13:2–5, 89). Here, Christ offers the vision of his side as a substitute for a vision of his divinity. He offers the wounding of his body as a sign of his love.

³¹ "And furthermore, he desires we know that this dearworthy soul [of Christ] was preciously knit to God in the making. Which knot is so subtle and so mighty that it is oned into God, in which oneing it is made endlessly holy. Furthermore, he desires we know that all the souls that shall be saved in heaven without end are knit into this knot, and oned in this oneing, and made holy in this holiness" (53:49–54, 295). Denise Baker explains that "subtle" here means both "cleverly made and difficult to understand" (Baker, *Showings*, 84 n7).

In *A Revelation*, Julian's development of the vision opens up a space in which Christ's body can be understood as more than sign. In A Vision, Christ's looking down at his side and his words, "Look how I loved you" flow together in a single moment. In A Revelation, Julian tells us that as Christ looks into his side with joy, he draws her understanding into his side through the wound. The vision is no longer one of external observation but one of embrace. Julian's understanding enters Christ's body and sees "a fair, delectable place, and large enough for all mankind that shall be saved to rest in peace and in love" (24:3–5, 201). Unlike the short text, in which the vision of Christ's wound is a substitute for a vision of his divinity, in A Revelation, Julian believes she is understanding, in part, Christ's divinity and the Trinity as she enters his side and gazes on a space in which humankind can rest: "And with this sweet enjoying he showed to my understanding, in part, the blessed godhead, to the extent that he would at that time, strengthening my poor soul to understand what may be said: that is to mean, the endless love that was without beginning, and is, and shall be ever" (24:7–10, 201).³² Only after lingering in this moment of vision and comprehension does Julian hear Christ's words, "Look how I loved you" (24:11, 203).³³

Where in *A Vision*, Julian understands Christ's words to be explaining how his willingness to accept the wounding of his flesh is evidence of his love, here she understands them to be attributing greater significance to Christ's body: "My darling, behold and see your lord, your God, who is your maker and your endless joy. See your own brother, your savior. My

³² I have resisted translating "enjoyeng" as "rejoicing," as both Colledge and Walsh and Spearing do, to suggest that "enjoy" here and elsewhere in Julian's writing retains the etymological inheritance of "en" as "making," so that to "enjoy" is to create joy or make joy possible rather than to celebrate. My thanks to Margaret Mohrmann for this observation.

³³ Watson and Jenkins note that only the Paris manuscript of *A Revelation* reads "love" in the present tense. Westminster, Sloane, and the single surviving manuscript of *A Vision* (Additional) all read "loved." The line is repeated twice more in chapter 24 of *A Revelation*. Sloane retains "loved" in each instance, while Paris agrees with Sloane only in the final instance. I have followed Watson and Jenkins in my use of the past tense for each occurrence.

child, behold and see what delight and bliss I have in your salvation, and for my love enjoy with me" (24:12–14, 203). Christ's body is the site of God's ongoing love, without beginning or end. Christ's body is God the creator. Christ's body is humankind's endless joy and salvation. Comparing short and long text, we can see that Julian is placing far greater theological emphasis on the physicality of Christ and its role in salvation. Her development of God's motherhood, also found only in *A Revelation* and discussed more fully in chapter 3, can then likewise be understood not primarily as an attempt to feminize God but rather an attempt to stress the centrality of God's physicality in the drama of human salvation.

In stressing the importance of God's physicality, Julian connects divine and human physicality at the center of this drama. Through the *exemplum* of the lord and the servant, Christ's suffering and human suffering are inseparable. Christ, the servant, "falls" into human nature/flesh and immediately feels the "deadly pains" (51:239, 285) that afflict the servant who is also all humankind (51:88–89, 279). Julian recalls the eighth revelation, in which her body was "full of the feeling and recollection of Christ's passion and his dying" (55:44–45, 301). She "felt no pain except for Christ's pains" and thought that her "pains surpassed any bodily death" (17:43–46, 183). The experience of suffering blurs the distinction between Julian's body and Christ's body. Drawing human sensuality—that is, everything in the individual that participates in and is vulnerable to the changeability of time—into the center of divine action, stressing that this sensuality suffers from but is not the source of sin, Julian elevates the significance of human sensuality from that which must be endured for a time to that which is an essential dimension of human reunion with God.³⁴ In doing so, she acknowledges the seriousness of sin's pain and the severity of human suffering without conceding their hopelessness.

³⁴ As Janet Martin Soskice observes, in Julian's thought, "Our human bodies, once mapped on Christ's human body, are not obstacles to salvation, but its very means." Janet Martin Soskice, *Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and*

c. Julian's Concern With Suffering

David Aers and Lynn Staley argue that attending to the social and political context of the late 14th century is essential to understanding the choices that authors, including Julian, were making and the strategies they were employing as they composed their texts.³⁵ Staley, for example, suggests that Julian's development of a non-oppositional and loving relationship between the lord and the servant in the fourteenth revelation and her conflation of the servant as both Adam and Christ (thus complicating and challenging the definition of what it means to be a servant) serves as both contrast to and critique of the strict, at times violent, reassertion of social hierarchy and order that characterized late 14th century England. Staley writes, "We cannot ignore that Julian chose to add this long section about a Lord and a Servant, and to blur the lines of distinction between lordship and servantship, at a time when almost every major figure in England was discussing lords and servants in radically different terms."³⁶

Although a careful consideration of Julian's political and social context is beyond the scope of this project, even a brief examination of late 14th century England reveals that suffering was a widespread, particularly acute reality of daily life. Although scholars continue to debate the precise timing of Julian's writing both *A Vision* and *A Revelation*,³⁷ the composition of both certainly followed in the wake of a series of outbreaks of the plague in England that began in 1348.³⁸ Widespread deaths unsettled the social order. A series of infections decimated the cattle

Religious Language (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 142. I resist, however, the suggestion that sensuality in Julian's thought can be equated with the human body—sensuality encompasses all aspects of human existence that are subject to change in this life.

³⁵ David Aers and Lynn Staley, *The Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics, and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

³⁶ Lynn Staley, "Julian of Norwich and the Late Fourteenth-Century Crisis of Authority," *The Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics, and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture*, David Aers and Lynn Staley (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 164.

³⁷ For a discussion of the dating of Julian's texts, see chapter 3.

³⁸ Nuth, *Wisdom's Daughter*, 198 n9. See also May McKisack, *The Fourteenth Century: 1307–1399* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 328–42.

population. Poor harvests only intensified the suffering.³⁹ By 1369, peasants began to revolt against the oppressive controls of landowners and clergy. Poor laborers, long attached to the land, began wandering, looking for work. Those who could exercise political and social power, including clerical authorities, sought to reestablish control and order, often by whatever means necessary.⁴⁰

One of the most prominent enforcers in Norwich during Julian's time was her bishop,

Lord Henry Despenser, widely known for his militaristic fervor. During the peasant rising of

1381, Despenser was known to have killed rebels himself in his efforts to end the revolt against

the Abbot of Peterborough.⁴¹ Julian wrote, reflected, prayed, and counseled those in need⁴²

within this deeply unsettled social context. Awareness of this context can help illuminate one of

Julian's more challenging passages on suffering and clarify why her concern for physicality has

such import for her thought on sin.

In chapter 28 in the eighth revelation Julian tells her readers that God

enjoys the tribulations of his servants with pity and compassion. And to each person whom he loves, in order to bring them to God's joy, God lays on them something that in God's sight is no cause for being despised, something for which they are abused and despised in this world, scorned and raped and cast out. And he does this to prevent the damage they might receive from the pomp and the pride and the vainglory of this wretched life, and to make their way ready to come to heaven and lift them up in bliss without end everlasting. $(28:9-15:213)^{43}$

⁴³ I am indebted to Spearing's translation here, as well as to Watson & Jenkins's notes on the text. Neither Spearing nor Colledge & Walsh retain Julian's use of the term "rape." Spearing translates it as "violently treated," while Colledge & Walsh translate it as "mocked." Watson & Jenkins note that "raped" means literally "snatched" and that

³⁹ Jantzen, *Mystic and Theologian*, 8–9.

⁴⁰ Staley, "Crisis of Authority," 152.

⁴¹ Ibid., 153–4.

⁴² Watson and Jenkins cite the testamentary evidence as proof of Julian's "wide (and lofty) social and religious connections." At least four surviving wills from the late 14th and early 15th centuries include bequests for Julian (W&J, 5). In their earlier critical edition, Colledge and Walsh cite Margery Kempe's account of her extended conversations with Julian as "more significant than these sporadic records of bequests" as telling us more about Julian's contacts with others. *A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich*, ed. Edmund Colledge O.S.A. and James Walsh S.J. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978), 35–38 (hereafter C&W). See also Jantzen, *Mystic and Theologian*, 28–48.

Modern sensibilities recoil at the thought of an apparently sadistic God who enjoys and inflicts human suffering, but if we trace the path of Julian's thought carefully through the chapter, keeping in mind Lynn Staley's argument that Julian is "profoundly and courageously polemical,"⁴⁴ we can discern a larger pattern that reveals a different, more complex relation between God and suffering.

Chapter 28 opens with Julian's insight that Christ has compassion on her and her evencristen because of sin. With this realization, Julian is "filled with compassion for all my evencristen. For full well he loves people who will be saved: that is to say, God's servants" (28:2–3, 211). God's love for her evencristen fills Julian likewise with love for them. The exegesis that follows begins firmly within the context of God's love and the action of this love on Julian and her evencristen.

The following sentence appears to digress from the vision into what Watson and Jenkins suggest is a prophecy about the fate of the church: "Holy church shall be shaken in sorrow and anguish and tribulation in this world as men shake a cloth in the wind" (28:4–5, 211).⁴⁵ If we attend to the close proximity of Julian's previous references to God's servants, her "evencristen," we can, I argue, read this "prophecy" with a slightly different interpretation. Julian is less likely commenting here on the state of the institution that is the church and more likely expressing concern for those who participate in the body of Christ, those who will be saved. In the following lines, quoted above, she tells us that "our lord enjoys the tribulations of his servants with pity and

[&]quot;the word can already refer to sexual assault in Middle English" (W&J, 212), so I have chosen to retain Julian's use of the term.

⁴⁴ Staley, "Crisis of Authority," 110.

⁴⁵ Watson and Jenkins describe these lines as "a prophecy that may refer to the church's usual state of struggle but could also predict a coming ordeal: perhaps the ordeal precipitated by the coming of the Antichrist that is imagined at the end of *Piers Plowman* and that was ever more widely expected in the late fourteenth century, as the papal schism continued" (W&J, 210). Note also that Watson and Jenkins break Julian's text at the end of this sentence with a new paragraph, while Colledge and Walsh continue the sentence in their modern English translation: "…as men shake a cloth in the wind; and in this matter our Lord answered, revealing in this way: Ah, I shall turn this into a great thing, of endless honour and everlasting joy, in heaven" (C&W, *Showings*, 226).

compassion." The repetition of "tribulation" here echoes the previous reference to the "sorrow, anguish, and tribulation" that "holy church" will experience in this world. Julian's references in this passage to "my evencristen," "people that shall be saved," "God's servants," and "holy church" appear to be interchangeable. Holy church, my evencristen, God's servants, and those who will be saved are all to be shaken in this world. The image of a man shaking a cloth in the wind suggests a sense of complete powerlessness when one is the cloth being shaken. It also suggests two parties: the one who shakes and the one who is shaken. Those who are shaken are those who do not have the power in this world to control forces of violence, whether it is the unstoppable destruction of a plague or the overwhelming force of an army such as that led by Henry Despenser, bishop of Norwich.

When we consider the sense of powerlessness that many of Julian's evencristen would have encountered in their suffering, her words take on a different meaning. God reveals to Julian that he will make of this suffering "a great thing, of endless worship and everlasting joy, in heaven." It is within this context that God "enjoys" the suffering of God's servants:

Holy church will be shaken in sorrow and anguish and tribulation in this world as men shake a cloth in the wind.

And as to this our lord answered, revealing in this way: "Ah, I shall turn this into a great thing of endless worship and everlasting joy in heaven." Yes, I saw even as much as this: that our lord enjoys the tribulations of his servants with pity and compassion. (28:4–10, 211)

Veronica Mary Rolf understands this passage to be saying that from God's perspective, the suffering of the powerless has already been turned to endless joy in heaven, so he "enjoys" their suffering with pity and compassion.⁴⁶ When we recall that the prefix "en-" means to put into or

⁴⁶ "He knows within our pain the glory that will certainly come of it; in the midst of our great mourning and sorrow, he anticipates the wiping away of every tear and the great reward. This is what God in eternity *enjoys*" (emphasis original). Veronica Mary Rolf, *Julian's Gospel: Illuminating the Life & Revelations of Julian of Norwich* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 389.

cause to be, "en-joy" can be understood less as celebrating or rejoicing and more as causing joy. When God "enjoys" human suffering, he is infusing it with joy.⁴⁷

This passage can also be read as a social criticism of her times. Julian says that God "lays" something on God's servants "that in God's sight is no cause for being despised, something for which they are abused and despised in this world, scorned and raped and cast out." He does so, Julian tells us, "to prevent the damage they might receive from the pomp and the pride and the vainglory of this wretched life" (28:10–14, 213). As Julian recognizes, those who are scorned and raped and cast out in this life are least likely to be consumed by pomp and pride and vainglory. Her words can be read not only as a pastoral comfort to the powerless who find themselves beaten and abused in this world, but also as a subtle criticism of the powerful. Just as Lynn Staley has argued that the lord and the servant *exemplum* can be read as a veiled but nonetheless searing criticism of the values of Julian's day, we can read this passage in chapter 28 in a similar vein. When Julian argues that those who are scorned and despised suffer so that they will be broken from their attachments to the pomp and pride of this life, she implies that those who are not so broken, those who are deeply attached to their earthly power and pride (perhaps including her bishop?) will have to be broken from those attachments before they can be included in the endless joy in heaven.⁴⁸

d. Christ's Compassionate Embrace

In addition to criticizing the socially powerful and reassuring those who suffer that God will transform that suffering into joy, Julian's interpretation of her vision situates human sin and suffering within the context of Christ's compassion: "Christ has compassion on us because of

⁴⁷ See also note 32 in this chapter.

⁴⁸ Commenting on this passage, Jantzen reaches a similar conclusion: "Though [Julian] does not make the connection explicit, it is plausible to suppose that the sin she has most in mind at this juncture is the 'pomp and pride and vainglory' that she has just been considering, and that some of the chief offenders are those who call themselves after Christ's name" (Jantzen, *Mystic and Theologian*, 97).

sin" (28:1, 211). Christ's compassion is inseparable from his assumption of human physicality. Christ's "love-longing" thirst for humankind (31:15, 219) leads him to choose to become vulnerable with humankind: "And I, beholding all this by his grace, saw that the love in him was so strong which he has to our souls that willfully he chose it with great desire, and mildly he suffered it with great joy" (20:23–25, 191). His body becomes the vessel that contains and carries those who will be saved into heaven. He is "knit" to human sensuality and human sensuality is thereby knit to him. All human suffering is drawn into Christ's suffering and Christ's compassion.

Julian is not suggesting that those who suffer should accept their suffering meekly because it is their place in the world. Instead she is acknowledging that suffering is a reality in human life. Those who will be saved will be shaken violently like a cloth in the wind and their hope rests in God who will turn that suffering to joy and glory. This transformation is possible only because of "the worshipful union…made by God between the soul and the body" (55:36–37, 299). Because of this union, human suffering is situated within a larger context, and human compassion likewise participates in Christ's compassion: "And then I saw that each kind compassion that man has for his evencristen with charity, it is Christ in him" (28:18, 213).

Because of sin, Christ embraces humankind in compassion, an embrace that is made possible through Christ's assumption of human sensuality. In receiving this compassion, Julian says, she and her evencristen are filled with compassion for one another and comforted in their pain. Ultimately what contextualizes the pain of sin in Julian's theology, what offers comfort, is God's response to the human suffering that results from sin: pity and compassion and movement toward humankind in the form of the embodied Christ. As enormous and overwhelming as human suffering is, God's loving care is greater: "By his sufferance we fall, and in his blessed love, with his might and his wisdom, we are kept. And by mercy and grace we are raised to manifold more joys" (35:25–37, 231).

The connection between divine physicality and human physicality elevates not only the importance and value of the human body as part of this physicality/sensuality, it also intensifies Julian's focus on the seriousness of sin and the pain it inflicts on humans. Suffering is not something one learns to rise above or ignore. Suffering is something one endures through the grace of God in the company of God. It seems plausible that in Julian's time, in the midst of social upheaval, of the constant threat of losing those one loved, of forces beyond one's control, it was reassuring to know that God "beholds sin as sorrow and pain to his lovers" (39:29, 241), to know that even despite the ways in which their own sins contribute to the pain, Christ "desires that we know that all shall be turned to our worship and to profit by the virtue of his passion. And that we know we suffer not at all alone, but with him" (28:22–24, 213).

In the previous chapter, I argued that Julian incorporates maternal imagery of God toward two ends. One is to emphasize an intimacy between divine and human by emphasizing God's physicality. In this section, I have shown how Julian's emphasis on physicality is essential to her discussion of sin. It allows her to situate sin within the context of God's loving embrace, an embrace made possible by the integration of the divine with human sensuality. God becomes sensual, becomes vulnerable in order that human sensuality might be drawn into participation with the divine. I turn now to what I argue is Julian's other motivation for incorporating maternal imagery into her theology of the Trinity: her desire to emphasize the unlikeness of God to human. In the following section, I demonstrate how critical this unlikeness is to Julian's discussion of sin.

3. Knowledge of Sin and the Unlikeness of God

In the previous chapter, I argued that Julian is particularly careful to draw a clear distinction between divine and human perspectives and knowledge and that she incorporates gender into her discussion of God and the Trinity creatively to emphasize God's unlikeness to humans. Emphasizing the distinction between divine and human perspectives is not unique to Julian's thought, but her development of this distinction reflects a deep concern for the dangerous consequences of human judgment that forgets its own blindness. I argue in this section that Julian's concern is greatest with regard to human judgments about sin.

a. Awareness of Sin

Knowledge of sin is a central component of God's revelations to Julian and the theology she develops in response. Joan Nuth describes Julian's discussion of sin as "the most original area of her theological reflections."⁴⁹ When God reveals to Julian that she will sin, and by this Julian understands that God is revealing that all humans will sin ("But by all the gracious comfort that followed, as you will see, I was taught to take it as including all my evencristen, all in general and nothing in particular. Though our lord showed me that I should sin, by me alone is understood all" [37:4–7, 235]), Julian is overcome by the joy of beholding God and does not at first pay attention to God's revelation that humans will sin: "God brought to my mind that I should sin. And for the pleasure I felt in beholding him, I did not attend readily to that showing" (37:1–3, 235). God, however, refuses to show or teach her anything further until she attends.

Much later in *A Revelation*, Julian recalls how God waited patiently for her to focus on the revelation. This knowledge that humans will sin, she realizes, has an essential function: "And by this I was taught, though we may be lifted high into contemplation by the special gift of

⁴⁹ Nuth, *Wisdom's Daughter*, 119.

our lord, yet we must have knowledge and sight of our sin and our feebleness. For without this knowledge, we may not have true meekness, and without this we may not be safe" (78:29–33, 369). Awareness of sin is a necessary step in God's healing work. It helps the individual cultivate the meekness and "reverent dread" that are essential qualities of the proper human orientation toward God: "For of all things, beholding and loving the maker makes the soul to seem least in its own sight, and most fills it with reverent dread and true meekness, and with plenty of charity toward its evencristen" (6:55–58, 145). Elsewhere, Julian elaborates on this true meekness that she and her evencristen gain when God shows them their sin:

And then we sorrow and mourn discreetly, turning ourselves to beholding his mercy, clinging to his love and to his goodness, seeing that he is our medicine, knowing that we do nothing but sin. And thus by the meekness that we gain as we see our sin—faithfully knowing his everlasting love, thanking him and praising him—we please him. (82:11–15, 375)

True meekness, or "humility" as it is often translated, is not a condition of self-abasement but rather a grateful awareness that as the individual falls—which Julian understands to be a regular occurrence of human living—she is embraced, loved, and kept safe by God, that God is continually working a goodness in her that resists sin and draws her closer to eternal union with God. Falling and coming to see one's falling in light of God's love is part of the spiritual birthing ("ghostly forthbringing") Julian describes toward the end of the fourteenth revelation: "For we need to fall and we need to see our falling. For if we did not fall, we should not know how feeble and how wretched we are of ourselves, nor should we know so fully the marvelous love of our maker" (61:15–18, 315).

b. Misperceptions of the Self in Sin

Knowledge of sin is only part of the knowledge that humans need. In the sixteenth revelation, as Julian elaborates on the ways in which she saw sin in the revelations, she

summarizes the "three ways of knowing" that properly belong to humans. First, they need to know God. Second, they need to know themselves as God created them and continues to see them in grace. Third, subsequent to the two previous kinds of knowledge, humans need to know themselves as they are with regard to their sin and feebleness (72:43–47, 349). Only within the larger context of God and God's loving regard for humankind do humans see themselves as they are if left to themselves, trapped in their sinfulness and feebleness.

There are two important points to note with regard to knowledge of sin in Julian's theology. First, as I argued earlier in this chapter, it is a knowledge that is situated always within an awareness of God's love and an assurance that humans are kept securely by God throughout all their suffering. Second, while human judgment about sin is a kind of truth for Julian, it is not the higher truth. The higher truth about sin, seeing sin truly, comes entirely from God. The blindness that afflicts humans as a result of their falling impedes their ability to know in any of the "three ways of knowing" that Julian argues are essential. She and her evencristen cannot even begin to long for God until God first acts upon them: "For we are now so blind and so unwise that we can never seek God until that time when he of his goodness shows himself to us" (10:10–12, 159). The inability to see God is the reason an individual suffers in this life, "For if he saw God continually, he would have no mischievous feelings, nor any kind of impulse or sorrow that inclines him to sin" (47:16–17, 265).

The individual's inability to see God or to see herself as God sees her means that she is also unable to see sin accurately. The inconstancy of human sensuality cannot, of itself, sustain its sight of God and so it "falls often into sin" (76:25–26, 363). Then external and internal forces ("the impulse" in her that "comes from the enemy" and her "own foolishness and blindness") attempt to convince her that this repeated falling makes her a wretch. Without God's action upon

her, left to herself, she understands her sinful condition in such a way that it cultivates a "false dread of her wretchedness" (76:34, 363).

Knowledge of sin is essential to spiritual growth, but it is not a knowledge Julian and her evencristen can access by themselves, whether through their reason or their feelings ("And also I saw we may not have this knowledge through ourselves" [78:33–34, 369]). Even the knowledge of sin Julian's evencristen gain from the teachings of the church is partial and, of itself, cannot draw them closer to God who is their eternal bliss.

Julian and her evencristen have a firsthand knowledge of sin prior to God's revelation of sin—they experience the pain of sin on a daily basis: "there be many deeds that we see as evil and so many harms suffered that it seems to us it would be impossible that it ever should come to a good end" (32:7–9:221). But these perceptions come from "the blind judging of humankind" (11:29:165). The suffering caused by sin is real and human judgments about that suffering only intensify the pain. Sin "beats down a man or a woman and breaks him to pieces and disgusts him in his own sight—so much so that after a time he thinks he is not worthy for anything but to sink into hell" (39:2–4:239). Sin convinces Julian and her evencristen that they deserve their suffering. It convicts them as worthless, but the conviction is a human judgment, not divine revelation. God's revelation of sin to Julian affirms the horrors and pain of sin. It acknowledges human suffering but it does so in order to assure Julian and her evencristen that even in the face of this misery and wretchedness, they are loved endlessly and "kept full securely" (40:45:245). God's revelation exposes a different kind of knowledge about sin.

c. The Function and the Limits of Human Judgments About Sin

Julian acknowledges that to some extent, human judgment, particularly as it is manifested in the rite of confession within the church, plays an important role in spiritual development. Toward the end of the thirteenth revelation, she describes the individual's experience of sin and confession:

Sin is the sharpest scourge that may strike any soul, which beats down a man or a woman and breaks him to pieces and disgusts him in his own sight—so much so that after a time he thinks he is not worthy for anything but to sink into hell—until the time when contrition takes him through the touching of the holy ghost, and turns the bitterness into hope of God's mercy. And then begin his wounds to heal and his soul to quicken, drawn into the life of holy church. The holy ghost leads him to confession, willfully to show his sins, nakedly and truly, with great sorrow and with great shame that he has so defiled the fair image of God. Then he undertakes penance for every sin, enjoined by his confessor, that is grounded in holy church by the teaching of the holy ghost. $(39:1-10, 239)^{50}$

The passage begins with the individual's self-perception. In her eyes, she believes she "is not worthy for anything but to sink into hell." Through the action of the Holy Ghost upon her, she experiences contrition and her bitterness quickly turns to hope. She is drawn into the church to confess and receive penance from her confessor. This experience is one means, Julian explains, of cultivating the "meekness" or humility that "greatly pleases God" (39:11, 241). This meekness also comes from bodily sickness, or the sorrow and shame the individual experiences when she is scorned by the world, or all the sufferings she experiences this life. Julian's argument here and throughout *A Revelation* is not that sin and suffering should be sought or glorified but rather that "full preciously our good lord keeps us, when it seems to us that we are nearly forsaken and cast away for our sin" (39:14–15, 241). The pivotal moment of the thirteenth revelation is the comforting reassurance she receives from God as she struggles to comprehend the reality of sin in human experience: "And to this our lord answered: 'I keep you full securely.' This word was said with more love and assurance of spiritual keeping than I can or may tell" (37:8–10, 235).

⁵⁰ Colledge and Walsh and Spearing both translate "willfully to show his sins" as the individual willing to reveal his sins, which Watson and Jenkins point out is in keeping with the common understanding at the time of what distinguished confession as genuine (W&J, 238). The penitent must earnestly want to reveal his sins. But I believe God is the one revealing here, not the individual; God, not humans, "show" in Julian's thought. Through confession, with an open heart, the soul begins to see its sin as God reveals it and the soul is horrified at the sight of how it defiles the image of God.

The rite of confession and penance in the church is not the sole arbiter of human sin or human worth. Julian groups the experience of confession with a series of other experiences of suffering and emphasizes the humility that comes from these experiences. Contrition is the first of three phases of transformation in the human heart, three "medicines" that heal "every sinful soul": contrition, compassion, and true longing for God (39:20–24, 241). Human judgment does not see the soul as God sees it; it does not see sin truly until God begins to reveal it, but human judgment, including the judgment of confession, prepares the heart for contrition and healing.

To say that human judgment does not see sin truly is not to say that it is false, however. The judgment or "dome" of holy church teaches Julian that she needs to know herself as a sinner, while God's judgment, revealed to Julian in her visions, is one of love that assigns no blame because of sin. Denys Turner describes these two judgments as two stories about sin: the one told by love in the revelation and the one told by sin about itself: "the one-sided narrative of sin and divine punishment *minus* what is shown to Julian in her shewings of love."⁵¹ Both stories are essential to Julian's theology and human healing. It is not a question of determining that the church's teachings are ultimately trumped by the revelation of love.⁵² In this life, not only are both stories true, as Turner puts it, "*only* both are true…Only the simultaneous telling of both is true, for neither is true unless the other is."⁵³

The two "judgments" are two different sources of human awareness, both of which Julian argues are essential to human growth in God: "And right thus our good lord wants us to accuse ourselves, willfully and truly seeing and knowing our falling and all the harms that come thereof,

⁵¹ Turner, Julian of Norwich, 99.

⁵² Abram Van Engen argues that Julian's account of the lord and servant does not reconcile "Julian's revelations with church teachings; instead, it repositions both, so that God's showings finally outweigh and outflank church doctrine." Abram Van Engen, "Shifting Perspectives: Sin and Salvation in Julian's *A Revelation of Love*," *Literature and Theology* 23.1 (2009): 1.

⁵³ Turner, Julian of Norwich, 99.

seeing and knowing that we may never restore it; and therewith, that we willfully and truly see and know his everlasting love that he has for us, and his plenteous mercy" (52:63–67, 291). Through the work of mercy, Julian and her evencristen see their sin—they recognize that they are filled with "wrath, contention and strife" (49:17, 269)—and they accuse themselves. At the same time, through grace, they are reassured of God's love, that even as they are filled with anger, even as they are fallen, "yet we are all mercifully enclosed in the mildness of God" (49:17–18, 269). These two judgments, these two ways of "beholding," are held together ("Between that one and the other is nothing at all—for it is all one love, which one blessed love has now in us a double working" [52:75–77, 293]) but they remain distinct. Holy church as well as individuals are marked by their unlikeness to God, even as they participate in God's likeness through the grace of God.

Human judgment about sin remains important in Julian's thought but only to the extent it plays a role in the larger drama of Julian and her evencristen being drawn into relationship with their loving God. Repeatedly, Julian insists that human judgment about sin has its limits and cautions against the dangers of exceeding those limits. Both human blindness and "our spiritual enemies, within and without" try to work against the faith that is affirmed through the revelations (70:24–26, 345). As we saw above, these same forces, internal and external, try to convince the individual she is a wretch and undeserving of God's love and instill in her a "false dread of her wretchedness" (76:34, 363). She forgets that "God is all love and will do all," so that when she begins to recognize her sin and to try to adhere to "the ordinances of the holy church," she is haunted by a dread that holds her back from God. She remembers her previous sins and knows she will continue to fall: "And the beholding of this makes us so sorry and so heavy that we can scarcely see any comfort. And this dread we mistake sometimes for meckness, but it is a foul

blindness and a weakness" (73:31–34, 353). Human knowledge of sin itself becomes sin when it threatens to sever the individual from her knowledge of God's love.

d. "Seeing" Sin

"Seeing" in Julian's thought is not a simple or superficial phenomenon. Nicholas Watson illustrates the range of meanings Julian attaches to this concept of "seeing," from the literal and visual to the figurative and theological. To "see" for Julian encompasses "the delicate interaction of eye and mind, of memory, thought and feeling, of God and Julian, which blossoms upwards and outwards from a single visionary moment in the text."⁵⁴ It is far more than physical observation. Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt argues that Julian's "bodily seeing" of Christ's suffering body is more than visual comprehension; "she does not 'see' simply with her eyes, but with her entire body" as her pain is drawn into and displaced by the experience of Christ's pain.⁵⁵ "Seeing" is a process of deepening comprehension made possible by God's revelation. "Seeing" sin is therefore not an objective process of being instructed or judged by other humans.⁵⁶ It is not even a matter of judging one's self. Seeing sin is a transformation of the soul, a turning of the heart as it is drawn by God into greater understanding of the ways in which the individual falls short of who and what she is created to be, the ways in which she has been damaged by sin, both the structural sin that began shaping her thoughts and ways of being before she became conscious of herself or the world, the social sin—both relational and structural—in which she continues to participate, consciously, ignorantly, thoughtlessly, or unconsciously, and the

⁵⁴ Nicholas Watson, "The Trinitarian Hermeneutic in Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Love*," in *Julian of Norwich: A Book of Essays*, ed. Sandra J. McEntire (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998), 69.

⁵⁵ Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, *Julian of Norwich and the Mystical Body Politic of Christ* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 45–46.

⁵⁶ Although, as I discuss below, human judgment, both as it is manifested in the church's sacrament of confession and in the individual's feelings that she is sinful, plays an important role in the spiritual process as Julian understands it.

personal sin that is both her condition of brokenness and her actions arising from that brokenness.

There is an eschatological suspense in Julian's thought that acknowledges the limits of all human knowledge, particularly knowledge of sin: "For we shall truly see in heaven without end that we have grievously sinned in this life" (61:18–19, 315). God reveals human sin now for particular purposes but the fullness of sin will not be known until Julian and her evencristen are united with God in heaven. The function of human talk about sin, then, is forever qualified. The experience and awareness of sin serve a particular purpose: to draw human consciousness back to the source of human existence and salvation that is God's love. The pain of sin "purges and makes us to know ourselves and ask for mercy" (27:24–25, 211). "And thus by this meek knowing, through contrition and grace, we shall be broken from all that is not our lord; and then shall our blessed savior perfectly heal us and one us to him" (78:19–22, 367).

Although Julian at times describes the awareness of sin as "the judgment of holy church" (45:15, 261) and "man's judgment" (45:2–3, 259) or "the beholding of man" (52:58, 291), she and her evencristen do not control the process of discerning sin, either as action or condition. In Julian's theology, awareness of sin, the capacity to see one's sinful condition, is not the product of human claims about sin. She and her evencristen not only do not know themselves in this life except by faith (46:1–2, 261), they do not know their own sin. When they do come to see their sin, it is not because other humans name it as such. Julian stresses several times that whatever knowledge of sin is possible and profitable in this life, it does not include knowledge of the sins of others: "For beholding the sin of other men, it makes as it were a thick mist before the eye of the soul, and we may not for that time see the fairness of God" (76:12–13, 363). Through the revelations, Julian learns that she should not be concerned to see the sins of others, except to the

extent doing so enables her to "comfort or help my evencristen" (79:7–8, 369). She and her evencristen do not see sin through human efforts, their own or those of others; they see sin as a result of God's loving action on them. They see it in light of the knowledge that they are both God's dwelling place and themselves enclosed in God.⁵⁷

Knowledge of God's love does not erase sin or make it inconsequential; it makes knowledge of sin possible. It draws the pain of sin to the surface as Julian and her evencristen become aware that "of ourselves we are nothing but sin and wretchedness" (78:16–17, 367). The revelation of sin is a byproduct of the human soul's longing for God and God's response to that longing. God's mercy and grace touch the human soul and allow it to see sin: "Our lord of his mercy shows us our sin and our feebleness by the sweet gracious light of himself. For our sin is so foul and so horrible that he of his courtesy will not show it to us but by the light of his mercy" (78:1–3, 367).

Human knowledge of sin, like all human knowledge in Julian's theology, is partial. Julian develops the distinction between God and human judgment into a powerful, theologically grounded limit on the power of human claims about sin. Such a limit is an important response to the concerns I raised in chapter 1 about the ways in which claims about sin can be manipulated to reinforce oppression and injustice. Feminists are rightly critical of models of sin that define sin exclusively in terms of pride, but in the realm of talking about sin itself, particularly the sins of others, Julian reminds us that a humble awareness of the limits of human knowledge is essential. While it is necessary work in this life to develop frameworks for holding ourselves and others accountable to social standards and norms, to equate a particular set of social norms with 'sin' is to presume that the human and divine perspective are one. Julian reminds us of our unlikeness to

 $^{^{57}}$ "The place that Jesus takes in our soul he shall never leave it without end, as to my sight, for in us is his homeliest home and his endless dwelling" (68:12–13, 337).

God and our inability to know our sin or those of others with any confidence. Our reflections on sin can inform the work of human judgment, but they remain distinct from the judgments of God.

4. The Collective Dimensions of Sin

The collective or social dimensions of Julian's theology with regard to sin is an important final point to emphasize in light of my feminist commitments, particularly given the concerns feminists have raised about overly individualistic conceptions of sin in the Christian tradition. In this section, I highlight the ways in which Julian's understanding of the self in sin is inseparable from her understanding of humans as profoundly relational. She provides a model for thinking about the condition of sin as something that disrupts and deforms both the individual *and* the network of human relations that form communities and societies.

F. C. Bauerschmidt observes that Julian's widespread popularity today is due, at least in part, to her classification as a "mystic" which implies she offers readers "a universal availability" free of particular religious doctrines or historical particularity. This "mystical" Julian offers a guide to individual spiritual reflection and growth focused primarily on an inward journey of self-exploration.⁵⁸ Such a reading of Julian, Bauerschmidt argues, "depoliticizes" her theology and misunderstands its main task, which is not to cultivate an inner individual spiritual piety for its own sake but rather 'to imagine and commend a specific form of human *social* existence, characterized by a compassion that mirrors in history the divine sociality of Father, Son and Spirit."⁵⁹ What we find in Julian is not a concern for "individual redemption" but rather the

⁵⁸ F. C. Bauerschmidt, "Julian of Norwich—Incorporated," *Modern Theology* 13.1 (1997): 75–100. Bauerschmidt quotes from Karen Armstrong's discussion of Julian to illustrate his point: "In recent years people have found the doctrines of Christianity increasingly difficult, but a visionary like Julian penetrates the cerebral crust of the religious experience, which has little to do with logic and reason, to reach its core" (Karen Armstrong, *Voices of God: Four Medieval Mystics and Their Writings* [New York: Bantam Books, 1994], 177). Bauerschmidt responds: "The intellectual apprehension of doctrine is not, for Julian, a 'crust' over religious experience; rather it is a knife she wields to prune and probe her revelation" (81).

⁵⁹ Bauerschmidt, "Julian of Norwich—Incorporated," 76, emphasis added.

possibility, established by Christ, "of restored communion: the communion of human beings with God and a communion of human begins with each other."⁶⁰ As Bauerschmidt demonstrates both here and in his later work on Julian, Julian's interpretive task is deeply concerned with the social dimension of human existence and its collective "incorporation into the suffering and generative body of Christ."⁶¹ Throughout A Revelation, Julian attends to both the individual and the collective in her discussions of sin, demonstrating an awareness of the interconnected fractures that radiate through human bodies and human communities as the result of sin. As Grace Jantzen observes, Julian is acutely aware that "the fracture at the heart of humankind is a fracture that is contributed to by everyone and that has consequences for everyone."62

Julian stresses repeatedly that the topics she takes up throughout A Revelation, including sin and salvation, are not individualistic concerns. While her experience is intensely personal, it is not meant for her alone but the comfort of all her evencristen. "All that I say about myself," she writes at the end of the first revelation, "I mean to be interpreted as referring to all my evencristen, for I have learned in the spiritual showing of our lord God that he means it to be understood this way" (8:31-32, 153). She cultivates a tension throughout A Revelation between the personal and the collective. The personal nature of her revelation grounds it in the particular, in the concrete realities of a suffering female body, yet Julian continually gestures expansively

⁶⁰ Ibid., 82.

⁶¹ Ibid., 94. In his more recent work, Julian of Norwich and the Mystical Body Politic of Christ, Bauerschmidt develops this social/political reading of Julian's work further, arguing that Julian offers a new way of "imagining the political" through her development of an "organizing mythos" that is an alternative to "the metaphysics of order" found in feudalism or "the metaphysics of freedom" found in modernity: the reciprocal exchange of self-giving that is exemplified in the Trinity and "communicated to creatures through the 'forth spredyng [indwelling]' (60:2) of that trinitarian life in the economy of salvation" (Bauerschmidt, Julian of Norwich, 185). Michael Hanby's work with Augustine's On the Trinity offers a strikingly similar model. Hanby argues that Augustine understands that creation emerges from the eternal, mutually giving relationship between the Father and the Son. Because of sin, humans are outside this relationship, unable to participate. "Christ's 'function'," Hanby writes, "is one whereby he reincorporates an estranged creation into the trinitarian life of God." Christ is the mediator who makes human participation in the reciprocal self-giving of the Trinity possible. Michael Hanby, Augustine and Modernity (London: Routledge, 2003), 28. ⁶² Jantzen, *Mystic and Theologian*, 171.

toward those around her, drawing them into the experience of receiving and interpreting God's message,⁶³ making clear that the message has implications not only for Julian but for them all, both their relation with God and their relations with one another.

Julian understands the interpretation of God's revelations as both an individual and an ongoing collective interpretive act, guided by God's love. "This showing was given, as to my understanding, to teach our soul wisely to cling to the goodness of God," she writes. The revelations are a gift to Julian *and* her evencristen and the ongoing work to understand them teaches the soul. "This book is begun by God's gift and grace," Julian writes in the final chapter of *A Revelation*, "but it is not yet performed, as to my sight…For truly I saw and understood in our lord's meaning that he showed it for he will have it known more than it is. In which knowing he will give us grace to love him and cling to him" (86:1–7, 379). Watson and Jenkins note that in this passage Julian "shifts responsibility from writer to readers to continue to 'perform' *A Revelation* until it is done," that is, until God's final deeds are done. The "performance" of *A Revelation* that Julian has modeled is work that continues in the life of every evencristen, work that includes discerning what it means to be sinful, vulnerable, suffering creatures who are loved by God.

The collective nature of *A Revelation*'s interpretation and performance reflects its concern for solidarity. Denys Turner writes, "Julian's text itself enacts what it is about: it is addressed as a form of solidarity in love to her evencristen just as it is *about* that solidarity in love."⁶⁴ As early as the first revelation, Julian connects the personal encounter with God to love for others: "For of all things, contemplating and loving the maker makes the soul to seem least in

⁶³ "But the spiritual sight I cannot and may not show it as openly or as fully as I would. But I trust in our lord God almighty that he shall, of his goodness and for your love, make you receive it more spiritually and more sweetly than I can or may tell it" (9:25–28, 157).

⁶⁴ Turner, Julian of Norwich, 74.

its own sight, and most fills it with reverent dread and true meekness, and with plenty of charity toward its evencristen" (6:55–58, 145). The love that connects the soul to God embraces all those who will be saved, "for we are all one in love" (9:3–4, 153)." Encountering the compassion that Christ has for humans because of sin, Julian's soul is filled with compassion for all her evencristen (28:3, 211). *A Revelation* teaches that contemplating the condition of sin, knowing it to be a condition that infects all humankind, is meant to cultivate compassion and solidarity. Reflecting on sin, asking for God's forgiveness, feeling overwhelmed by God's love and responding to love with love is not a self-absorbed exercise in Julian's theology—the individual is turned back toward creation, filled with love and compassion for others.

When Julian regards her sinful existence, she is aware of herself as individual *and* as part of a larger community, a larger drama. Her experience of sin consists of both dimensions personal and collective—so that she is neither responsible for all sin and suffering nor separate from any of it. The "breaking and the healing" that is the human experience of sin and salvation unites humankind in charity; through it, God reminds him "who is highest and nearest with God" that he is "sinful and needy" and comforts "the least and lowest of those who shall be saved...with him who is highest" (78:23–26, 367). Again, Julian cultivates a tension that cannot be resolved. Humans experience the pain of sin as individuals *and* as a miasma of suffering that infuses the collective body in ways that cannot be neatly parsed. To be in right relations, to be "blissfully safe in the possession of our endless joy," means to be not only in blissful union with God but also to be "loving and peaceful with ourselves and our evencristen and with all that God loves, as pleases God to love" (49:28–31, 271).

Julian's attention to her evencristen throughout *A Revelation*, her emphasis on human solidarity, and her awareness of sin as both an individual and collective experience all point to

the fundamental reality that in Julian's theology, as feminist and womanist theologians have observed repeatedly since, sin itself is relational. More precisely, sin is a disruption of relations because it damages the individual's capacity for relation with God, others, and self. Sin as condition is a loss of the capacity to participate in and receive love, and love is the essence of human creation, existence, and salvation. "For I saw that God began never to love mankind" (53:21, 295), Julian writes. God's love for humankind has no beginning or end. "For before he made us he loved us, and when we were made we loved him" (53:30, 295). "Our life is all grounded and rooted in love, and without love we may not live" (49:4–5, 269). Sin disrupts this love, separating humankind's consciousness from God. The servant who has fallen can no longer look upon his loving lord, even though the lord remains nearby and never ceases to love the servant. The servant is "blinded in his reason and stunned in his mind to such an extent that he [has] almost forgotten his own love" (51:22–23, 275). Julian's understanding of salvation is, as Bauerschmidt argues, profoundly social, the restoration of "the communion of human beings with God and a communion of human begins with each other,"⁶⁵ and her understanding of sin is likewise social, even as it pays close attention to the experience of the self in sin.

Sin in Julian's thought is less about the disobedient acts of individuals and more about the tragic, senseless, collective loss of the capacity for love, a loss that results in diminished, disrupted existence for communities and individuals. The self in sin is cut off from God, from others, from her truest self as she was created to be. A discussion of sin that begins with Julian's orientation may attend closely to particular, embodied lives, but it does so with an awareness of the larger social context of those lives, both as it unfolds in a fallen history and as it is intended to be, made "all at one with him, and each of us with the other in true, lasting joy that is Jesus"

⁶⁵ Bauerschmidt, "Julian of Norwich—Incorporated," 82.

(71:4–5, 345). Personal sin, whether condition or act, is never considered in isolation from the social web of relations that continually works upon and is affected by the individual.

5. What Have We Gained?

Julian's thought provides a number of insights that both inform and challenge my project of considering the self in sin from a feminist perspective.

First, Julian offers a theological anthropology that does not map neatly onto the traditional oppositional binaries of male/female, soul/body, higher/lower. These ideas about the human press toward a conception of sin that likewise does not map onto men and women in gender-specific patterns. My feminist conception of personal sin is strengthened by a theological anthropology that creatively incorporates and challenges gendered assumptions about human existence. Related to this, Julian offers a soteriology that does not privilege soul/spirit over body or individual over community but enfolds both in a vision of healing and restoration of relation. To be feminist, a conception of personal sin needs a doctrine of salvation that values the body, both as physical reality (our embodied selves) and as corporate entity (the community as body of Christ); Julian's theology offers us an example of such a conception.

Next, Julian's thought on sin takes suffering seriously, so much so that it privileges the pain of sin over sin itself when contemplating its reality in human life. In her discussion of sin, Julian focuses more on the pain of sin than on defining particular actions and thoughts as sinful. As I discussed in chapter 2, a conception of sin shaped by feminist commitments maintains a focus on suffering and seeks to cultivate a compassionate response to that suffering. In turn, it requires a rigorous understanding of compassion that energizes an active response to injustice in this life. A compassionate response to the pain of sin is not satisfied with acknowledgment alone.

219

It reaches out to others in love, chastened by humility, recognizing its inadequacy, yet standing in solidarity nonetheless with those who suffer.

At the same time, Julian recognizes that no human action will ever eliminate human suffering; she believes that human vulnerability has a crucial place in God's plan. A feminist passion for justice may resist any insight that cultivates an acceptance of suffering, concerned that it, in turn, cultivates a passive acceptance of injustice and the suffering that results from it. To the contrary, holding fast to this insight as feminists committed to social justice, we are called to respond to the needs of others without presuming we are the solution. We participate in the work of identifying and trying to eliminate patterns and practices of injustice in ourselves and our society that cause others to suffer, while we ground ourselves always in our longing for God and our desire for God's healing grace and mercy to act on us and others. A feminist conception of personal sin has to wrestle with and find its place within the tension between loving action in the world and hope in God's action.

Julian's insistence that humans participate in God's likeness is the foundation for some of her more radical claims with regard to sin and how it affects the human before God. Yet she also insists on the radical contingency of all things human, most especially human judgment, as I have shown. A feminist conception of personal sin that embraces this insight does not provide a vantage point from which to denounce the actions of others as sinful. As a feminist, I endorse this prohibition in some contexts (such as Jerry Falwell's judgment that the terrorist attacks on the U.S. in September 2001 were God's punishment for the country's sin of accepting homosexuality). I am less willing to give up this righteous vantage point when it is used to denounce the racist or sexist acts of others, or to name as sin the complacent indifference of this country's privileged, and yet that is what Julian's theology indicates I must do. Resisting the temptation to judge another's sin does not leave us helpless, however; it changes our motivation. Instead of tracing patterns of responsibility out of a hunger for blame, we trace them out of concern for the pain that they cause and a desire to ease what suffering we can, to participate in God's work of healing our fragmented selves, communities, and world.

Perhaps most important, Julian situates her entire discussion of sin within a context of love. In the final chapter of *A Revelation*, Julian discloses that for years after her experience, she was mystified by what she had seen, heard, and thought. She longed in the years that followed to know what it all meant. Finally, after more than fifteen years, God answered her desire with "spiritual understanding": "What, would you know your lord's meaning in this thing? Know it well, love was his meaning" (86:13–14, 379). Julian cannot understand the revelations until she begins with love. She glimpses the truth of the Christian narrative when she begins with love. A feminist conception of sin that begins with love—God's loving creation of humankind, God's loving sustenance of human existence, human longing in love for God—understands that ideas about sin, as well as ideas about suffering, sacrifice, and humility become dangerous when unmoored from their foundation in love. A feminist conception of personal sin begins with and continually refers itself back to the idea that humans are created and continuously held in love. Reflection on sin arises out of a desire for love and a desire to be healed in one's capacity to love.

With this longing in mind, I turn now to the final goal of my project: sketching the contours of a conception of personal sin that is responsive to feminist concerns and deepens our understanding of what it means within a Christian context to participate in, suffer from, and heal in spite of the realities of sin.

Chapter 5

Toward a Feminist Conception of Personal Sin

In chapter 1, I argued that Christian feminist thought needs a conception of personal sin that does not begin with a primary focus on sin as act or acts and I suggested that a rethinking of some of the elements of the doctrine of original sin could provide such a conception. In chapter 2, I developed a set of criteria that emerge from feminist evaluations of conceptions of sin within the Christian tradition. In chapters 3 and 4, I offered a close reading of Julian of Norwich's thought on sin, which required an examination of her theological anthropology and her soteriology. In this final chapter, I take up the themes and insights that emerged from my reading of Julian, using them to trace the contours of a Christian conception of personal sin that is responsive to and advances feminist concerns and commitments. Building on Julian's insight that sin is a condition in which humans cannot experience themselves as receiving or participating in divine love, I name this condition "estrangement" and offer it as a starting point for rethinking some aspects of the doctrine of original sin.

I begin the chapter with a brief discussion of personal sin as estrangement, developing my claim that this concept of sin emerges from the encounter with divine love. Second, taking up Julian's theological anthropology of substance and sensuality, I develop it further by drawing on contemporary gender theory and queer theology to offer an anthropology that disrupts the oppositional binaries of body/soul and female/male. I show how such a disruption is essential to 1) developing a soteriology that values the body and 2) cultivating ideas about a creatively gendered God that later prove essential to my discussion of human vulnerability. Third, in this chapter I consider what it means to take seriously Julian's focus on the pain of sin as more important than describing, classifying, or judging sins. I explore how prioritizing the pain of sin allows me to address some feminist concerns about sin-talk and leads me to develop my ideas about personal sin as estrangement with an awareness of human vulnerability and the need for a particular kind of compassion. Next, I show how Julian's emphasis on the contingency of human judgment, particularly as it relates to sin, illustrates the importance of divine transcendence for feminist thought. Julian offers a model of God that is both immanent and transcendent, integrated with her model of the human that is, in turn, both elevated as the dwelling place of God and chastened not to presume divine knowledge of sin. Finally, I return to the idea that all talk of sin needs to be situated within the context of divine love. I consider how orienting a discussion of personal sin within a context of love transforms not only our motivation for reflecting on sin but also our understanding of what it means to be humans created out of, sustained by, and drawn into the love of God.

1. Personal Sin as Estrangement

In the previous chapter, I argued that Julian defines sin in terms of love. More precisely, I argued that she defines sin as an inability to recognize, receive, and participate in divine love. Her theological development of the *exemplum* of the lord and the servant offers an understanding of sin as the condition in which humans cannot "see" God's love (with "see" bearing all the rich and complex weight of Julian's development of the term). In building on Julian's insights into sin, I now want to name this inability as "estrangement" and discuss briefly how this concept could be more fully developed as a feminist conception of personal sin.

a. Focusing on Human Receptivity and Personal Sin as Condition

As I discussed in chapter 1, the doctrine of original sin suggests a helpful, even vital, distinction between sin as condition and sin as act, yet most treatments of original sin blur or even eliminate the distinction out of a desire to emphasize human responsibility for sin.

Responsibility attaches to acts, including intentions, and I have argued that this concern with responsibility moves our attention too quickly away from sin as a condition in which humans find themselves, a condition that inflicts great suffering, the contours of which emerge only in light of God's revelation of Godself through Christ. Reflecting on personal sin as a condition of estrangement and considering the ways in which this estrangement is "original" helps us resist a too-quick turn toward responsibility, which can too easily devolve into the desire to assess blame and guilt, a desire that so concerns feminist and womanist theologians.¹ More important, reflecting on estrangement as a kind of "original sin" focuses attention on human receptivity prior to any consideration of human agency.²

Paul Tillich, in his development of a systematic theology, rejects the vocabulary of "original sin" for the idea of what he also names "estrangement."³ For Tillich, estrangement is a condition ("the tragic universality of existential estrangement") of the transition from essence to existence (thus, Tillich argues for "the original fact...that the transition from essence to existence is a universal quality of finite being" rather than the original sin). To exist is to be estranged from essence, the ground of one's being, a condition marked by unbelief, hubris, and concupiscence.⁴ Sin, for Tillich, is then a personal act of turning away from that to which one belongs, i.e., God. It is the personal manifestation or expression of the tragic, universal condition of estrangement. The idea of "sin" in Tillich's thought is reserved for a particular kind of human act. The

² When I resist the quick turn to human agency by favoring a focus on human receptivity, I am not advocating human passivity. Receptivity encompasses human response and participation.

³ Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol. 2 (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 29-47.

⁴ Although Tillich's categories of essence and existence seem comparable to Julian's ideas of substance and sensuality, there are crucial differences between them. Tillich is describing a change in ontological status that is necessary for existence: we are one with essence, we fall into existence, and are thus estranged from God. Existence requires estrangement. Julian does not describe the relationship between substance and sensuality in this way. In this life, we are both substance and sensuality, even if we cannot access that substance in any conscious, controlled way. In Julian's theology, estrangement is a requirement for humans to exist. She sees sensuality—both human and divine—as essential to the work of salvation, to returning God's treasure to God—the right relation with humankind. Sensuality makes us vulnerable and changeable but it also makes it possible for God/Christ to embrace us through God's sensuality.

¹ See my discussion in chapter 1.

condition of estrangement is not sin. Again, sin and act are conflated and reflection on sin becomes reflection on human acts—parsing, cataloging, defining acts that are to be labeled "sin," presumably so they can be guarded against, rejected, and educated, reformed, and prayed away.

When we retain the idea of sin as a condition as Julian develops it (rather than trying to distinguish between this condition and the concept of sin, as Tillich does), we create a reflective space in which the receptivity of human beings, rather than their agency, shifts to the center and holds our attention. The particular understanding of sin as estrangement that I am drawing from Julian's thought emerges out of the encounter with divine love through Christ and does not begin with assumptions about human rebellion or disobedience. Sin defined as opposition, resistance, or disobedience to God depends upon adversarial models of the divine-human relation, not only focusing attention on human acts but also reinforcing the modern assumption that humans are constituted primarily through their actions. Under these adversarial models, humans either submit their actions to the control of God or they assert control themselves, thereby sinning. In either case, the emphasis is on the human as active and the question is one of control.

Instead, I argue, following Julian's lead, we need a way of understanding the brokenness of the divine-human relation that emerges from the revelation of divine love, rather than our observations of or concerns about human behavior. Julian encourages us to see ourselves and others in sin, not as disobedient transgressors but as wounded, suffering servants, lying in the dirt, cut off from love, believing ourselves to be abandoned, alone. "Estrangement," as I propose to develop it with Julian's help, is a *relational* metaphor that is grounded in an understanding of the human as emerging from loving relation. In this understanding, the human is receptive before she is active. Where Tillich argues that estrangement is the defining quality of human existence, I argue this defining quality is instead receptivity, and estrangement is a name for its brokenness.

b. Rethinking the Doctrine of Original Sin

In chapter 1, I articulated three critical elements of the doctrine of original sin that I believe can be rethought and retained as part of a feminist conception of personal sin as condition: sin as contingent, sin as damage beyond human repair, and sin as universal. I now want to revisit each of these elements briefly and demonstrate how each could be rethought in terms of love and estrangement.

The first of these elements is the contingency of sin. Reviewing the components of the doctrine of original sin as it is traditionally constructed, Alistair McFadyen writes:

sin is a contingent (not necessary) consequence of human freedom; its origin, if not its present reality, was constituted in a free act of the human creature through which was lost the creaturely and unaided possibility of perfection and of goodness. Sin was neither inevitable nor an aspect of our proper nature, but a distortion of it.⁵

This traditional approach begins with Genesis 3 and focuses on the first humans' "free act" of disobedience in the garden and their "fall" from the "possibility of perfection and goodness." Human disobedience, not God, is the source of sin. Orienting our thought about sin within this framework means we begin with questions of guilt and blame (or responsibility) and end with judgment: humans brought this pain on themselves through disobedient acts. As we have seen, Julian focuses on the consequences of sin rather than its origins, yet even so, she is clear throughout that sin is a distortion and fracturing of humans as they were created and are called to be in relation with God, self, and others. Sin is contingent in the sense that it is not the first or final word about human existence. Of course, we have also to deal with the idea that sin is "behovely" in Julian's thought, which is why I am inclined toward Denys Turner's interpretation over the more simplistic translation of "behovely" as "necessary." To say that sin is necessary is

⁵ Alistair McFadyen, *Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 16–17.

to suggest it is not contingent and I read Julian as insisting on sin's contingency, even as she struggles to work out the ways in which sin has a "fitting" place in the human-divine relation.

When we frame the contingency of sin within the idea that original sin is a condition of estrangement, that is, an inability to recognize and receive love, in particular divine love that is the source of human existence, we begin not with a question of guilt or responsibility but with the revelation of divine compassion and the reality of human longing for love. In Julian's revelations, we do not recognize the contingency of sin because we see God punish human disobedience. We recognize the contingency of sin because we see God's response to human suffering:

'Look, my beloved servant, what harm and trouble he has had and taken in my service for my love—yes, and for his good will! Is it not reasonable that I reward him for his fright and his fear, his hurt and his injury, and all his woe? And not only this, but falls it not to me to give him a gift that is better for him and more worshipful than his own health should have been? Otherwise I think I did him no grace.' (51:40–45:275)

This reorientation of sin's contingency demonstrates how we can retain the traditional doctrinal emphasis on sin as a distortion of human nature without defining that distortion in terms of disobedience and guilt.

Developing this concept of estrangement as a kind of "original sin" emphasizes that this condition is not only contingent, it is beyond human repair, which is the second element of the doctrine of original sin I rethink in this section and incorporate into my feminist conception of personal sin. The fractures radiating out from this condition of estrangement, fractures that run through individuals, relationships, and societies, cannot themselves be healed through human efforts. Humans can (and in Julian's theology, must) respond to the suffering that results from these fractures, but the underlying condition in which humans are separated from the love of God is one that only God's action can begin to heal. Reorienting personal sin in terms of love rather

than disobedience retains the idea that sin is a radical condition and that human receptivity and responsiveness are therefore more important than human control. This reorientation, however, also shifts the terms in which we understand that receptivity and responsiveness from obedience and submission⁶ to loving participation, fulfillment, and joy.⁷

Third and finally, developing the idea of estrangement as a kind of "original sin" allows us to emphasize the universal nature of estrangement. It encourages us to resist the idea that there are degrees of estrangement, that some of us are more capable of "seeing" God's love than others. It is also, as McFadyen observes, to claim something more than a solidarity among humans that is forged through a shared tendency to commit sinful acts.⁸ Human solidarity rests not in a shared disobedience or guilt or even a common vulnerability to sin and suffering but in a nature that was created by God to be integrated with itself, others, and God. It is only secondarily, through the fracturing of this nature, that humans are bound together by sin and suffering.⁹ When we understand this universal condition in terms of an inability to receive and participate in God's love, we are inclined toward compassion rather than control.

⁶ I resist the language of submission even with regard to God, though I am deeply appreciative of Sarah Coakley's efforts to illuminate the importance of submission to God and the ways in which it can be understood as a distinctly different and Christological way of being in contrast to the grasping, controlling mentality of the world. Although Coakley draws a crucial distinction between one's relation with others and one's relation with God, a distinction I likewise would stress were I to develop a set of ethical practices grounded in the theological concepts developed in the current project, I find the language of submission to be too deeply embedded in heteronormative and sexist patterns of thought in U.S. culture and would, instead, consider the possibilities of a feminist reclamation of the concept of humility. Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy, and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002).

⁷ I am deeply indebted to Alistair McFadyen's excellent treatment of the doctrine of original sin and his development of a theological conception of the good that emphasizes joy as essential to human flourishing. McFadyen writes, "Joy in God is a way of living out and finding ever richer ways of being in communion with others, within the demands of concrete and changing situations and ecologies of relationship. It is surely joy in God, but it is also joy in oneself, in others, in the world" (McFadyen, *Bound to Sin*, 216). ⁸ Ibid., 17.

⁹ It is also through the fracture of sin that human suffering is not a genuine source of solidarity among humans, for its distribution is shaped by injustice. The suffering humans share as a result of original sin is not identical with the suffering they experience as the result of human injustice, both personal and social.

James Alison's thought offers an important clarification to this idea of estrangement as an inability to receive and participate in divine love, for he reminds us that humans, even estranged, can still receive divine love:

One of the things revealed by the doctrine of original sin is that it is our capacity to receive gratuitously that was damaged in the fall: not our capacity to *receive*, because we have to receive in order to exist, but our capacity to receive *gratuitously*, which is the only way in which we can share in divine life, because that life can never be other than gratuitous.¹⁰

We still receive divine love because we exist and existence is not possible without that gift, but our participation is not possible. Further, our resistance is possible as well. Being unable to receive gratuitously means we cannot receive divine love without trying to hold onto it, grasping it as if it were something more we might possess. We cannot receive without believing we must have deserved/earned it or that we owe something as a consequence. We translate love into the language of possession, commodity, and exchange.

In developing the idea of personal sin as estrangement by rethinking and retaining these elements of the doctrine of original sin, I am deliberately trying to avoid suggesting that estrangement is *the* sin that explains or organizes all other sins. As we saw in my discussion in chapter 1, Ian McFarland rightly worries over the collapse of original into actual sin and cautions that "the reduction of all actual sin to one basic type is likely to impede recognition of sins that do not readily conform to the picture of sin established by the dominant hamartiology."¹¹ I choose to describe personal sin as estrangement precisely because the idea of estrangement resists classification as human action and reminds us that personal sin can be understood, at least in part, as a condition that makes sin as acts possible but is not, itself, an *act* of sin. Reflecting on the idea of personal sin as condition as I have articulated it with Julian's help reorients us to God,

¹⁰ James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin Through Easter Eyes* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 46.

¹¹ Ian A. McFarland, *In Adam's Fall: A Meditation on the Christian Doctrine of Original Sin* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 196.

ourselves, and the world, before we begin to explore the nuances and complexities of human agency and responsibility, before we attempt to perceive our sinful acts and those of our communities and nations. This way of understanding personal sin reflects our disorientation and our need for reorientation as the initial stage of healing.¹²

This idea of estrangement as Julian has defined it—an inability to perceive and participate in divine love—serves as a starting point for developing a concept of personal sin that allows me to rethink and retain what I find to be the more powerful elements of the doctrine or original sin while setting aside those that are less than helpful or even harmful and indefensible from a feminist perspective.¹³ It allows me to draw the clear distinction between sin as condition and sin as act that I identified as important to this project in chapters 1 and 2. Finally, it gives me a revised framework for thinking about personal sin that can be developed in ways that are responsive to the key claims and commitments gathered from feminist and womanist thought on sin in chapter 2. In the next section, I revisit one of these key commitments—the need to resist dualistic indulgences—and show how Julian's thought, in particular her theological anthropology and her creative use of gender to describe God's activity, can be drawn into productive conversation with contemporary gender theory and queer theology to challenge the oppositional, hierarchical binaries that concern feminist thought.

¹² Although this idea of healing as reorientation can be understood as similar to the traditional Reformed category of sanctification, particularly as it is developed by Serene Jones, I resist the language of justification and sanctification because there is much that is traditionally associated with the mis/understandings of these categories that I do not find useful in developing a conception of sin. See, for example, McFarland's brief discussion of the ways in which discussions of justification can devolve into what Bonhoeffer described as the idea of "grace as bargain-basement goods, cut-rate forgiveness," and those of sanctification become little more than a "narrow and rigid moralism." McFarland, *In Adam's Fall*, 206, quoting Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, vol. 4 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, Clifford J. Green, ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 43.

¹³ In doing so, as I discussed in chapter 1, I am responding to Kathryn Tanner's call for a "feminist rearticulation of the cultural elements of patriarchal discourse," not only because doing so might increase my "feminist claim on theological credibility" but also because, like Tanner, I find the traditions of Christian thought to be a rich source of guidance and inspiration, even as I work to untangle and resist the patriarchal convictions that saturate these traditions. Kathryn Tanner, "Social Theory Concerning the 'New Social Movements' and the Practice of Feminist Theology," in *Horizons in Feminist Theology: Identity, Tradition, and Norms*, ed. Rebecca S. Chopp and Sheila Greeve Davaney (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 189–90.

2. Disrupting Binaries: Extending Julian's Theological Anthropology and Her Creatively Gendered God

In chapters 3 and 4, I argued two claims about Julian's use of gender that are important to the current discussion. First, I argued that Julian's model of the human avoids explicitly gendered metaphors that can be used to position women as more inclined toward sin than men (a significant concern for feminist theology), even as it incorporates characteristics—vulnerability and changeability—that were more likely in Julian's time to be associated with women than men. She develops the dimensions of substance and sensuality in such a way that neither can be mapped neatly onto male or female and integrates the activity of God fully into both dimensions, in the process subtly undoing the traditional hierarchical relationship between soul/body and male/female. Second, I argued that Julian creatively incorporates gender into her theology of God, not to feminize God or make God more accessible to women's experience, but to emphasize the importance of physicality to the divine-human relation. Again, she integrates gendered imagery into the action of the three persons of the Trinity in such a way that male and female cannot be parsed as discrete categories (categories that can then be assigned "higher" and "lower" value).¹⁴

Through the lens of contemporary queer theology, we can see that Julian is effectively queering both human and God. In this section, I want to demonstrate, if only briefly, how gender theory and queer theology give us new tools for interpreting Julian's thought and extending it, pressing toward further insight, further challenges to the hierarchical assumptions that underlie and reinforce patterns of injustice and exploitation. Disrupting these fundamental binaries is essential to developing a conception of sin that values the body and to offering a creatively

¹⁴ Janet Martin Soskice writes, "[Julian] is willing to style all three Persons as Mother...[she] follows the route not of displacement but of excess, complementing the gendered scriptural terms of divine Fatherhood and Sonship with maternal and functional imagery..." Janet Martin Soskice, *Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 116.

gendered God (no longer super-masculine to humankind's feminine) in whom all humans, particularly those who are most threatened, exploited, and abused, may be safely enfolded, restored, and sustained in love.

Sarah Coakley has argued that Judith Butler's work on gender attracts so many followers because it offers "the prospect of an escape from stereotype, the hope of an elusive personal transformation beyond normal human expectations and restrictions."¹⁵ Coakley reads Butler as "[gesturing] toward an eschatological horizon which will give mortal flesh final significance...[where it can] find some sense of completion without losing its mystery, without succumbing again to 'appropriate' or restrictive gender roles."¹⁶ Just as Coakley sees value in drawing Butler's gender performativity into conversation with Gregory of Nyssa's asceticism, I suggest that similarly productive connections emerge when Butler's gender performativity encounters Julian's theological anthropology. The eschatological longing Coakley sees in Butler's work, the possibility and hope for transformation beyond the restrictive boundaries of present configurations of power and discourse, resonates across almost seven hundred years with the longing and promise of Julian's work. In Butler's theory, I find powerful insights about human identity and its construction that can inform and extend Julian's thought on human sensuality. At the same time, Julian's theology acknowledges a transcendent power at work in and through individuals and their network of relations that Butler's theory does not acknowledge but seems to need.

In her 1990 book, *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that sex, gender, and sexuality are not naturalized "facts" of human identity but rather repeated performances circumscribed by social, political, and cultural rules: "...what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured

¹⁵ Coakley, *Powers and Submissions*, 161.

¹⁶ Ibid., 166.

through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body."¹⁷ Butler demonstrates how revealing the constructed, performative nature of gender allows us to see that these rules can be parodied and subverted, thus undermining their hegemonic power and making intelligible the many proliferations of gender now circumscribed as "impossible" or "unnatural."¹⁸ For Butler, not only gender but all aspects of culturally intelligible identity are likewise performed within a set of regulated discourses that allow only certain configurations of identity to be recognized. There is no internal, stable "I" that precedes cultural and political construction/regulation: "There is no self that is prior to the convergence [of discursive injunctions] or who maintains 'integrity' prior to its entrance into this conflicted cultural field. There is only a taking up of the tools where they lie, where the very 'taking up' is enabled by the tool lying there."¹⁹

We can appreciate the power of Butler's argument for exposing the constructed nature of sex and gender and the regulatory function of political practices that dissolve themselves in the "natural fact" of sex and/or gender, thereby obscuring their existence and their power. However, if there is no self that can be situated separately from regulatory political practices, who or what, then, is taking up the tools at hand? I argue we can acknowledge the inadequacy of the human capacity to *see* human selves in their endless multiplicity and the (always potentially violent) human impulse in Western thought to limit, categorize, and regulate this endless multiplicity,²⁰ without having to accept Butler's premise that there is no self outside these cultural and political

¹⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 2d ed. (New York: Routledge, 1990; New York: Routledge Classics, 2008), xv.

¹⁸ Ibid., 203.

¹⁹ Ibid., 199.

²⁰ "...the naturalized knowledge of gender operates as a preemptive and violent circumscription of reality" (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xxiv).

regulated practices.²¹ We can accept that humans are socially conformed into performing sex and gender, rather than either being part of a naturalized, pre-socialized self or an "internal essence" that manifests itself ("identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results"²²), without having to jettison entirely the notion of a self whose sense of integrity does not rely exclusively upon its social formation.²³ Butler's theory suggests but does not acknowledge that something, some impulse outside the regulatory system, erupts as the "unnatural," or perhaps only whispers a different possibility. What is this disruptive influence? What impulse reveals these regulatory practices themselves as "unnatural" and constructed?

Julian's theology, in particular her theological anthropology, provides one alternative for understanding this disruptive, creative force. Integrating a theological anthropology of substance/sensuality with Butler's theory of the self as performance allows for the possibility that it is grace manifesting itself in the particular that disrupts the normative assumptions of gender, eruptions into and through the "normal" that we cannot see or that we cannot tolerate when we refuse the performative nature of the self.²⁴ At the same time, faith in the self as a divine gift counters the claim that the self is formed only through the performance made possible

²¹ Michael Levenson describes this as "the terrible claustrophobia of [Butler's] vision...No thought is given to other social circumstances, different historical moments, alternative desires or instincts that might not merely be sparks excited by the power of the machine, but might live outside the total system of power...love not as the surprise precipitate of the regime of death, but as its genuine adversary." Michael Levenson, "Speaking to Power: The Performances of Judith Butler," *Lingua Franca* 8.6 (1998): 63.

²² Butler, Gender Trouble, 34.

²³ Jennifer Beste makes a similar point when she argues that Butler's ideas about the self and its agency limit their usefulness for feminist theology, particularly when it is focused on the experiences of trauma. Although Butler's insights into the powerful self-shaping influences of social discourse can, Beste acknowledges, "help us understand why a victim can be both overwhelmed and 'reconstituted' by abuse, and why recovery from chronic interpersonal harm is such an arduous and sometimes impossible process," they do not consider the needs of trauma survivors. Survivors attest that "developing a sense of self-continuity and self-coherence as well as a sense of effective agency is crucial for recovery and full engagement with daily life," capacities that Butler's theory does not recognize. Jennifer Beste, "The Limits of Poststructuralism for Feminist Theology," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 22.1 (2006): 14–15.

²⁴ Butler writes, "The disciplinary production of gender effects a false stabilization of gender in the interests of the heterosexual construction and regulation of sexuality within the reproductive domain. The construction of coherence conceals the gender discontinuities that run rampant within heterosexual, bisexual, and gay and lesbian contexts in which gender does not necessarily follow from sex, and desire, or sexuality generally, does not seem to follow from gender..." (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 184–85).

by culturally and politically created tools. Performance is the shaping/distortion/flourishing of a self within particular social contexts, but performance is not the entirety of its existence.

A theory of gender and identity formation like Butler's gives us a framework for more fully developing ideas about the human dimension of sensuality without being constrained by parsing human existence into categories of male/female or reinforcing a compulsive heterosexuality.²⁵ As I argued in chapter 3, by redefining substance and sensuality, Julian disrupts the binary in the oppositional/hierarchal sense, even though she retains a model with two dimensions. Because sensuality encompasses the entirety of human experience in this life, it enfolds body and spirit or soul and refuses to parse them. Human substance, while also integrated with the human soul, is not directly accessible to the individual in this life and so cannot serve the traditional binary function of soul or spirit to body. In turn, God is integrated into human sensuality and substance; the divine-human relation is not contained in the realm of the spirit or soul but enfolds the entirety of human existence, including its bodily dimensions. Integrating God as both physically and spiritually immanent further disrupts the traditional binary of body/soul. These human dimensions of substance and sensuality, in Julian's thought, are intentionally non-discrete, separated not by rigid distinctions or a fixed order but by fluid boundaries across which grace and mercy move. In a similar way, Julian disrupts the fundamental hierarchical binary of male/female in her theological anthropology, not by eliminating gendered language but by interweaving assumptions of her time about male/female into her concept of who/what "we" are. In doing so, she unsettles the otherwise hegemonic

²⁵ In adopting Julian's language of "sensuality," I am adopting as well her rich use of the term to encompass the changeability of human existence in this life. Sensuality as I am using it is not, therefore, akin to Reinhold Niebuhr's use of the term to describe a particular aspect of sin that results from "the self's undue identification with and devotion to particular impulses and desires within itself." Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, volume I: *Human Nature* (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1941; Louisville,KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 228.

heteronormativity that structures our thought, our institutions, our every gesture and word. Gender theory helps us recognize and extend this aspect of Julian's theology.

If we are going to ground ideas about identity formation through performativity and disruption in a sense of the divine, however, it becomes crucial, especially for feminist thought, that this sense of the divine be cultivated as something other than a super-masculinized god—hence the importance of queering God. A queer God is not an androgynous God possessing a thinly disguised masculinity or femininity but a God who integrates and surpasses the spectrum of human expressions, gendered or otherwise. Julian doesn't give us a God who is alternately masculine and feminine; she gives us a God who is queer. Gender is fully integrated into Julian's understanding of the Trinitarian God's activity, an activity that enfolds human into divine.

Again, a turn to gender theory and queer theology could extend this aspect of Julian's thought in developing a conception of personal sin that responds to the challenges and commitments of feminist thought. Butler's work demonstrates that imagining God as male or female or even alternately male *and* female reinforces the hegemony of a binary, heteronormative discourse that is not determined by a "natural" male or female essence but instead is inscribed upon and catalogs human bodies, a discourse that excludes anything outside the binary as unimaginable, impossible, unthinkable.

Gavin D'Costa argues that "certain types of theology might properly be called queer" because "they are capable of overturning idols, showing how human constructions so easily masquerade as 'God-given reality'…"²⁶ Although the orientation of queer theory and queer theology are post-modern developments that are alien to Julian's context, queer theology nonetheless can serve as a lens for recognizing the ways in which Julian's creatively gendered

²⁶ Gavin D'Costa, "Queer Trinity," in *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, ed. Gerard Loughlin (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 270.

God gestures toward the possibility of "overturning" the idolatry of a super-masculinized language for God that rests firmly on a hierarchical gender binary of male/female. Queer theory and queer theology remind us to attend to the silences of dominant discourse, to inquire, with Argentinian theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid, about the "suppressed knowledge in exile," the "marginal and indirect speech" that "hides under the skirts of every discourse of religious and political authority."²⁷ Such an analysis of the dominant discourses about the divine in Julian's time could help us recognize the marginal and indirect speech peeking out from beneath the skirts of Julian's revelations.

Gender theory and queer theology highlight the fluidity with which Julian incorporates gender into her thought about God and underscore the importance of that fluidity over a static and illusory androgyny. While the idea of gender neutrality has its appeal, it cannot be accomplished in a society whose "neutral" is masculine by default. We need to usurp gender fixity before we can do without gender, if ever we can do without it. We need to understand male and female, not as discrete, self-contained, clearly marked boundaries but as reservoirs of meaning from which we draw in our never-ending efforts to understand the divine and ourselves, reservoirs which do not, themselves, exhaust the possibilities of gender. Gender theory and queer theology help us see these possibilities emerging in Julian's thought and give us tools for developing them further. Such developments unsettle the ground beneath traditional conceptions of sin and caution a feminist conception of sin from settling back onto unscrutinized assumptions about gender, sex, and sexuality.

²⁷ Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology* (London: Routledge, 2000), 20. Michel Foucault's genealogical method is often credited with focusing our attention on the silences of dominant discourse. Grace Jantzen writes, "If there is one thing we have learned from Foucault's own strategies since his *Madness and Civilization* it is to listen to the silences, to be alert to what is not said." Jantzen goes on to explore the silences in Foucault's work with regard to women, gender, and death. Grace Jantzen, "Promising Ashes' A Queer Language of Life," in *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, ed. Gerard Loughlin (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 249.

In chapter 2, I committed to developing a conception of personal sin that does not rely upon or reinforce dualistic thinking. The idea I am developing of personal sin as estrangement, grounded here in a theological anthropology and ideas about a creatively gendered God that disrupt the male/female binary, is responsive to this feminist commitment to resisting dualistic indulgences. It is also, as I will summarize in the next section, inextricably linked to a deep awareness of human embodiment, not as a source of sin but as a site that suffers the consequences of sin and is integrated into the process of restoration and healing that is the work of grace.

3. Focusing on Suffering: The Pain of Sin

In chapter 2, my survey of feminist and womanist thought on sin revealed a commitment to human embodiment and a rejection of any conception of sin, personal or social, that attempts to justify or render invisible or insignificant the suffering of particular bodies. To the contrary, womanist and feminist theologians take suffering seriously and work to develop theologies that expand our capacity for recognizing and responding to the suffering of others, suffering that results not only from the actions of a single individual but, more important, from the systematic forms of injustice and harm in which individuals and groups collude, consciously and unconsciously. I share this commitment to a focus on suffering as a primary starting point for reflecting on sin. In *A Revelation*, Julian's reflection on sin begins with the experience of a body in pain, her body, which gives rise to her confrontation with another body in pain, the crucified body of God, which, in turn, deepens her awareness of the suffering of all her evencristen. Julian teaches us that where we begin our reflection on sin shapes how we think about sin and, ultimately, how we understand the work of mercy and grace.

Starting with the consequences of sin, maintaining a focus on the pain that is caused by sin, we commit ourselves to situating any theory or story about sin we develop within the context of that suffering. Julian describes how she was filled with compassion as she was drawn into the suffering of Christ, compassion for Christ and all her evencristen. The concept of sin that emerges from this encounter with suffering has been shaped first by compassion, not a hunger for judgment or vengeance or even justice. We understand sin less as a proclivity to disobey God's commands and more as an inability to receive and participate in God's love. We understand God less as the taskmaster punishing disobedience to instruct or chasten and more as the active, loving, healing force working on humankind to restore its capacity to receive, participate in, and pass on love.

Focusing on the pain of sin gives rise to a conception of sin that is responsive to the feminist and womanist concerns about suffering that I discussed in chapter 2. Estrangement defined in terms of love focuses on the condition in which humans find themselves, not on an action, even primordial, for which they are to blame or for which they are being punished. Like Delores Williams's womanist concept of sin as defilement, the concept of personal sin as estrangement takes seriously the suffering and healing of particular bodies. Supported by Julian's anthropology of substance and sensuality, this idea of estrangement mourns the suffering of the body and values its healing as a part of human sensuality and substance.

Unlike the idea of sin as defilement, however, sin as estrangement functions as both a personal and social metaphor. As I discussed in chapter 2, defilement functions well in naming the harm done to Black women, but it is less helpful to the individual, particularly the individual who has suffered most as a result of the social sin of defilement, in reflecting on herself as a creature broken by sin. In Toni Morrison's novel, *Paradise*, sixteen-year old Pallas, who arrives

at the Convent so traumatized by her experience on a night road alone with two men in pursuit that she can neither speak nor cry because "the pain was down too far," might find "defilement" a helpful concept in describing the actions of her attackers, but it is less clear how such a concept alone sheds light on her condition as something more than defiled.²⁸

Both Williams and Mary Potter Engel define personal sin in terms of social sin. Williams argues that Black women sin when they do not challenge or resist the ways in which social structures dehumanize and degrade them; Engel defines sin as "those free, discrete acts of responsible individuals that create or reinforce these structures of oppression."²⁹ In either argument, in reflecting on personal sin, Pallas is left to question the ways in which she contributes to or participates in the structures that make her defilement possible. Further, when personal sin is defined exclusively in terms of individual participation in social sin, it allows social sin to define the boundaries of sin, which in turn limits our understanding of the possibilities of grace and healing. Defining sin as a condition in which the capacity to recognize and participate in love has been damaged allows us to situate the social sins of defilement and oppression (and personal participation in them) within a larger array of endless manifestations of the estranged condition of humankind.

Mary Potter Engel argues that defining sin as alienation "connotes a static, passive condition that does not do justice to the active exploitive structures of a society built for the strong against the vulnerable."³⁰ She worries that such a definition of sin leads us to think of salvation only in terms of reconciliation, a concept that Engel rightly argues can be toxic when those who have been violently assaulted are urged to relinquish any protective boundaries they

²⁸ See also my discussion of Morrison's character, Seneca, in chapter 1, page 31.

²⁹ Mary Potter Engel, "Evil, Sin, and Violation of the Vulnerable," in *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*, ed. Mary Potter Engel and Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1990), 162.

³⁰ Ibid., 167.

have established and reconcile with their abusers in the name of Christian love. Defining personal sin as estrangement does not point toward a "static, passive condition" so much as it focuses on the suffering that results from a loss of humanity's ability to receive and participate in divine love, suffering that is individual, collective, *and* relational. Further, while understanding personal sin as estrangement may lead one to hope for reconciliation and reintegration, such hope, grounded theologically, is eschatological. In this life, the hope for healing has no clear expectation that healing will take a particular form, such as the reconciliation of abused and abuser. Healing, instead, may take the shape of woman, long-abused, who begins to suspect she may not, in fact, be worthless, whose suspicion deepens into hope, courage, and love so that she is able to separate herself from the abuse. Perhaps her hope extends to the one who has abused her, but it need not be a hope that requires her to accept once again the illusion of her worthlessness. The ways in which grace and mercy work upon particular souls is unpredictable and beyond human determination or control.

Understanding personal sin as a condition of estrangement allows us, perhaps even commands us, to focus on the suffering that is caused by sin (including defilement or structural forms of oppression) without immediately attempting to parse that sin in terms of human action and responsibility. We attend to these experiences of suffering, opening ourselves to the truth revealed in them. For those who benefit most from current dynamics of privilege and power, these truths include the complicity of our particular social location and its associated privilege in the suffering of others. We mourn the suffering that is made possible through sin. We pray to be guided to *see* another's suffering (and our own, and God's) in the fullest sense of the word as Julian employs it so that we may be filled and transformed by compassion. This transforming compassion does not leave us comforted and self-congratulatory that we have felt deeply. It does not allow us to remain a passive observer, looking down on the suffering of others, grateful we do not share their fate, perhaps extending a hand or a check to ease someone's way. This compassion asks nothing less than everything. It draws us into the midst of suffering. It asks those of us who benefit from current structures of privilege (we who are White, educated, socially and/or financially wealthy) to take up Miguel A. De La Torre's invitation to "sit in the dust" by the side of those who suffer, to listen and learn, particularly from those whose suffering is the result of social structures and systematic sin that dehumanize in the name of Whiteness or heteronormativity or male privilege. For those who protest the hopelessness of such a vision, De La Torre cautions that "all too often the advocacy of hope gets in the way of listening to and learning from the oppressed."³¹ This transforming compassion and the learning it cultivates precede and reshape subsequent discussions of human responsibility, sin as action, and justice.

Julian does not use the language of "trauma" and yet the conception of personal sin I have drawn from her work closely resembles Serene Jones's description of trauma's impact on the human psyche:

When people are traumatized, a kind of cognitive/psychic overwhelming breakdown can occur. When this happens, it becomes difficult for victims to experience the healing power of God's grace because their internal capacities (where one knows and feels) have been broken. It is hard to know God when your knowing faculties have been disabled. It is hard to feel divine love when your capacity to feel anything at all has been shut down.³²

This resonance between the language of contemporary trauma theory and the language of sin as estrangement emphasizes the way in which this concept I am offering is more concerned with

³¹ Miguel A. De La Torre, *Latina/o Social Ethics: Moving Beyond Eurocentric Moral Thinking* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 93.

³² Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), viii–ix.

recognizing the traumatic effects of sin than with explaining sin in terms of human disobedience and rebellion. It encourages us to attend to traumatic experience and its effect on human sensuality in Julian's fullest sense of the word as yet another metaphor for exploring sin. Like secular thought on gender and sexuality, secular trauma theory can be a rich source for further development of the idea of personal sin as estrangement.

In this section, I have considered how the idea of estrangement I have drawn from Julian's work allows me to respond to feminist and womanist concerns about traditional forms of sin-talk with regard to their dualistic patterns of thought and their failure to take suffering seriously. Next, I return to the tension between divine immanence and transcendence that I highlighted in feminist and womanist thought in chapter 2 and argue that Julian's emphasis on the limits of human judgment and God's transcendence illustrates the importance of divine transcendence for feminist thought. Julian's emphasis on the unlikeness of God points toward the crucial role of humility in developing a conception of personal sin.

4. Acknowledging Limits: The Unlikeness of God and Sin-Talk

As I discussed in chapter 2, feminist theology has long been suspicious of divine transcendence, interpreting the desire for a transcendent (masculine) God as a manifestation of the human (male) desire to rule at the top of a hierarchical chain of being that elevates that which is masculine/civilized/controlled over that which is feminine/natural/chaotic. Particularly when discussing sin, feminists in recent years have, as Joy Ann McDougall observes, stopped framing sin in terms of a damaged relationship to God or disobedience to God's will.³³ Alistair McFadyen observes that in their reluctance to reinforce the idea of a transcendent God whose relations with creation are "hierarchical, dominating, and generally alienating and expropriating

³³ Joy Ann McDougall, "Feminist Theology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 680.

of human autonomy," feminist theologies of sin "tend either to elide all reference to God or to make God so immanent to the dynamics of 'right relation' or selfhood that any meaningful distinction between them threatens to collapse."³⁴

In response to this feminist suspicion of divine transcendence, Rebekah Miles argues that ideas about divine transcendence provide an essential restraint on human systems of power and privilege. Building on the work of Reinhold Niebuhr, Miles develops a feminist Christian realism that integrates Niebuhr's emphasis on divine transcendence with feminist commitments to a divine immanence that focuses attention on questions of justice, community, embodiment, and liberation.³⁵ Miles's work stresses the need for a conception of God whose immanence and transcendence are not framed in the polarizing language of either/or, a language that, as I discussed in my first two chapters, all too easily frames discussions of sin in absolute terms of saved/damned. Feminist thought needs what Miles calls "a more comprehensive model of God's presence," one that integrates divine immanence and divine transcendence. Julian gives us such a model and demonstrates how essential it is to developing a non-dualistic conception of personal sin.

In Julian's theology, divine immanence and transcendence are integrated rather than oppositional, an integration made possible by the incarnation of God in Christ and the relationship God maintains with human substance and sensuality. God is both beyond human comprehension and experience *and* intimately bound to and concerned with human existence and human suffering. God is "endless sovereign truth, endless sovereign wisdom, endless sovereign love unmade" (44:9–10, 259) and, in Jesus, "very God and very man" (68:4, 335), resides in the center of the human soul, "for in us is his homeliest home and his endless dwelling" (68:13,

³⁴ McFadyen, *Bound to Sin*, 164.

³⁵ Rebekah L. Miles, *The Bonds of Freedom: Feminist Theology and Christian Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 153.

337).³⁶ Human substance, with its unbroken relation to God's will, accessible to human consciousness in this life only in part and only through the work of God's mercy and grace, nonetheless becomes the channel through which we are drawn beyond ourselves. The connection between human substance and God fills us with a longing for God, assures us we are kept safe and loved by God in this life, even as we fall and suffer and believe ourselves to be unworthy of that love. At the same time, God reaches out to us and enfolds us through Christ's assumption of human sensuality. We are both drawn to a God who is beyond us and embraced by God who is with us.

Yet the integration of divine immanence and divine transcendence does not mean the distinction between them is not important in Julian's thought. To the contrary, although she does not cast them in oppositional roles, she cultivates the tension between them. God may be closer to humans than they are to themselves, but God is also forever exceeding human consciousness. Humans may, through their relationship with Christ in the soul and the work of mercy and grace on them, glimpse the love of God, feel themselves drawn toward it, but their perspective remains distinct from that of God. Julian cautions her evencristen from presuming upon the intimacy that is God's gift to think they can see as God sees.

The importance of maintaining the tension between divine immanence and divine transcendence and of recognizing God's unlikeness to humankind is particularly evident in Julian's development of the two judgments: first, God's judgment of humankind, which has the doubleness of pity and mercy, and in which Julian can see no wrath, and second, humankind's judgment of humankind, that is, the judgment of the Church, which helps her evencristen, when

³⁶ "Our soul is made to be God's wonning, and the wonning of our soul is God, who is unmade." (54:8–9:297). Watson and Jenkins note a distinction here between the Sloane and Paris manuscripts, with Paris using "dwelling" in place of "wonning." Although Watson and Jenkins suggest "dwelling" as a translation for "wonning" in chapter 68, cited above, they also note that "dwelling" in Middle English usage suggests a temporary, though possibly long-lasting, condition, while "wonning" is "a permanent state of rest" (W&J, 407).

they experience themselves as sinners, to confess, repent, and recognize their need for God's mercy and grace, but which is in no way the absolute word on humankind and sin. As I argued in the previous two chapters, Julian develops her ideas of the two judgments to make clear that the relationship between them is not one of analogy. Human judgment is not a limited version of the divine judgment that is to come in the end. Each judgment has a purpose, and in the instance of the Church's judgment, serves its purpose in this life only; the two remain radically distinct.

This means that all human knowledge, particularly human judgment about sin, is always qualified, never absolute. This aspect of Julian's thought aligns with my feminist commitment to stressing the provisional nature of claims about sin. If all human knowledge is provisional, all claims about sin are likewise incomplete, always at least partially wrong, relevant and revealing only in particular contexts at particular times. This includes the concept of personal sin as estrangement developed in this project. The concept of estrangement cannot encompass the entirety of human experiences of sin any more than can pride, defilement, or unfaithfulness. Yet stressing, as it does, the unlikeness of God, even as it depends upon an understanding of God as intimately intertwined with human growth and healing, the concept of personal sin as estrangement drawn from Julian's thought provides theological grounding for limiting claims about sin, both as acts and as condition. It challenges the *Left Behind* theology that claims confident knowledge of sin, that individuals can be parsed into categories of good or evil, that those who are "left behind" can determine the personal failings that kept them from being "taken up" in the Rapture, eliminate those failings, and fight those who are evil to earn themselves a second chance at heaven.

The concept of personal sin as estrangement I am developing resists, or at the very least resituates, any discussion of sin as acts or sin as moral failing, ways of talking about sin that all

too often, as I discussed in chapters 1 and 2, can be turned against those who are already most vulnerable to suffering from the injustice of existing social systems and norms. By insisting on the unlikeness of God, the conception of sin I have drawn from Julian's thought refuses to indulge the temptation of casting society's moral norms in terms of God's will in order to elevate them to divine status, so that any deviation from them becomes an act against God. Julian's caution in articulating particular sins, in turn, cautions us to do likewise. She limits herself to contemplating those sins—despair and impatience—that most threaten a person's hope and faith and risk deepening her estrangement from divine love. The sins that concern Julian provide little traction for those who seek to wield the language of sin as a form of social control.

Julian's emphasis on the unlikeness of God and the way this emphasis shapes her understanding of the contingency of human judgment demonstrates the importance of divine transcendence to feminist thought on sin. Divine transcendence and divine immanence are drawn together in Julian's theology as a productive tension in which humans live, longing for and being drawn into God's love. It is not enough that God is fully present within and among humans. God's transcendence expands the horizon so that human hope and longing are always reaching, anticipating, exceeding all expectations, and human claims to knowledge, including knowledge of sin, are always limited.

Julian tells her readers that God wants them to know what they need to know for their salvation, for "this blessed part [which] is open and clear and fair and light and plenteous," tells them how they are bound to God and taught within by the Holy Spirit and from without by the church (30:2–5, 215). This is the part of truth that God reveals so that Julian and her evencristen can "enjoy in God" as God enjoys in them. But God keeps another part of the truth hidden from them—everything that is not related to their salvation. Julian acknowledges that God's truth

encompasses more than humans can comprehend and urges her readers to accept the limits God has drawn, to trust that they are able to know what they need to know to be healed and loved (30:10-20, 217).³⁷

A feminist theology that takes these limits seriously has to struggle with its subsequently limited ability to take up a position that many feminist theologies, along with other liberation theologies, have found empowering, even essential: the capacity to invoke divine reinforcement for particular moral claims. In Julian's theology, divine transcendence is not a source of a universal moral ideal against which all human acts or claims can be judged. Moral claims, as well as claims about sin, remain in the realm of the human and may be critiqued, defended, or challenged according to various criteria, but they must resist the appeal to what Kathleen Sands describes as "the metaphysical authorization for particular visions of how the world ought to be."³⁸ This does not mean that feminist theologians cannot appeal to sources within a tradition that are understood as divinely authorized, such as scripture, but the nature of that divine authorization and the particular theologian's interpretation of it remain open questions with particular and varied responses, open to challenges from different (also particular) perspectives, never resolved, never absolute. Julian's understanding of divine transcendence, her emphasis on the unlikeness of God, provides a theological mandate for a feminist commitment to the particularity of all claims (including feminist claims) about sin, the divine, and the human.

5. Reorienting Sin

At the end of *A Revelation*, Julian writes: "And from the time that it was shown, I desired oftentimes to know what was our lord's meaning. And fifteen years after and more, I was

³⁷ As always in Julian's thought, this healing and loving is not a solitary pursuit, individual accomplishment, or a private matter between God and the individual. It is the experience of a community of souls that encompasses "all mankind that is and shall be of good will" (30:3–4, 215).

³⁸ Kathleen Sands, *Escape from Paradise: Evil and Tragedy in Feminist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 68.

answered in ghostly understanding, saying thus: "What, would you know your lord's meaning in this thing? Know it well, love was his meaning..." (86:11–14, 379). Earlier, she tells us that God revealed the *exemplum* of the lord and the servant in response to her anxiety about the discrepancy between the two judgments—that in humanity's sight, people deserve blame for their sin and yet as God's regard for humankind was revealed to her, Julian could discern no trace of blame.³⁹ When the *exemplum* is first revealed to her, Julian is left with little understanding of its significance. She trusts that it offers her important insights but it will take her years of further reflection and "teaching inwardly" (51:73, 277) from God before she comes to understand some of its significance.

In chapter 4, I argued that Julian's development of the relationship between divine physicality and human sensuality situates sin within the context of God's loving embrace. Julian's reflections on the condition of personal sin—human estrangement from divine love—are permeated with spiritual ("ghostly") and physical images of divine joy and love. She sees human suffering and sin within the embrace of Christ's compassion for humankind, a compassion that, in turn, fills her with compassion for her evencristen. Julian's spiritual and theological journey begins as she, in the midst of suffering, encounters the vision of a suffering Christ, which in turn floods her with compassion for her evencristen, for Christ, and herself. It is within this compassion that Julian frames her worries about sin and it is not until she recognizes the centrality of love to God's revelations that she begins to glimpse their meaning.

Julian's reflections on sin are motivated by compassion and situated within a context of divine love. The concept of personal sin as estrangement that I have drawn from Julian's thought, subsequently, does not emerge out of a desire to establish human responsibility for sin

³⁹ "And between these two contraries, my reason was greatly travailed by my blindness and could have no rest, for dread that his blessed presence should pass from my sight, and I would be left in unknowing how he beholds us in our sin" (50:14–16, 273).

and explain individual suffering as a consequence of human action. The conception of personal sin as estrangement I offer emerges out of a concern for the well-being of humankind in the midst of its suffering. It emerges out of an encounter with divine love that reveals sin as a condition in which humans have lost the ability to recognize and experience that love.

In chapter 1, I expressed concern about popular cultural understandings of sin that seem to sanction some humans as God's instruments of "good" who are justified in acting against those who behave, look, or think in particularly "bad" ways. Even more nuanced and thoughtful analyses of the doctrine of original sin, I argued, move too quickly to considerations of the human will and human responsibility for sin. Julian offers us an alternative approach, one that suspends, at least temporarily, the concern with human responsibility. This alternative approach, I argue, shapes our subsequent understanding of personal sin differently as a result.

For example, in developing his argument that modern theology needs to return to the doctrine of original sin, Ian McFarland relies heavily on the idea that the "remedy for sin is forgiveness."⁴⁰ By concentrating so centrally on the need for forgiveness, McFarland's understanding of sin is tilted in a particular way. As I have illustrated in the previous chapter, Julian teaches us that we are not forgiven in order to be loved; we are loved before we are forgiven. In some sense, the estrangement that is our condition must be recognized by us through the work of grace that is healing it, *before* we are equipped to consider actual sin or a response to it. Forgiveness is not the proper register for understanding our relationship with God. Although McFarland insists that repentance and sin should not be understood as a "matter of economic exchange," he discusses the relationship between the two in explicitly economic terms. They are, he says, inseparable because they are "two sides of a coin…to receive forgiveness for a sin is impossible without knowing that sin for which one is being forgiven; and to know something one

⁴⁰ McFarland, In Adam's Fall, 180.

has done as a sin is to reject it as incompatible with one's identity as a child of God by repenting of it."⁴¹ McFarland's emphasis on forgiveness as *the* divine response to sin requires him to work out a kind of calculus that links sin, repentance, and forgiveness. The relationship among the three may not be that of *quid pro quo* but their inseparability in a curious way restrains our understanding of God's action.

Instead, as I argued in my examination of Julian's development and eventual rejection of the language of "wrath" to describe God's orientation toward humankind and sin, there is a critical distinction to be drawn between divine love and divine forgiveness and the former is the proper model for understanding God's action in the world. When we begin our reflection on sin with a reflection on divine love, when we define sin in terms of a loss of the human capacity to perceive, respond to, and participate in divine love, there is no calculus limiting our understanding of sin and love to terms of sin, repentance, and forgiveness.⁴² As McFarland argues, the idea of forgiveness requires a certain degree of specificity: "I can't hear the message that my sin is forgiven as good news for me unless I know wherein my sin lies. Otherwise, the message of forgiveness remains an abstraction that can gain no traction on my particular circumstances."⁴³ Forgiveness, therefore, appears to be a limited action, focused on particular

⁴¹ Ibid., 197.

⁴² My concerns about and interest in the concept of forgiveness are too extensive to be included here, but my primary concern is that an emphasis on divine forgiveness may too easily be translated into a unqualified expectation that humans "forgive" one another, regardless of the surrounding dynamics of oppression, injustice, and abuse. As Wendy Farley writes, "Forgiveness is demanded of those who become angry or denounce injustice or talk about racism, economic injustice, or fiscal irresponsibility within the community." Farley associates this understanding of forgiveness with a "misappropriation of love" and an "unskilled agape," thus interrelating the two concepts instead of distinguishing them as I believe we should. Wendy Farley, *The Wounding and Healing of Desire: Weaving Heaven and Earth* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 87–88. I share Farley's concerns, but I believe that overemphasizing God's relation with humanity as one of forgiveness, however nuanced and carefully crafted one's understanding of divine forgiveness may be, too easily limits an understanding of divine forgiveness, in keeping with Margaret Urban Walker's philosophical development of the concept in *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations After Wrongdoing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

behaviors and wrongdoing. It tends toward acts. Love, on the other hand, is both particular and encompassing. It calls into existence and thereby surpasses forgiveness and wrongdoing.

Cheryl Townsend Gilkes writes that, for African American women, loving one's self in the face of the diminishment and hatred directed at that self by the world "is probably the most critical task we complete in establishing our commitment 'to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female," because "through loving ourselves 'regardless,' and repairing our inner visions, we save our own lives [and take] the first step toward our 'response-ability' to save our brothers and sisters."⁴⁴ Gilkes writes from a sociological perspective, rather than a theological one, but her work helps us recognize that in this context, a language of personal sin that begins with pride or disobedience not only risks irrelevancy but may inflict real damage on the women of Gilkes's essay who already experience the world as "hateful" toward the shape of their bodies, the color of their skin, and their very existence as Black women. Gilkes's call for self-love and self-creation, when powered theologically by Julian's vision of God's love for the self and Christ's actions to draw the self once more into God's embrace, demonstrates the need for a language of personal sin that can participate in and advance this work of love.

This project began out of a desire to develop a conception of personal sin that is responsive to the experiences of those most likely to suffer from current structures of unjust privilege and power. The voices of those who suffer, those who struggle to survive violence, hopelessness, poverty, and despair—the women and men of Toni Morrison's novel, *Paradise*, the disappeared and tortured Chilean women of Marjorie Agosin's poems, survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, the women and men who risk their lives in desperation to cross the border between Mexico and the United States—have been my touchstone throughout the project,

⁴⁴ Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, "The 'Loves' and 'Troubles' of African-American Women's Bodies: The Womanist Challenge to Cultural Humiliation and Community Ambivalence," in *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, ed. Emilie M. Townes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 247.

their faces and stories the ones I summon with each claim or insight.⁴⁵ They challenge and test theological reflection, and I write with the awareness that everything I offer is subject to their evaluation. All of my insights, indeed all of theological reflection, I believe, thus exist in a suspended state, perpetually subject to the evaluation of its readers. Yes, there is Truth, but it is not a Truth I or anyone else can access or control. Truth emerges in the encounter between thought and individual. It is, as Wendy Farley says, "a way rather than a possession. It is not finished when one possesses right doctrine, but is a mode of life that never ceases to fine-tune its orientation toward reality."⁴⁶

I hope that the concept of sin as estrangement developed in this project will resonate for those who have survived violence. If we agree that the reasons we develop conceptions of sin within Christian thought are to provide insight into human experience and draw individuals and communities into the embrace of God's healing grace, personal sin articulated as guilt and pride fails in both these tasks when confronting the faces of those who have been persecuted, beaten, or tortured for having dark skin, vulnerable bodies, or an identity that somehow marks them as acceptable targets to others. Pride is not the defining motif of their existence, nor is guilt the appropriate descriptor of their condition. Rejecting the language of pride and guilt in no way precludes the language of responsibility. Even those who suffer persecution and torture retain their agency, even if greatly diminished by particular circumstances. They are never only and exclusively victims. A feminist conception of personal sin, however, when confronted with the faces of those who have suffered persecution, those who have encountered the kind of violence whose purpose is to erase their very existence, will defer discussions of responsibility in favor of

 ⁴⁵ Marjorie Agosin, Zones of Pain/Las Zonas Del Dolor, trans. Cola Franzen (Fredonia, NY: White Pine Press, 1988); Miguel De La Torre, Trails of Hope and Terror: Testimonies on Immigration (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009).
 ⁴⁶ Wendy Farley, Eros for the Other: Retaining Truth in a Pluralistic World (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 191.

reflecting on sin as a condition of profound and debilitating loss experienced by all of humankind.

This project has sought to deepen and enrich the Christian tradition of reflecting on the self in sin by taking seriously a set of feminist concerns and commitments. It is the first step in a larger effort to develop a theological framework of ideas about sin and salvation that informs a set of ethical perspectives and practices that are both Christian and feminist. As Julian recognized, sin cannot be understood, resolved, or solved. There is no "getting to the bottom" of sin and eliminating it from the human experience and this project does not claim to do so. It, instead, joins the ongoing efforts of theologians and ethicists to complicate and question what we think we have learned with regard to sin, recognizing that every claim is, itself, distorted by sin and therefore always partial, always in some way missing the mark. We reflect in the ongoing hope that some glimmer of grace makes its way into our reflecting, that through it, God may open us and others to new dimensions of God's ongoing revelation of love.

Bibliography

- Abbott, Christopher. 1999. *Julian of Norwich: Autobiography and Theology*. Suffolk, UK: D. S. Brewer.
- Adams, Marilyn McCord. 2000. *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- ———. 2002. "Neglected Values, Shrunken Agents, Happy Endings: A Reply to Rogers." *Faith and Philosophy* 19:214–32.
- ———. 2011. "Julian of Norwich: Problems of Evil and the Seriousness of Sin." Philosophia 39:433–47.
- Adams, Robert Merrihew. 1985. "Involuntary Sins." The Philosophical Review 94:3–31.
- Aers, David. 2009. Salvation and Sin: Augustine, Langland, and Fourteenth-Century Theology. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Aers, David, and Lynn Staley. 1996. *The Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics, and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Agosin, Marjorie. 1988. Zones of Pain / Las Zonas Del Dolor. Translated by Cola Franzen. Fredonia, NY: White Pine Press.
- Alison, James. 1998. *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin Through Easter Eyes*. New York: Crossroad.
- Althaus-Reid, Marcella. 2000. Indecent Theology. London: Routledge.
- _____. 2003. *The Queer God*. London: Routledge.
- Althaus-Reid, Marcella and Lisa Isherwood, eds. 2004. *The Sexual Theologian: Essays on Sex, God and Politics*. London: T&T Clark International.
- Andrews, James A. 2011. "On Original Sin and the Scandalous Nature of Existence." Journal of Theological Interpretation 5.2:231–50.
- St. Augustine. 1998. *Confessions*. Translated by Henry Chadwick. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- ———. 1998. *The City of God against the Pagans*. Translated by R. W. Dyson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

------. 2002. *On the Trinity: Books* 8–15. Edited by Gareth B. Matthews. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Baker, Denise Nowakowski. 1994. Julian of Norwich's Showings: From Vision to Book. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Baker, Denise N., ed. 2005. *Julian of Norwich: Showings*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Bakhtin, M. M. 1981. The Dialogic Imagination. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Bauerschmidt, F.C. 1997. "Julian of Norwich—Incorporated." *Modern Theology* 13.1:75–100.
- Bauerschmidt, Frederick Christian. 1999. Julian of Norwich and the Mystical Body Politic of Christ. South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Beste, Jennifer. 2006. "The Limits of Poststructuralism for Feminist Theology." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 22.1:14–15.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. 1997. Creation and Fall/Temptation: Two Biblical Studies. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- ———. 2003. *Discipleship*, vol. 4 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*. Edited by Clifford J. Green. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
- Borresen, Kari Elisabeth. 1981. Subordination and Equivalence: The Nature and Role of Woman in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. Washington, DC: University Press of America.
- Brown, Joanne Carlson and Carole R. Bohn, eds. 1989. *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*. New York: Pilgrim Press.
- Burdge, Barb J. 2007. "Bending Gender, Ending Gender: Theoretical Foundations for Social Work Practice with the Transgender Community." *Social Work* 52.3:243–50.
- Butler, Judith. [1990] 1999. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.
- Bynum, Caroline Walker. 1982. Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- ———. 1987. Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

———. 1992. Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion. New York: Zone Books.

-. 2004. "The Power in the Blood: Sacrifice, Satisfaction, and Substitution in Late Medieval Soteriology." In *The Redemption: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on Christ as Redeemer*, edited by Stephen T. Davis. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Calvin, John. 2006. Institutes of the Christian Religion. 2 vols. Edited by John T. McNeill. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Chau, Carolyn A. 2012. "What Could Possibly Be Given?': Towards an Exploration of *Kenosis* as Forgiveness—Continuing the Conversation Between Coakley, Hampson, and Papanikolaou." *Modern Theology* 28.1:1–24.
- Chevrette, Roberta. 2013. "Outing Heteronormativity in Interpersonal and Family Communication: Feminist Applications of Queer Theory 'Beyond the Sexy Streets."" *Communication Theory* 23:170–90.
- Chopp, Rebecca. 1993. "Feminism and the Theology of Sin." The Ecumenist, 12-16.
- Chopp, Rebecca and Sheila Greeve Davaney, eds. 1997. Horizons in Feminist Theology: Identity, Tradition, and Norms. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
- Clark, Elizabeth A. 1983. Women in the Early Church. Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc.
- Coakley, Sarah. 2002. Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy, and Gender. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
 - ———. 2004. "The Woman at the Altar: Cosmological Disturbance or Gender Subversion?" *Anglican Theological Review* 86.1:75–93.
- ———. 2008. "Why gift? Gift, gender and trinitarian relations in Milbank and Tanner." Scottish Journal of Theology 61:224–35.
- Colledge, Edmund O.S.A. and James Walsh S.J., eds. 1978. *A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich*. 2 vols. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies.
- Colledge, Edmund O.S.A. and James Walsh S.J., trans. 1978. *Julian of Norwich: Showings*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.
- Conybeare, Catharine. 2006. The Irrational Augustine. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cross, Richard. 2011. "Disability, Impairment, and Some Medieval Accounts of the Incarnation: Suggestions for a Theology of Personhood." *Modern Theology* 27.4:639–58.
- Daly, Mary. 1979. ""After the Death of God the Father: Women's Liberation and the Transformation of Christian Consciousness." In *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, edited by Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, 53–62. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers (originally published in *Commonweal*, 12 March 1971).

- Davis, Stephen T., ed. 2001. *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, 2nd edition. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.
- D'Costa, Gavin. 2007. "Queer Trinity." In *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, edited by Gerard Loughlin, 269–80. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- De La Torre, Miguel A. 2009. *Trails of Hope and Terror: Testimonies on Immigration*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.
- ------. 2010. Latina/o Social Ethics: Moving Beyond Eurocentric Moral Thinking. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press.
- Delbo, Charlotte. 1995. *Auschwitz and After*. Translated by Rosette C. Lamont. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Delumeau, Jean. 1983. Le péché et la peur: La culpabilisation en Occident (XIII^c—XVIII^c siècles). Paris: Fayard. Translated by Eric Nicholson, under the title Sin and Fear: The Emergence of a Western Guilt Culture 13th–18th Centuries. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990.
- Dorrien, Gary. 1995. Soul in Society: The Making and Renewal of Social Christianity. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
- Douglas, Mark. 2012. "Experience and Relevance: Continuing to Learn from Niebuhr and Saiving." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 28.1:102–108.
- Dutton, Elizabeth. 2008. Julian of Norwich: The Influence of Late-Medieval Devotional Compilations. Suffolk, UK: D. S. Brewer.
- Dutton, Elisabeth, ed. 2008. *Julian of Norwich: A Revelation of Love*. Plymouth, UK: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Elliott, Dyan. 1999. Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Engel, Mary Potter. 1990. "Evil, Sin, and the Violation of the Vulnerable." In *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*, edited by Mary Potter Engel and Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, 152–64. San Francisco, CA: Harper.
- Farley, Edward. 1990. *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Farley, Wendy. 1990. *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion: A Contemporary Theodicy*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press.
 - —. 1996. *Eros for the Other: Retaining Truth in a Pluralistic World*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

- 1999. "The Practice of Theodicy." In *Pain Seeking Understanding: Suffering, Medicine, and Faith*, edited by Margaret E. Mohrmann and Mark J. Hanson, 103– 114. Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press.
- ———. 2005. *The Wounding and Healing of Desire: Weaving Heaven and Earth.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox.
- Flax, Jane. 1987. "Within and Without: Women, Gender, and Theory." Signs 12.4:621-43.
- Forbes, Bruce David, and Jeanne Halgren Kilde, eds. 2004. *Rapture, Revelation, and the End Times*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Foucault, Michel. 1980. Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972– 1977. Edited by Colin Gordon. New York: Vintage Books.
- Fredriksen, Paula. 2012. Sin: The Early History of an Idea. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Frykholm, Amy Johnson. 2004. *Rapture Culture: Left Behind in Evangelical America*. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.
- Fulkerson, Mary McClintock. 1991. "Sexism as Original Sin: Developing a Theacentric Discourse." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 59:653–75.
- ———. 1994. *Changing the Subject: Women's Discourses and Feminist Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress.
- ———. 1997. "Contesting the Gendered Subject: A Feminist Account of the Imago Dei." In Horizons in Feminist Theology: Identity, Tradition, and Norms, edited by Rebecca S. Chopp and Sheila Grave Devaney, 99–115. Minneapolis: Fortress.
- ———. 2000. "Feminist Thinking on Sin: Thoughts on an Update." *dialog: A Journal of Theology* 39.3:230–33.
- Gebara, Ivone. 2002. *Out of the Depths: Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation*. Translated by Ann Patrick Ware. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Gibson, Libby. 2012. "Ethics from the Other Side: Postcolonial, Lay, and Feminist Contributions to Anglican Ethics." *Anglican Theological Review* 94.4:639–63.
- Gilkes, Cheryl Townsend. 1997. "The 'Loves' and 'Troubles' of African-American Women's Bodies: The Womanist Challenge to Cultural Humiliation and Community Ambivalence." In A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering, edited by Emilie M. Townes, 232–49. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Glasscoe, Marion, trans. 1976. Julian of Norwich: A Revelation of Love. Exeter: University of Exeter.

-. 1978. "Changing Chere and Changing Text in the Eighth Revelation of Julian of Norwich." *Medium Aevum* 66.1:115–21.

- . 1993. English Medieval Mystics: Games of Faith. London: Longman.
- Graham, Billy. 2012. "Confusing Evil with Good." Decision Magazine. June 12, 2012.
- Gregersen, Niels Henrik. 2000. "Guilt, Shame, and Rehabilitation: The Pedagogy of Divine Judgment." *dialog: A Journal of Theology* 39.2:105–18.
- Christine E. Gudorf. 1994. *Body, Sex, and Pleasure: Reconstructing Christian Sexual Ethics*. Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press.
- Halttunen, Karen. 1998. Murder Most Foul: The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hampson, Daphne. 1986. "Reinhold Niebuhr on Sin: A Critique." In *Reinhold Niebuhr and the Issues of Our Time*, edited by Richard Harries, 46–60. London: Mowbray & Co. Ltd..
 - ——. 1990. Theology and Feminism. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd.
- Hampson, Daphne, ed. 1996. *Swallowing a Fishbone: Feminist Theologians Debate Christianity*. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.
- Hanby, Michael. 2003. Augustine and Modernity. London: Routledge.
- Harrison, Beverly Wildung. 1985. *Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics*. Edited by Carol S. Robb. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Harrison, Carol. 2000. *Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Herdt, Jennifer A. 2009. "Christian Humility, Courtly Civility, and the Code of the Streets." *Modern Theology* 25.4:541–61.
- Heyward, Carter. 1987. "Heterosexist Theology: Being Above it All." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 3.1:29–38.
- Holloway, Julia Bolton, trans. 2003. *Julian of Norwich: Showing of Love*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press.
- Jantzen, Grace M. 1987. Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian. New York: Paulist Press.
- ------. 1995. *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

-. 1999. *Becoming Divine: Toward a Feminist Philosophy of Religion*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

 2007. "Promising Ashes' A Queer Language of Life." In *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, edited by Gerard Loughlin, 245–53. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

- Jennings, Theodore W. 2001. "Reconstructing the Doctrine of Sin," In *The Other Side of Sin:* Woundedness from the Perspective of the Sinned-Against, edited by Andrew Sung Park and Susan L. Nelson, 109–22. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Johnson, Elizabeth A. 1999. *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company.
- Johnson, Elizabeth A., et al. 1995. "Feminist Theology: A Review of Literature." *Theological Studies* 56:327–52.
- Jones, Paul. 2008. *The Humanity of Christ: Christology in Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics*. London: T&T Clark.
- Jones, Serene. 2000. *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

——. 2009. *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

- Julian of Norwich. 1976. *A Revelation of Love*. Edited by Marion Glasscoe. Great Britain: The University of Exeter.
 - ——. 1978. A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich. Edited by Edmund Colledge O.S.A. and James Walsh S.J. 2 vols. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies.
- ———. 1978. *Julian of Norwich: Showings*. Translated by Edmund Colledge O.S.A. and James Walsh S.J. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.
- ———. 1998. *Revelations of Divine Love*. Translated by Elizabeth Spearing. New York: Penguin Books.
- ------. 2003. *Showing of Love*. Translated by Julia Bolton Holloway. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press.
- ------. 2005. *Julian of Norwich: Showings*. Edited by Denise N. Baker. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
 - -. 2006. *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. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

-. 2008. *A Revelation of Love*. Edited by Elisabeth Dutton. Plymouth, UK: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

- Kamitsuka, Margaret D. 2004. "Toward a Feminist Postmodern and Postcolonial Interpretation of Sin." *The Journal of Religion*, 84:179–211.
- Kamitsuka, Margaret D., ed. 2010. *The Embrace of Eros: Bodies, Desires, and Sexuality in Christianity*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
- Karlsen, Carol F. 1987. *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Karnes, Michelle. 2012. "Julian of Norwich's Art of Interpretation." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 42:333–63.
- Keller, Catherine. 1986. From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism, and Self. Boston: Beacon Press.

———. 1996. *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

—. 1997. "Seeking and Sucking: On Relation and Essence in Feminist Theology." In Horizons in Feminist Theology: Identity, Tradition, and Norms, edited by Rebecca Chopp and Sheila Greeve Davaney. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

------. 2005. *God and Power: Counter-Apocalyptic Journeys*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

- Kelsey, David. 1993. "Whatever Happened to the Doctrine of Sin?" *Theology Today* 50:169–78.
- Kempster, Hugh. 1997. "Julian of Norwich: The Westminster Text of A Revelation of Love." *Mystics Quarterly* 23.4:177–246.
- Kleinhans, Kathryn Ann. 2000. "The *Bondage of the Will* as Good News for Postmodern Selves." *dialog: A Journal of Theology* 39.2:93–98.
- Kolbet, Paul R. 2010. *Augustine and the Cure of Souls: Revising a Classical Ideal*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

Konkola, Kari. 2005. "Have We Lost Humility?" Humanitas 18.1-2:182-207.

- Kvam, Kristen E., Schearing, Linda S., and Ziegler, Valerie H., eds. 1999. *Eve and Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Levenson, Michael. 1998. "Speaking to Power: The Performances of Judith Butler." *Lingua Franca* 8.6:60–7.

- Lewis, Robert E., ed. 1952–2001. *Middle English Dictionary*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press (available on-line: <u>http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/</u>).
- Lightsey, Pamela R. 2013. "Inner Dictum: A Womanist Reflection From the Queer Realm." Black Theology: An International Journal 10.3:339–49.
- Loughlin, Gerard, ed. 2007. *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Lowe, Mary Elise. 2000. "Woman Oriented Hamartiologies: A Survey of the Shift from Powerlessness to Right Relationship." *dialog: A Journal of Theology* 39.2:119–39.
- Lyon, Jodie L. 2012. "Pride and the Symptoms of Sin." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 28.1:96–102.
- Mathewes, Charles. 2001. *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———. 2010. *The Republic of Grace: Augustinian Thoughts for Dark Times*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

- Mayo, Cris. 2007. "Disruptions of Desire: From Androgynes to Genderqueer." *Philosophy of Education Yearbook*, 49–58.
- McAvan, Em. 2011. "Ambiguity and Apophatic Bodies in Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body*." *Critique* 52:434–43.
- McAvoy, Liz Herbert. 2004. Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe. Cambridge, UK: D. S. Brewer.
- McAvoy, Liz Herbert, ed. 2008. A Companion to Julian of Norwich. Cambridge, UK: D. S. Brewer.
- McDougall, Joy Ann. 2006. "Sin—No More? A Feminist Re-visioning of a Christian Theology of Sin." *Anglican Theological Review* 88.2:215–35.
- ———. 2009. "Feminist Theology." In *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, edited by John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance, 670–87. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
 - —. 2012. "Rising with Mary: Re-visioning a Feminist Theology of the Cross and Resurrection." *Theology Today* 69.2:166–76.
- McEntire, Sandra J., ed. 1998. Julian of Norwich: A Book of Essays. New York: Garland.
- McFadyen, Alistair. 2000. *Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust, and the Christian Doctrine of Sin.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- McFague, Sallie. 1987. *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age.* Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press.
- McFarland, Ian A. 2010. In Adam's Fall: A Meditation on the Christian Doctrine of Original Sin. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.
- McKisack, May. 1959. *The Fourteenth Century: 1307–1399*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mercadante, Linda. 1996. Victims and Sinners: Spiritual Roots of Addiction and Recovery. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.
- ———. 2000. "Anguish: Unraveling Sin and Victimization." *Anglican Theological Review* 82.2:283–302.
- Miles, Margaret Ruth. 1979. Augustine on the Body. Missoula, MT: Scholars Press.
- Miles, Rebekah L. 2001. *The Bonds of Freedom: Feminist Theology and Christian Realism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mohrmann, Margaret E. and Mark J. Hanson, eds. 1999. *Pain Seeking Understanding: Suffering, Medicine, and Faith.* Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press.
- Molnar, Paul D. 2002. *Divine Freedom and The Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology*. Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark Ltd.
- Morone, James. 2003. *Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Morrison, Toni. 1987. Beloved. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- ——. 1998. Paradise. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Murray, Stephen Butler. 2004. "The Dimensions of Sin and Fallenness in the Theological Anthropology of Black and Womanist Theologies." *The Journal of Religion* 84.1:23–47.
- Nelson, Derek R. 2009. What's Wrong with Sin? Sin in Individual and Social Perspective from Schleiermacher to Theologies of Liberation. New York: T&T Clark International.
- Nelson, Susan L. 2000. "Sin and the Broken Heart." *dialog: A Journal of Theology* 39.2:99–104.

Niebuhr, H. Richard. 1935. "Man the Sinner." The Journal of Religion 15.3:272-80.

——. 1963. *The Responsible Self*. New York: Harper and Row. Republished 1999. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

- Niebuhr, Reinhold. 1932. *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. New York: Charles Scribners' Sons. Republished 2001. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.
- ———. 1941. *The Nature and Destiny of Man.* Vol. 1, *Human Nature*. New York: Charles Scribners' Sons. Republished 1996. Louisville,KY: Westminster John Knox Press.
- ——. 1943. The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. 2, Human Destiny. New York: Charles Scribners' Sons. Republished 1996. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

Nussbaum, Martha C. 1999. Sex and Social Justice. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- ———. 2006. Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Nuth, Joan M. 1991. *Wisdom's Daughter: The Theology of Julian of Norwich*. New York: Crossroads.

———. 1992. "Two Medieval Soteriologies: Anselm of Canterbury and Julian of Norwich." *Theological Studies* 53.4:611–45.

- O'Faolain, Julia, and Lauro Martines, eds. 1973. Not in God's Image. New York: Harper.
- Pagels, Elaine. 1988. Adam, Eve, and the Serpent. New York: Random House.
- Papanikolaou, Aristotle. 2003. "Person, *Kenosis* and Abuse: Hans Urs Von Balthasar and Feminist Theologies in Conversation." *Modern Theology* 19.1:41–65.
- Pardue, Stephen. 2012. "Kenosis and its Discontents: Towards an Augustinian Account of Divine Humility." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 65:271–88.
- Park, Andrew Sung. 1993. The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin. Nashville, TN: Abingdon.
- Park, Andrew Sung and Susan L. Nelson, eds. 2001. *The Other Side of Sin: Woundedness from the Perspective of the Sinned Against*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Parsons, Susan Frank. 2002. *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Peters, Ted. 2000. "Sin, Scapegoating, and Justifying Faith." *dialog: A Journal of Theology* 39.2:84–92.
- Plantinga, Cornelius. 1993. ""Not the Way It's S'pposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin." *Theology Today* 50:179–92.

——. 1995. Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

- Plaskow, Judith. 1980. Sex, Sin and Grace: Women's Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America.
- ———. 1989. *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers.

Power, Kim. 1995. Veiled Desire: Augustine on Women. New York: Continuum.

- Rauschenbusch, Walter. [1917] 1997. A Theology for the Social Gospel. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Ray, Stephen H. 2003. *Do No Harm: Social Sin and Christian Responsibility*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Ricoeur, Paul. 1967. The Symbolism of Evil. New York: Harper & Row.
 - ——. 1985. "Evil, A Challenge to Philosophy and Theology." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53:635–48.
- Riehle, Wolfgang. 2014. The Secret Within: Hermits, Recluses, and Spiritual Outsiders in Medieval England. Translated by Charity Scott-Stokes. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. Originally published 2011. Englische Mystik des Mittelalters. Munich: C.H. Beck.
- Robbins, Joel. 2004. Becoming Sinners: Christian Transformations of Morality and Culture in a Papua New Guinea Society. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Robertson, Elizabeth. 1993. "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, 142–67. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press,.
- Rogers, Katherin A. 2002. "The Abolition of Sin: A Response to Adams in the Augustinian Tradition." *Faith and Philosophy* 19.1:69–84.
- Rohrer, Judy. 2005. "Toward a Full-Inclusion Feminism: A Feminist Deployment of Disability Analysis." *Feminist Studies* 31.1:34–63.
- Rolf, Veronica Mary. 2013. Julian's Gospel: Illuminating the Life & Revelations of Julian of Norwich. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Rossing, Barbara R. 2004. *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Ruether, Rosemary Radford. 1983. *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*. Boston: Beacon Press.

- ——. 1992. "Dualism and the Nature of Evil in Feminist Theology." *Studies in Christian Ethics* 5:26–39.
- ———. 1998. *Introducing Redemption in Christian Feminism*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- ——. 1998. Women and Redemption: A Theological History. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- . 2000. "Women and Sin: Response to Mary Elise Lowe." dialog: A Journal of Theology 39.3:233–35.
- Sachs, John R. 1991. "Current Eschatology: Universal Salvation and the Problem of Hell." *Theological Studies* 52:227–54.
- Sands, Kathleen. 1994. *Escape from Paradise: Evil and Tragedy in Feminist Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Sands, Kathleen, ed. 2000. *God Forbid: Religion and Sex in American Public Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Saiving, Valerie. 1960. "The Human Situation: A Feminine View." *Journal of Religion* 40:100–12.
- Schep, Dennis. 2012. "The Limits of Performativity: A Critique of Hegemony in Gender Theory." *Hypatia* 27.4:864–80.
- Shuster, Marguerite. 2004. *The Fall and Sin: What We Have Become as Sinners*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Schultze, Quentin J. 1993. "Civil Sin: Evil and Purgation in the Media." *Theology Today* 50.2:229–42.
- Slater, Peter. 1985. "Tillich on the Fall and the Temptation of Goodness." *The Journal of Religion* 65.2:196–207.
- Smith, Christine M. 1993. "Sin and Evil in Feminist Thought." Theology Today 50.2:208-19.
- Soskice, Janet Martin. 2007. *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Spearing, Elizabeth, trans. 1998. Revelations of Divine Love. New York: Penguin Books.
- Stark, Judith Chelius, ed. 2007. *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University.
- Suchocki, Marjorie Hewitt. 1994. *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology*. New York: Continuum.

- Tanner, Kathryn. 1997. "Social Theory Concerning the 'New Social Movements' and the Practice of Feminist Theology." In *Horizons in Feminist Theology: Identity, Tradition, and Norms*, edited by Rebecca S. Chopp and Sheila Greeve Davaney, 179– 97. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
- ———. 2001. Jesus, Humanity, and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- ———. 2014. "Incarnation, Cross, and Sacrifice: A Feminist-Inspired Reappraisal." *Anglican Theological Review* 86.1:35–56.
- Tillich, Paul. 1957. *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Townes, Emilie M. 2006. *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Townes, Emilie M., ed. 1997. A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering. New York: Orbis Books.
- Turner, Denys. 2004. "Sin is Behovely' in Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love*." *Modern Theology* 20.3:407–22.

_____. 2011. Julian of Norwich, Theologian. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

- Van Engen, Abram. 2009. "Shifting Perspectives: Sin and Salvation in Julian's *A Revelation* of Love." Literature and Theology 23.1:1–17.
- Von Balthasar, Hans Urs. 1988. *Dare We Hope "That All Men Be Saved"*? Translated by David Kipp and Lothar Krauth. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
- Walker, Margaret Urban. 1998. Moral Understandings: A Feminist Study in Ethics. New York: Routledge.
- ------. 2006. *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations after Wrongdoing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———. 2007. *Moral Understandings: A Feminist Study in Ethics*, 2nd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Ward, Benedicta S.L.G. 1988. "Julian the Solitary." *Julian Reconsidered*, Kenneth Leech and Sister Benedicta S.L.G. Oxford: SLG Press.
- Watson, Nicholas. 1993. "The Composition of Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Divine Love*." *Speculum* 68:637–83

——. 1996. "'Yf wommen be double naturelly': Remaking 'Woman' in Julian of Norwich's Revelation of Love." *Exemplaria* 8:1–34.

- -. 1998. "The Trinitarian Hermeneutic in Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Love*." In *Julian of Norwich: A Book of Essays*, edited by Sandra J. McEntire, 61–90. New York, NY: Garland Publishing, Inc. Originally published 1991. In *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Exeter Symposium V*, edited by Marion Glasscoe, 79–100. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer.
- —. 1999. "The Middle English Mystics." In *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, edited by David Wallace, 539–65. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Watson, Nicholas and Jacqueline Jenkins, eds. 2006. *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and A Revelation of Love*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Weaver, Darlene Fozard. 2001. "How Sin Works: A Review Essay." Journal of Religious Ethics 29.3:473–501.
- . 2003. "Taking Sin Seriously." Journal of Religious Ethics 31.1:45-74.
- Welch, Sharon D. 2000. A Feminist Ethic of Risk. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- West, Angela. 1995. *Deadly Innocence: Feminist Theology and the Mythology of Sin.* London: Cassell.
- West, Traci C. 2006. *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Williams, Delores S. 1993. Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
 - —. 1997. "A Womanist Perspective on Sin." In A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering, edited by Emilie M. Townes, 130–49. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Williams, Rowan. 1982. *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing.
- Wirzba, Norman. 2008. "The Touch of Humility: An Invitation to Creatureliness." *Modern Theology* 24.2:225–44.