The Vibrant Blood of the Dead Body: Themes and Uses of Blood in the Memorial of Angela of Foligno

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Gender studies as an area of research demonstrates the influence and reach of gender within the human experience. History, politics and religion have all come to bare the facelift that the unearthing of gender reveals. Traditionally human biology intimately connects the body with gender identity. In the frame of post-structuralism, however, the body has been identified as the place where gender plays out, not its determining factor. Despite biological traditionalism, male and female bodies are constructed bodies, bodies that emerge as homosexual or heterosexual, as men and women through "the reiterations of certain discursive practices."[1] The body then becomes a text to be read and these discursive practices are places of gender construction. Bodies in history, politics and religion embody subjectivity through the roles they perform and in turn, read like a library of asserted ideas.

The Christian Middle Ages presents a plethora of bodily devotion. With the birth of the stigmata in Francis of Assisi, the anchoritic visions of Julian of Norwich and the divine marriage of Bernard of Clairvaux in his treatise *On the Song of Songs*, the body emerged as the choice vehicle for divine communication. As such, the body was the medium for spiritual messages. A person's religious life played out on their body and in turn, medieval spiritual devotions created and maintained the Christian bodies that housed them. The medieval turn toward the body provided multiple social and intellectual resources to deal with the confines of human flesh, such as life, birth and death.[2] This paper looks to use the body as a platform

1. Veronica Vasterling, "Body and Language: Butler, Merleau-Ponty and Lyotard on the Speaking Embodies Subject." *Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 11.2: 205–223. Project Muse. Concordia University, Montreal, PQ. http://muse.jhu.edu/. 18 March 2010, 2.

2. Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference and the Demands of History* (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London, 2002), 272.

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to examine the female Christian and engage in the larger dialogue of female hagiography and how a male author's subjectivity manifest itself through a woman's body in text. For the purposes of this analysis, the body of Angela of Foligno will be examined through her *Memorial*, penned by her confessor Brother Arnaldo and completed around 1298 CE.

Angela of Foligno was thirty-seven years old when she committed to a religious life. She had been both wife and mother beforehand, and had a most intimate knowledge of both male and female fleshy bodies. Having copulated, been impregnated, given birth, reared and buried her children along with her husband and mother, Angela knew the boundaries and realities of human flesh. This personal history separated Angela from other religious women, who normally entered a religious life as chaste virgins[3] and despite their feminine fleshy bodies knew very little about the extent of their malleable corpus. In her religious life, Angela was a mystic whose revelations centered on images of the suffering Christ and the Eucharist. In this paper I examine in particular, the use of blood in Angela's visions as recorded in the *Memorial*, and suggest that her personal history as wife and mother shapes how the *Memorial* uses blood both as a source of nourishment and as a symbol of flesh. In tracing the text's use of blood, I separate my examination into three themes: Kinship Blood, Sacrificial Blood and Blood as Sustenance. By examining each theme as it arises in Angela's *Memorial*, we see her spiritually nourished and physically sustained by Christ's blood, recreating her fleshy body through His. The text manipulates her fleshy knowledge of motherhood so that this unique bodily perspective reorganizes her own corpus into the body of a holy woman. It does this by directing her maternal knowledge onto the human body of Christ. In the *Memorial* Christ's blood is the vehicle for a new body for Angela, one not set apart because of its maternal, carnal past.

Angela of Foligno was born in 1248 CE in an area in Italy near Assisi called Umbria and died in 1309 CE. Her mystic life began when she was thirty-seven while she was a wife and mother. Born twenty-five years after the death of Francis of Assisi, Angela entered the Franciscan order in the midst of turmoil. After the death of their founding figure, Franciscans were unable to come to a consensus of the meaning and reality of poverty,

3. Not all women who entered into convents and took religious orders were virgins, but the holy women chosen as exemplars all personified the chaste life of virginity.

the fundamental marker in the order's spirituality. At the same time, the Papacy moved from Rome to Avginon and with that shift opened decades of authoritative uncertainty and religious instability. Founded by Clare of Assisi, the female companion order to the Franciscan movement was newly established only thirty years before Angela took the orders and its establishment was one of much political maneuvering. For close to fifty-five years, from the death of Francis until the establishment of the order, Clare strategically navigated the Papal system to compose a rule "that would recognize unendowed Franciscan women in law."[4] For women taking these orders in the thirteenth century, Franciscan poverty was not only an economic stance, but a political appeal.[5]

It is important to frame Angela inside the Franciscan movement, if not to understand her political allegiance, to understand her imagery of the suffering Christ. Drawing on a rich Christian history, Francis of Assisi arguably focused medieval theology onto the suffering body of Christ in his exhibition of the first stigmata. While Angela herself never displays the signs of a stigmata, she does, like Francis, use the suffering bleeding body of Christ to exemplify her theology.

The corporeality of Christ's suffering body was pivotal in medieval women's devotion. Women's bodies are fleshy, sexualized bodies. They bleed naturally. They have breasts that lactate. Feminine bodies are overtly marked with their gendered biology. When the Medieval understanding of Christ shifted from a glorious figure to a suffering one, Christ's body became a human body. This shift opened new spaces where His devout created new modes of religious devotion to reflect this change and emulate His body. These new forms of devotion included rigorous Eucharist veneration and bodily ecstasies. Karma Lochrie says, "both the medieval idea of the imitation of Christ as an imitation of his humanity—his bodiliness—and the increasing graphic representations of that bodiliness are defining features of late medieval mysticism and of women's mystical experiences

4. Joan Mueller, *The Privilege of Poverty: Clare of Assisi, Agnes of Prague and the Struggle for a Franciscan Rule for Women* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State UP, 2006), 114.

5. Ibid., 6.

in particular."[6] Christ's body became human and fleshy allowing women to fasten themselves onto this idea and venerate Christ's humanity in a manner much more intimately connected to their own gendered reality. When the suffering God became human, the female body became a vehicle to a relationship with Him.

With this emerging female bodily devotion, women's practices began to center themselves on the Eucharist and the consumption of Christ's body. Images often depict Christ feeding waiting female devotees directly from his wounded side. In many cases, He pulls a Eucharistic wafer from his wound, and in others, His blood falls into the waiting chalice or mouth of the female attendant. In all instances, women are receptacles to the wounded body of Christ. His injured, and subsequently dead body is always central and aligns itself neatly with the popular Eucharistic theology found in female devotional practice and writings. These images not only conflate Christ's wound and blood with a woman's breast, but most importantly with the nutrition a woman's breast milk supplies.[7] In these instances, Christ's blood signifies his nourishing, fecund body. A body that spiritually harvests those it feeds, transforming devotees into spiritual offspring.

This imagery of Christ's blood as spiritual nourishment functions very closely to the medieval physiology of blood as it existed as one of the four humors. The humors were an interdependent system of the body's four liquid sources: blood, bile, phlegm and black bile. The balance of these liquids was key to a person's health and it was based on these theories that practices such as therapeutic bloodletting were based. Essentially, if a person were sick some of their bodily liquids were removed to allow the humors to rebalance themselves. Aristotle observed that valued human traits such as a person's courage and intelligence indicated the quality of a person's humors and in particular the quality of their blood. The higher the quality of a person's blood, the more advantageous qualities they displayed; suggesting that the internal state of a person's humors displayed itself externally on the body.

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6. Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and the Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 2.

7. For more information on this phenomena please read Caroline Walker Bynum's *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1988).

As Aristotle's observations indicate, blood held a special place among the humors. Sanguineous blood, or blood found in a person's veins, was a combination of pure humor blood (that was created in the liver), yellow and red bile. The function of both biles fortified the pure blood inside the veins. This sanguineous substance was the body's nutrition system. In medieval physiology, digested food proceeded from the stomach to the liver, where in the liver it was concocted into the humors, and most importantly the blood. In this process, blood was purified in the liver with additional parts refined into semen.[8] The body used this concocted or 'cooked' blood as sustenance and in turn the humors, in particular blood, maintained the functioning body. Physiologically, blood nurtured and nourished the body in the Middle Ages and likewise Christ's flesh and blood spiritually nurtured and nourished the women who venerated His suffering body. With this understanding of the medieval conception of blood and its contemporary Christian understanding of Christ's blood, it is to the Angela's *Memorial* that we now turn.

The *Memorial*

Angela's *Memorial* is the first section of her *Book* and is a text of consecutive steps outlining her spiritual conversion and inner journey. This text records her mystical experiences as retold to her confessor, Brother Arnaldo. There are thirty steps in the *Memorial*, which are then divided into three different sections surrounding particular turns in her spiritual life. Steps one through nineteen articulate Angela's spiritual conversion and personal cleansing through suffering. In this process, Angela commits herself wholly to Christ. While she rids herself of her worldly possessions, she fervently offers penance for her cleansing. In step eight, in the presence of Christ via a crucifix, she strips herself naked and offers her chastity to Him, promising to never offend Him again with her "bodily member."[9] This conversion lasted approximately five and half years ending in 1291 CE with her great vision of Christ in a church in Assisi, which becomes the twentieth step in her journey. Brother Arnaldo, the text's literary author, conflates the last eleven steps into seven supplementary steps. Of the seven, the first

8. Nancy G. Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 106

9. *Angela of Foligno: Complete Works*, ed. and trans. Paul La Chance, (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 126.

five supplementary steps describe the majority of her mystical visions and encounters with Christ that span approximately four years. The sixth and seventh supplementary steps were simultaneous events of spiritual and bodily torments (the sixth step) and majestic visions of God (the seventh step), which lasted for two years. Angela dies thirteen years after the events included in her *Memorial* at the age of sixty and the details of her death exist in a section of her *Instructions*,[10] the second part of her *Book*.

Angela's historical confessor, Brother Arnaldo was also her distant cousin. Having prayed to St. Francis in her second step for a just and noble confessor, Angela has a realization from God, and discovered Brother Arnaldo as her vehicle to absolution.[11] Angela's *Memorial* records not only her mystic experiences, but in the subtext of these writings, is the relationship between these two religious figures. Historically, women's confessors have always recorded the religious experiences of their illiterate pupils. The text emerges then, not as an autobiographical account of Angela's experiences, but rather as a Brother Arnaldo's interpretation of these events. With the exception of a few texts, the reader of women's vitae meet women whose bodies have had a male author's prerogative projected onto and manifest on their textual bodies. The examined themes that follow from the *Memorial* arise through Brother Arnaldo's textual constructions of Angela's female body. Theses themes tell the reader not about Angela's historical theology, but about Brother Arnaldo's imprint on her religious influence.

Kinship Blood

While tracing the use of blood in Angela of Foligno's *Memorial*, the theme of kinship and familial linage appears. While the connection of bloodlines was not a dominant trend in medieval literature, the re-orientation of Angela to a spiritual life after a full life as wife and mother does allow one to view her use of kinship and bloodlines as a vehicle for a personal self-redefinition.

In her ninth step, Angela describes her desire to "go to the cross" and how she needed to strip herself of everything worldly. This stripping, or lightening, of herself included forgiving her offenders, losing her possessions

10. Ibid., 219–318.
11. Ibid., 124.

as well as her personal attachments.[12] She describes her husband as a burden and her mother as an obstacle. When along with her sons, they pass away she expresses a great amount of liberation and even admits that she prayed for such occurrences. She says, "[b]ecause I had already entered the aforesaid way (the Franciscan order), and had prayed to God for their death, I felt a great consolation when it happened. I thought that since God had concealed me this aforesaid favor, my heart would always be within God's heart, and God's heart always within mine."[13] The loss of her familial ties allowed Angela to completely commit to her new spiritual life in the ways that she understood it to demand. People living in the Middle Ages understood the value of religious life through one's fidelity to it.[14] Religious life was only valued if the person adhering to its orders was completely and wholehearted committed to the lifestyle. Angela's religious conversion could only be valued once she shed herself of her social life. This meant not only forgoing the responsibly of property, but losing any familial responsibility as well.

Not long after the disappearance of those familial ties does Angela have her first encounter with Christ and his blood. In her fourteenth step, while in prayer, Christ appears to her on the cross and guides her to his wounded side and encourages her to drink his "fresh flowing" blood.[15] His blood here, she instructs, was her cleansing agent. While the occurrence of Christ's blood at this point in her conversion is not out of place, its congruent proximity to the loss of her familial ties is suggestive of a more intimate meaning.

In the Middle Ages blood is sometimes used to express kinship, familial linage and social survival.[16] Angela once a link in a familial bloodline, finds herself suddenly freed from such kinship in her ninth step. Not only was her mother gone, but the continuation of her family through her sons also died. No longer organized into a family circuit socially, Angela was isolated. The introduction to Christ's blood in her fourteenth step is a reorganizing of her social survival. In drinking from Christ's wound, not

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12. Ibid., 126.
13. Ibid.
14. Joan Mueller, *Privilege of Poverty*, 106.
15. La Chance, *Angela of Foligno*, 128.
16. Caroline Walker Bynum. *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 157.

only is she creating a bloodline for herself, but she is also declaring Christ as her intimate family and committing herself to His service. This cleansing was not only a spiritual re-orientation for Angela, but a social re-orientation of her familial priorities. In this instance, the text uses Angela's bodily and maternal knowledge to distance Angela from her own familial relationships. Her intimate knowledge of blood surfaces in the text at the point when the text wishes to distance Angela from the relationships that afforded her that knowledge.

When contrast with another prominent medieval mystic mother, the *Memorial*'s distancing of Angela from her maternal body emerges as unique. Margery Kempe[17] is a fourteenth century English mystic whose semi-autobiographical text surfaced centuries after the life of its namesake. Like Angela, Margery is a wife and mother before her religious experiences unfolded. Unlike Angela, Margery remains married to her husband while eventually creating a celibate relationship and her children remain alive. In Margery's *Book*, these relationships do complicate her religious life, but unlike in the *Memorial* they do not prevent the mystic woman from developing a flourishing relationship with Christ and subsequently, God.[18] Unlike the uses of maternal relations in Angela's *Memorial*, Margery's maternal characteristics in her *Book* allow her to organize herself within the structure of the divine family. For instance in chapter six of her *Book* at the beginning of her religious experiences, Margery attends to Anne, Mary's mother, and Elizabeth, Mary's sister, during their pregnancies.[19] In each case, Margery attends to the newly born, holy baby and in the case of the child Mary, attends to her throughout her childhood. Margery's impact on Mary is so great in this passage that Margery stays with Mary through her own divine pregnancy and birth, preparing beds and begging for food. In her *Book*, Margery utilizes her motherly instincts to associate herself with

17. While it is interesting to consider Margery's motherhood next to Angela's, it is important to note that the different geographical and political terrains separating these women, complicates a more detailed comparison. Angela's mysticism emerges within the conflicts presented by the surfacing multiple religious orders; while Margery faces Lollardy and the beginnings of the English Reformation.

18. To be fair to the development of Margery's celibate life, she does push the boundaries of her marital relationship while attempting to establish a mutual celibacy within matrimony.

19. Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, trans. Lynn Stanley (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2001), 15.

a new family. Where the *Memorial* capitalizes on the physicality of Angela's maternal body to leverage her into a spiritual relationship and ultimately distance her from that carnal body, Margery's *Book* streamlines Margery's maternal instincts and it is the emphasis on this maternal nature that allows Margery to intimately align herself within the divine kindred.

Near the middle of her *Memorial* in the fourth supplementary step, Angela finds herself again at the side of Christ. In a state of joy from one of her ecstatic visions she suddenly comes to understand how through Christ, human flesh is made one with God.[20] This realization is followed with a description of her entry into Christ's body via his side. Angela exclaims describing her own interaction with Christ,

> [a]t times it seems to my soul that it enters into Christ's side, and this is a source of great joy and delight; it is indeed such a joyful experience to move into Christ's side that in no way can I express it and put words to it... it seemed to me that I had indeed entered at that moment within the side of Christ. All sadness was gone and my joy was so great that nothing can be said about it.[21]

At her moment of inquiry, Angela is assumed into Christ's body.

Here it is not Christ's *wound* that Angela enters into, but his *side*. Any opening in Christ's side would be affiliated and generated from his final bodily infliction, but instead of being described as torn flesh, a cavern created against the will of the body, this opening functions as a natural gateway, where coming and going is expected. As Bynum expresses in *Wonderful Blood* the conflation of this receptive opening with other natural openings appears in many medieval mystic writings, most prominently paralleling it with the birth canal. Bynum says, "Christ's side was 'opened' like a door (or a birth canal) rather than 'pierced' as is wounding, is typical of many fourteenth and fifteenth-century devotions that analogize saving with birthing, conflate natural and artificial bodily openings,."[22] In this sense, what Angela engages in when brought into Christ's side is her birth or re-birth, where Christ's body is her maternal source and where the blood from Christ's side becomes maternal blood of uterine relation.

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20. La Chance, *Angela of Foligno*, 175.
21. Ibid., 176.
22. Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 19.

Medieval physiology understood female menstruum, or the blood that lined the uterus, as the material 'stuff' which was brought together by male sperm to form a fetus. Where the construction of a child was dependant on male virility, the material that formed a child existed in maternal blood. As Joan Cadden attests that medieval physiology blossomed from the work of ancient physicians Galen and Aristotle and while the fertility of female sperm was heavily debate in the Middle Ages with little consensus, the materiality of female menstruum was universal. "It," she says, "supplies the matter for the initial formation of the fetus itself."[23] For the medieval mind then, a fetus was created and brought forth from the materiality of maternal blood. While a father gave the child life, vibrancy and movement, its tangibility and corporeality was its mother's blood.

When Angela dissolves into Christ's side, or womb, in her fourth supplementary step not only is it symbolic of a spiritual re-birth, but when considered against the physiological beliefs of the thirteenth century becomes a physical re-formation as well. A re-formation where she emerges very literally, re-created from Christ's maternal blood. As she drank from his side, declaring a new familial linage, the blood of Christ's womb exclaims her unbreakable material connection with her savior, made available to her through His blood.

Again we see in this text that Angela's maternal body is being distanced from her religious identity. When Angela dissolves into Christ's side she becomes a child again, annulling any authority her body would have projected from her experience of motherhood. Returning to the Book of Margery Kempe, in the opening scenes of Margery's text the author capitalizes on Margery's maternal state to emphasize spiritual imagery. After giving birth, the reader learns that Margery falls into a prolonged illness where she engages in a cosmic battle with demons.[24] The sudden illness lasted the same time as a child's gestation. This is how the reader meets Margery Kempe, and this cosmic illness is the opening of her recorded religious life. Unlike the *Memorial*, Margery's *Book* plays with and emphasizes the association of Margery's maternal body and her

23. Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science and Culture* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1993), 126.

24. *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 7.

spiritual life. In the *Book*, maternal flesh is not a site of reformation, rather it is a platform for spiritual interaction.

In the fifth supplementary step Angela on Holy Saturday envisions herself with Christ inside the sepulcher. Brother Arnaldo writes,

> [o]n Holy Saturday, after what has just been related, Christ's faithful one told me the wonderful and joy-filled experience of God which were now hers. Among other things, she related to me, brother scribe, that on that very day, in a state of ecstasy, she found herself in the sepulcher with Christ. She said she had first of all kissed Christ's breast—and saw that he lay dead, with his eyes closed—then she kissed his mouth, from which, she added, a delightful fragrance emanated, one impossible to describe. This moment lasted only a short while. Afterward, she placed her cheek on Christ's own and he, in turn, placed his hand on her other cheek, pressing her closely to him.[25]

In this vision, Angela first addresses Christ's body through his breast. While male and physiologically unable to breast feed, as we have previously seen with her entrance into His side, Christ assumes a maternal role for Angela and in firstly addressing his breast, she acknowledges the nourishment his body offers her. Medieval imagery of Christ's body often emphasized maternal characteristics and as it was made popular by medieval mystics, the suffering Christ became a maternal Christ. Upon realizing that his body was dead, Angela joyously moves her devotion to his lips[26] realigning herself with Christ as the head of her family where her husband used to be. In this moment, we are able to experience the intimacy of life and death in the text, which it makes available through Angela's maternal knowledge and corporeal body.

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25. La Chance, *Angela of Foligno*, 182.

26. In Aelred of Rievaulx's work *On Spiritual Friendship*, he adopts the kiss as the primary symbol for his examination of the three stages of Christian friendship: the mystical kiss, the physical kiss and the spiritual kiss. His examination of the physical kiss focuses on the role of the mouth and the exchange that occurs between the two kissers. He correlates the air breathed in and out with that of one's spirit and explains that what is ultimately going on in a physical kiss is the exchanging and intermingling of two separate spirits. For more please see Nicolas James Perella, *The Kiss Sacred and Profane: An Interpretative History of Kiss Symbolism and Related Religio-Erotic Themes* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969).

Sacrificial Blood

Above the theme of blood as kinship and familial linage is discussed as it appears in Angela's *Memorial*. The text's understanding of blood also functions around a second theme of suffering and death in the text. Mainly suffering as it is the creator of dead bodies. Where above blood was a vehicle for Angela to create and established lineage with Christ, blood as it relates to suffering and death for Angela is life giving and joyful. Spilled blood becomes the primary source of life for Angela and as such indicates a joyous occasion and dead bodies become symbols of the gift of life. The following is an examination of how the text presents an understanding of dead bodies and living blood through Angela, in her *Memorial*.

In her third supplementary step, Angela speaks to Brother Arnaldo in two parables intended to teach about the sweetness of Christ's suffering. The first is a story of a father and his sons. The sons owe a great debt and while at a crossroads their father pays their debt with his life, clearing his sons' accounts. The sons, burdened with the responsibility of their father's death, are unable to return to the crossroads where he died because his blood was still visible as if it were alive and vibrant.[27] Angela relates this parable to the suffering of Christ on the cross and how people must look at the crucifix and witness the fresh blood flowing from it to find joy. This story draws on the fundamental building blocks of Christianity, sacrifice for the sake of another's salvation. It is immediately following this teaching that Brother Arnaldo questions her statement that uncomfortably looking at the cross is an immediate source of joy, rather he says that this discomfort is a gradual source of joy that is originally bitter.[28] It is in her story answering Brother Arnaldo that Angela's explains how discomfort can be joyous by explaining the relationship between blood and life.

She tells Brother Arnaldo that on Holy Thursday she and her companion went to a local hospital donated what they had to purchase food for the sick and proceeded to wash the sick bodies. "And after we had distributed all that we had," she says,

> We washed the feet of the women and the hands of the men, and especially those of one of the lepers which were festering and in an advanced stage of

27. La Chance, *Angela of Foligno*, 162.
28. Ibid.

> decomposition. Then we drank the very water with which we had washed him. And the drink was so sweet that, all the way home, we tasted its sweetness and it was as if we had received Holy Communion. As a small scale of the leper's sore was stuck in my throat, I tried to swallow it. My conscience would not let me spit it out, just as if I had received Holy Communion. I really did not want to spit it out but simply to detach it from my throat.[29]

In her observations about Angela's eating habits Caroline Walker Bynum suggests that in Angela's caring for sick bodies they became a substitute for Christ's own suffering body.[30] In creating this substitution, Angela subsequently takes eating and drinking of their bodies very literally, as seen above in the case of the leper.

The difference to be noted about the leper in contrast to the other sick people who she attended to, is that they were considered to be the living dead. Ritually put to death with the onset of their disease, lepers' bodies were more than simply sick bodies, like Christ, their bodies were also dead. As seen in John Shinners' collection of primary medieval religious sources, funerary rites were in circulation to separate lepers from the healthy. Lepers were "symbolically dead to the world, [and were] thoroughly cut off from healthy society."[31] Like the dead, bodies with leprosy were separate and similarly othered next to the living population.

More interestingly, the leper's body with its receding appendages, flaking skin and decaying flesh indicated a loss of blood and imbalance of the humors according to medieval physiology. All bodily ailments were physiologically explained through an imbalance of the humors as seen through therapies such as bloodletting. For example, some mystics such as Hildegard of Bingen associated leprosy with an excess of black bile in the blood.[32] The extreme changes taking place on a leper's body suggested a major dilemma amongst the humors. As sanguineous blood was the source of bodily nutrition that sustained a persons flesh, a disease where flesh decayed and the body slowly broke down indicated an absence of pure humor blood (which contained nutrients from the food as processed in the liver) in those

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29. Ibid., 163.

30. Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 144.

31. *Medieval Popular Religion 1000–1500: A Reader,* ed. John Shinners (Canada: Broadview Press, 2007), 311.

32. Peter Lewis Allen, *The Wages of Sin: Sex and Disease, Past and Present* (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 34.

dying parts. While the leper's body was not completely drained of blood, large amounts of flesh were missing the substance. Angela's singling out of this body next to other bodily ailments is a return to her understanding of dead bodies and living blood. Like Christ, lepers' bodies were absent of life and like Christ's body as seen above with her vision in the sepulcher, their bodies were a source of sweet joy for Angela.[33]

Blood according to the *Memorial* is vibrant, full of life and is a source of giving. In the text, Angela explains how Christ's blood is the ultimate medicine and source of healing.[34] It is superior to any other material for vivifying life. The blood that Angela envisions bleeding from the cross she describes as "fresh blood flowing."[35] As well, Angela feeds from the side of Christ as previously discussed.[36] This suggests that His blood is a source of nourishment for her, indicating a healthy life.

The corporeal use of blood in the *Memorial* stands out in contrast to the use of blood by other mystics such as Catherine of Siena. Catherine is a fourteenth century Italian mystic and Doctor of the Church and was a pivotal figure in the reconciliation of the Papacy to Rome. Her *Dialogue* and *Vita* are littered with bodily piety and images, but unlike Angela, orient themselves explicitly toward metaphysical manifestations. For example Catherine receives the gift of the stigmata, but unlike Francis of Assisi who wore the marks on his body, Catherine's infamous stigmata was spiritual, and although she felt its presence, she wore its marks exclusively on her soul. Catherine also utilizes the humanity of the suffering Christ like other contemporaries, but the affiliations of Christ's body always exists in the transcendental realm. Most relevant here is her use of blood. Where in the *Memorial* Angela's physical body is transformed into the body of a holy woman, the baptism in the blood of Christ that Catherine speaks of is a re-birth of the spiritual self.[37]

When considering the parable of the father, dying at the crossroads in context with this vivifying understanding of blood, the blood that remains

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33. An interesting fact about leprosy is that it was connected with sexually transmitted diseases in the Middle Ages as described in: Allen, *The Wages of Sin*, 25–40.

34. La Chance, *Angela of Foligno*, 155.

35. Ibid., 162.

36. Ibid., 126.

37. Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue* trans. Suzanne Noffke (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 138.

to mark the spot of his murder is a reminder of life. His dead body becomes not one wretched from life by his murderers, but the symbol of his voluntary gift of life for his sons. A dead body is absent of life, for Angela it is not life wretched from a body pulled into death, but a body's gift, giving its life, its blood, for another. The leper's body becomes her example of choice to express how the appearance of blood is not a bitter experience as understood by Brother Arnaldo, but a sweet one because a leper's dead body is indicative of the gift of life in it absence of blood and how it is similar to Christ's body.

This relationship between vivifying blood and the dead body is demonstrated again in one of the *Memorial*'s recorded sensatory Eucharistic visions. In the middle of her fifth supplementary step, Angela explains to Brother Arnaldo how she likes to let the host linger in her mouth because of the delicious meat taste that resonates with the piece of Christ's body. Brother Arnaldo writes, "[s]he said that it does not have the taste of any known bread or meat. It has most certainly a meat taste, but one very different and most savory. I cannot find anything to compare it to."[38] The use of meat imagery was very popular in writings of medieval female mystics to describe the Eucharist, although each text consequently molds this imagery to its own theological style. Catherine of Siena for instance, uses the consumption of meat consecutively with milk to describe the maturing nature of the spiritual self, much like the progression of food consumption for human children.[39] This connects her meat imagery with her overall emphasis on metaphysical devotion.

When considering the corporeal tendencies of the *Memorial*, the obvious connection here is the connection of human flesh to animal meat,[40] but the parallel becomes much more rich when placed in the context with the life of meat in the 13th century. Most families reared their own animals, feeding and nurturing them from birth. If someone did not have their own animals and wanted meat they would purchase a live bird or cow from the market. Ultimately the process of consuming meat if it did not include

38. La Chance, *Angela of Foligno*, 186.

39. Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*, 132.

40. The use of meat imagery was very popular in writings of medieval female mystics to describe the Eucharist although each text molds this imagery to its own style of theology. Catherine of Siena for instance, uses the consumption of meat consecutively with milk to describe the nature of the spiritual self, much like the progression of food consumption for human children.

raising the animal, always included the killing, bleeding and plucking or skinning the body. In order for a family to eat and realistically, continue on living, the animal died. In the case of meat, blood sacrifice for nourishment was a daily affair and 13th century citizens were very much aware of blood as a life source, that when shed gave the gift of life for something else. Angela would have been particularly aware of this life giving role of meat because of her place inside her families home as wife and mother having to perform these tasks herself.[41]

The text arranges Angela's experiences with dead bodies and frames them within her personal knowledge of human bodies. The vivacious understanding of the sacrificial blood of dead bodies, when paired with Angela's own intimate understanding of dead bodies, allows her to utilize Christ's blood as a place of redemption and life. In the *Memorial*, this life giving blood permits Angela to restructure her physical self next to Christ in a spiritual life, an distance herself from her carnal past.

Blood as Sustenance

In her first supplementary step, while Angela is entranced in a mystic vision, her companion reports to Angela's confessor that she sees light radiating from Angela's breast, swirling into the heavens.[42] While it is unexpected to see a spiritual transmission from a devotee's breast to the Supreme heaven (devotees are normally receptors in their divine relationships) this action indicates a carnal reality about Angela's body when compared to the body of her religious companion who witnessed this mystic experience.

Angela, unlike most idealized Christian women, was not a virgin. Not only did Angela's female body give her the ability to bring life into the world, Angela did in fact bring life into the world. Her body knew the carnal reality of flesh, blood, life and death, unlike her chaste religious contemporaries. As a married women and widow, she knew the realities of intercourse and the intimacies of a dead male body. This carnal experience better prepared Angela to interact with the realities of the crucifixion. According to Rudolph

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41. It is interesting to note that in the later Medieval Ages a group of self proclaimed Apostolics refused to eat meat on the basis that it was a product of sexual relations. See Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth Of Purgatory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 170.

42. La Chance, *Angela of Foligno*, 144.

M. Bell, "Angela's life as a widowed woman who had engaged in sexual intercourse and knew how the male body, alive and dead felt in her arms and under her fingers prepared her to relive the crucifixion in the explicit way she did."[43] Unlike her virgin companion, Angela knew the intimate crevices of the human body both as a mother and as a lover. The light emulating from Angela's breast marked her gendered body as different amongst other women religious because her breast, as the light indicated, actually did lactate in the past. Through the eyes of her companion as presented in the text, Angela's body was sexualized and othered.

Underpinning this discussion on Angela's carnal body and its relationship with blood is the idea that blood for Angela is a source of sustenance and bodily nutrition. Not only does Angela drink from Christ's side[44] to realign herself with his bloodline, as seen in the discussion on Kinship Blood, but Angela feeds from the dead bodies that she sees as symbols of the act of giving life. As meat was consumed to sustain human life, so Angela consumed Christ's body and blood to sustain her spiritual being.

The majority of Angela's mystic interactions were Eucharistic visions, meaning that at the time the host was raised during mass Angela would hear Christ speaking to her, or would see images of the cross appear on the host. These visions occurred at the moment of transubstantiation, suggesting a direct line between Angela and Christ seeing as the visions transpired as soon as Christ was thought to have physically entered the room. For example in her fourth supplementary step she explains,

> And close to the moment of the elevation of the body of Christ, he [Christ] said, 'Behold, the divine power is now present on the altar. I am within you. You can now receive me because you have already done so. Receive communion therefore with the blessing of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. I who am worthy make you worthy.' The great joy and the indescribable sweetness that was mine was a result of that communion were such that I think they will remain with me for the rest of my life.[45]

When Christ enters the space He speaks to Angela and encourages her to consume His body and there are multiple such occasions recorded in her

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43. Rudolph M. Bell, *Holy Anorexia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 109.
44. La Chance, *Angela of Foligno*, 128.
45. Ibid., 170.

Memorial. Consuming Christ's body is central to Angela's mystical visions, and nourish her spiritual life.

This consumption of Christ's body becomes symbolic in her act of drinking of the water she used to wash the leper's feet and in the consuming of one of the scabs.[46] For mystic women sick bodies were substitutes for Christ's own suffering body and in eating or drinking parts of sick bodies, mystic women were engaging in a Eucharistic act.[47] In consuming Christ's dead body (symbolically or through the host) Angela consumes the life giving act of His death and spilling of blood.[48] She is spiritually nourished through these means. This spiritual nourishment becomes the path to her transformation.

As previously described, according to medieval physiology, consumed food proceeded from the stomach to the liver, and it was in the liver that its nutrients were 'cooked' into the pure humor blood. This pure blood then forged with red and yellow bile to create sanguineous blood, which nourished the body. This substance then transferred from the veins to the body and in turn, the liver was continually creating new blood and biles to transport nourishment.[49] Ultimately, what a body consumed fused with new blood in the liver, and then diffused into the body through the veins. Food and nutrients, via a person's blood, integrated with the body and in a sense, became part of their flesh. This function of the humors suggests that blood as understood in the Middle Ages, merged with the body, intimately becoming part of a person's corpus. As blood nourishes, it reconfigures the body in its merging with it. Angela's body then was merging with Christ's body consumed and in her consumption of His body and blood the text makes claims about the physical transformation of her religious conversion. As described in the vision of her companion above where Angela's breast radiated light, her body was carnal and fleshy. As her devotion to Christ's body and blood increased in her *Memorial* via her consumption of Him, Angela is claiming that her physically body, once marked, was reconstituted

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46. Ibid., 163.

47. Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 144.

48. Please see previous discussion on sacrificial blood.

49. Nancy G. Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 104–106.

along with her spiritual one through her use and interaction with Christ's blood.

Conclusion

As seen in the tracing of three themes of blood in Angela of Foligno's *Memorial*, namely Kinship Blood, Sacrificial Blood and Blood as Sustenance, the reader comes to see Angela's physical and spiritual bodies transformed. Introduced to a carnally marked woman at the beginning of her *Memorial*, the reader follows Angela on her nineteen step conversion and through the seven supplemental steps describing her mystical encounters. Throughout these steps, Angela intimately engages with Christ's blood and subsequently reorients her fleshy marked body. Once set apart amongst religious women, Angela's spiritual conversion is also a physical conversion, reclaiming her body through Christ's blood. The text leverages Angela's maternal knowledge to emphasize her relationship with Christ. The shift in medieval theology from a glorious Christ to a suffering, human Christ allows this bodily relationship to unfold.

Within the larger gender and body discourse, this article illuminates difference and multiplicity in female Christian devotion. Christian women understood their bodies and negotiated them differently in relation to their own spirituality. While Angela of Foligno is a concentrated example of female devotion, the close analysis of her *Memorial* deflects the myth of homogenous spirituality amongst medieval mystics and their multifaceted bodily devotion. This analysis also draws attention to the manipulation of the female voice inside of text. Brother Arnaldo's projection of Angela's voice through his own is only an example of this wide spread phenomena. Historically, with few exceptions, women's voices have been muffled under the literate words of a male contemporary. While Brother Arnaldo's voice does not discredit the *Memorial* as a gendered text, it does add another layer of subjectivity to examine. Women like Angela, offer the contemporary scholar points of entry into historical worlds, and their gendered bodies allows for the unearthing of social fissures and contemporary reflection.