4

BLOOD AFTER THE LAST SUPPER
Jesus and the Gender of Blood

Mark 5:25–34

[25] Now there was a woman who had been suffering from a flow of blood for twelve years. [26] She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. [27] She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, [28] for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." [29] Immediately the spring of her blood stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. [30] Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" [31] And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" [32] He looked all around to see who had done it. [33] But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. [34] He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."[1] (Mark 5:25–34 RSV modified)

I quote Mark to remind readers of the story. Yet in this chapter I interpret primarily visual and tactile evidence. Paintings and objects take us beyond texts to see how art and objects in ritual space gender blood. How does blood drawn, presented, consecrated, or drunk in church magnify blood

[1] SBL Greek New Testament: [25] καὶ γυνὴ οὖσα ἐν ῥύσει αἵματος δώδεκα ἔτη [26] καὶ πολλὰ παθοῦσα ὑπὸ πολλῶν ἰατρῶν καὶ δαπανήσασα τὰ παρ' αὐτῆς πάντα καὶ μηδὲν ὠφεληθεῖσα ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον εἰς τὸ χεῖρον ἐλθοῦσα, [27] ἀκούσασα περὶ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, ἐλθοῦσα ἐν τῷ ὄχλῳ ὄπισθεν ἥψατο τοῦ ἱματίου αὐτοῦ· [28] ἔλεγεν γὰρ ὅτι Ἐὰν ἅψωμαι κἂν τῶν ἱματίων αὐτοῦ σωθήσομαι. [29] καὶ εὐθὺς ἐξηράνθη ἡ πηγὴ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτῆς, καὶ ἔγνω τῷ σώματι ὅτι ἴαται ἀπὸ τῆς μάστιγος. [30] καὶ εὐθὺς ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐπιγνοὺς ἐν ἑαυτῷ τὴν ἐξ αὐτοῦ δύναμιν ἐξελθοῦσαν ἐπιστραφεὶς ἐν τῷ ὄχλῳ ἔλεγεν· Τίς μου ἥψατο τῶν ἱματίων; [31] καὶ ἔλεγον αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ· Βλέπεις τὸν ὄχλον συνθλίβοντά σε, καὶ λέγεις· Τίς μου ἥψατο; [32] καὶ περιεβλέπετο ἰδεῖν τὴν τοῦτο ποιήσασαν. [33] ἡ δὲ γυνὴ φοβηθεῖσα καὶ τρέμουσα, εἰδυῖα ὃ γέγονεν αὐτῇ, ἦλθεν καὶ προσέπεσεν αὐτῷ καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ πᾶσαν τὴν ἀλήθειαν. [34] ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτῇ· Θυγάτηρ, ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε· ὕπαγε εἰς εἰρήνην, καὶ ἴσθι ὑγιὴς ἀπὸ τῆς μάστιγός σου.

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represented – or only implied – in texts? I usually work on texts. But texts can be coy. To put it tautologously, pictures are more graphic. I look to discern in images and objects how blood works in Christianity both to clean and to defile – to clean and defile gender roles, and thus mostly to reinforce and sometimes to transgress them.

Consider how blood works in the Bible:

> They washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (Revelation 7:14)
>
> Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins. (Hebrews 9:22)
>
> The city sheds blood from her midst, that her time may come, and makes idols to defile herself. (Ezekiel 22:3)

Blood is strange stuff. Sometimes it cleanses, so that red stuff makes clothes white. Even non-chlorine bleach is blue in color. So anthropologists identify blood as a "detergent." Detergent blood, like soap from ash, is made by sacrifice. But other blood defiles: the city (gendered feminine) "bleeds from her middle to defile herself." Christian rhetoric and images use blood in contrary ways, to cleanse and to defile. Those ways are also gendered. When men (Jesus, Abraham) shed blood in sacrifice, it cleanses. When women shed blood in menstruation and childbirth, it seems so powerful that men see danger. Women, in many cultures, may not sacrifice (no women priests). Men, in many cultures, must police characteristics gendered female. Blood takes on two different roles because it reinforces and complicates genders regarded as binary. If I speak of "women's blood," I don't mean to reduce women to blood, or to ignore the bleeding of transmen. Transwomen don't bleed at all. Instead, I repeat a cultural construction of gender to expose and subvert it. If we culturally construct it, why does Christ's gender even matter? The binary matters because he transgresses it; because it defines a low estate with which the stories identify him.

Mary Douglas has written, "where there is no differentiation there is no defilement." But it is also the case that, for Douglas, where there is no differentiation there is no power. Therefore, defilement can be reversed, so that "religions often sacralize the very unclean things" that they rejected. This occurs, for example, with the death of Christ. And it occurs preeminently with his blood. We must look at how the gendering of blood has made it seem unclean, and how the encounter of Jesus with the bleeding woman makes her bleeding creative.[2]

[2] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger,* 160, 159. I owe this paragraph to a question from Luke Bretherton.

This is dangerous work for a man, more so for a man with a husband. My lack of experience puts me at risk not only of blunders and bloopers, but, even worse, failures of tone and the presumption of ventriloquism. But it would be worse, I think, to write a book about blood with no chapter on menstruation and childbirth, a book in which the malestream association of blood with violence is quietly allowed to prevail.[3]

But the stories of Jesus subvert the gendering of blood in many and various ways, beginning with the virgin birth. Whether your biology is ancient or modern, the virgin birth makes strange the blood of Christ right from his conception: "Because Jesus has no earthly father, his blood is entirely the blood of his mother. It is Mary's blood that is the blood of God, Mary's blood shed on the cross, Mary's blood that works in the Eucharist. The Virgin birth queers the gender of blood by making the blood that the Son of God bleeds a woman's blood."[4]

Among many images and artifacts of blood and sacrifice, consider four standard images that gender women by means of blood. By "standard image" I mean a large collection of images that share an iconography. It's what they have in common that interests me. I focus on one commonly referred to in English as The Woman with an Issue of Blood and in Greek as the Haemorrhoissa.[5] This is the unnamed woman whom Jesus heals – or who heals herself – when she touches the hem of his cloak. In this image, overt blood never appears. For that

[3] Which actually happens in Gil Anidjar's *Blood: A Critique of Christianity* – where blood reduces to violence and blood gendered female is mentioned without being allowed to change the narrative.

I have six women to thank, five of them doctoral students at Duke University. One is Julie Morris, who published "Leaky Bodies" for *Christian Century* as this chapter was mostly finished, and which makes me think that, in the interchange of mutual influence between teacher and student, she must have influenced me more than I knew. The other four invited me to share the chapter with them, took it apart, and helped to put it back together again: Christina Ananias, Emily Dubie, Sarah Jobe, and Aminah Bradford. Sarah Jobe, not only a Hebrew Bible scholar but also a doula who has written a book on childbearing, *Creating with God: The Holy Confusing Blessedness of Pregnancy* (Paraclete Press, 2011), pointed out that a bloody birth is not a good thing; she and Aminah Bradford worked for hours to fix my draft. They are responsible for my attention to the placenta. The sixth is Deb Ebert, a New Zealand–certified midwife, who directed me to articles in obstretrical journals. For the errors of fact and tone that remain, I have only myself to thank.

[4] Gregory S. Williams, personal correspondence, Annunciation, 2019.

[5] For example, in the English traditions of the Gospel of Mark, the English translation of Schiller's *Iconography,* and the website of Art Resource.

reason, it seems to preserve the gendered pattern that celebrates the blood of male violence and suppresses the blood of women's fertility. But I argue it's more complicated than that, and the hidden blood undergoes a transfer that allows it to transform, transgender, and reemerge in another set of images – those of the crucifixion.[6]

Three other images offer us context. Judith and Holofernes depicts a story from the book of Judith (10:11–13:10; accepted as canonical by Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and Anglicans), in which a woman beheads a man, Holofernes, an enemy general. The scene seems to break the rule against showing women's bloodshed, but here too it's more complicated, since the scene presents Judith "escaping" her gender to perform violence gendered male. This exception proves the rule.[7]

The scene of Bathsheba Bathing plays two roles in the plot of 2 Samuel 11:2–4. First, David sees her bathing from a tower of his palace (v. 2). Omitted from sermons and children's bibles, a second plot point spells out that Bathsheba is observing a ritual requirement to bathe (v. 4; cf. Lev. 15:19–24). A ritual bath means not only that her period has just ended; it also implies that she can't be pregnant. Thus the child she conceives must be David's – not her husband's. Here too the blood that makes the difference goes without showing.

The final image shows Jesus nursing at Mary's breast. The Greek tradition calls this image "Galaktotrophousa," the Virgin who nourishes with milk.[8] Since many traditions see milk, like semen, as whitened blood, Mary also (with other nurses and the Eucharist) nourishes with blood. This image winks in and out of use or gets plastered over as attitudes change about

[6] Janet Martin Soskice first drew my attention to this story and its Christological references in her fine and subtle chapter "Blood and Defilement: Christology" in *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 84–99. My student Julie Morris renewed my attention in a more popular account influenced by Soskice, "A Story of Two Leaky Bodies: In Mark 5, a Hemorrhaging Woman Meets a Permeable Savior," *Christian Century* (Jan. 10, 2017), www.christiancentury.org/article/story-two-leaky-bodies, from which I learned of Candida Moss, "The Man with the Flow of Power: Porous Bodies in Mark 5:25–34," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129 (2010), 507–19. Emma Sedgwick, *From Flow to Face: The Haemorrhoissa Motif (Mark 5:24b–34 parr) between Anthropological Origin and Image Paradigm* (Leeuven: Peeters, 2015) came to my attention after this chapter was finished.

[7] Eva Straussman-Pflanzer, *Violence and Virtue: Artemisia Gentileschi's "Judith Slaying Holofernes"* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2013) treats gender but not the sociology of blood.

[8] See Elizabeth Bolman, "The Enigmatic Coptic Galaktotrophousa and the Cult of the Virgin Mary in Egypt," in *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, ed. Maria Vassilaki (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 13–22.

women's breasts. But because multiple traditions count milk as whitened blood, the exposure of a nursing breast is as close as we get in classical art to seeing blood gendered female.

Together those images raise a host of questions. What difference does it make that the Woman with an Issue of Blood never shows overt blood, while Judith and Holofernes conventionally shows floods? Do the images distinguish female-gendered blood, which men regard as secret,[9] from blood of war or sacrifice, which they regard as public? How can the woman cure herself without Jesus's conscious intention, so that he asks "who touched me"? Do both Judith and the bleeding woman, different as they are, depict women's agency and power over men? Why do images often show Judith killing Holofernes with breasts exposed? Why does the bleeding woman turn up so often on early Christian tombs? How have artists and authors used these stories to maintain or overcome gender roles? In what way do images of the bleeding woman feminize or masculinize Jesus, whose salvation they describe in terms of both sacrifice (gendered male) and rebirth (gendered female)? How have Christian artists and authors used images of women to think about Jesus – who both, like Holofernes, dies by violent execution, and, like the woman with the issue of blood, bleeds without limit?

Pictures, I learned, can also play coy. It's just that, in the church or gallery, you see so much male-gendered violence and female-gendered nakedness that the distractions of pictures can outdo the silence of texts. You study Bathsheba bathing, and there's so much to look at, you can't see what's not there. Western Christian art is frank about bloodshed by men. We're shocked at beheadings by ISIS, but Christian art displays beheadings in church. Nor does it shy from beheadings by women – if only they follow the pattern of men. Judith slaying Holofernes shows plenty of blood, one or the other half of his neck exposed obscenely for inspection like the pith of a squash. The image frees, by convention, one or both of Judith's breasts, either for her to wield the sword like an Amazon, or (which may be the same thing) to burst the bonds of gender. Images of Jael driving a tent peg into the skull of Sisera are less bloody but share the trope of exposing breasts (Antonio Molinari, Giovanni Romelli, Felice Fichelli, Gregorio Lazzarini). Judith's breasts mix a message: they sexualize her as a woman, and they bare her as a warrior. Western art shows all manner of violence; it lingers pruriently on the torture of the damned and on the piercing, flaying, and griddling of saints. But blood gendered female it does not show. The blood of women is That

[9] See Bildhauer, 30–8, 105; Peggy McCracken, *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero: Blood, Gender, and Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 84–91.

Which May Not Be Seen. Sometimes the only part of a painting to suggest a woman's blood is the label underneath. At most, a painting refers to female-gendered blood by indirection. The image of Bathsheba bathing refers to blood only to wash it away. You may say, of course! But it's exactly that assumption of naturalness, of what's right and proper, that I seek to expose. I want to display, not the blood itself, but the filters of our minds, by which we have come to expect *not* to see any blood. (We men? We women taught to protect the sensibilities of men?)[10] Sometimes water stands for blood; so a woman weeps on Jesus, as he himself will come to bleed.[11] This time water hides the blood. The saints can wash themselves in the blood of Jesus, but the blood of a woman can only be washed away. Artists may cover Jesus in crimson, carmine, or vermillion, but the clear water of erasure is the only sign of Bathsheba's menstruation. Bathsheba can bathe naked, if she appears immaculate. Only immaculate women may bathe.

Jesus on the other hand can drip blood from under his loincloth and down his legs. When he drips from his loincloth the blood does not, to be sure, originate from there. It originates from the wound in his side, which figures also as a vulva. Indeed, Jesus has a womb in his wound in Latin texts, a wound sometimes called *uterus* and sometimes *vulva,* both of which Latin uses to mean "womb." Although the words for wound and womb are unrelated in either language, even Latin distinguishes *vulna* (wound) from *vulva* (womb) by a single letter. Paintings likewise play upon the opening in Jesus's side. The play is always plausibly deniable. When blood from the vulna-vulva drips below the loincloth, paintings do and do not mark Jesus with the blood of menstruation. At most they leave a trace for the viewer to interpret. But they can mark Bathsheba (whose period drives the story) only with water. The paradox is, this water is anything but transparent.

In those examples, Bathsheba, like the woman with an issue of blood, seems to reinforce a gender dichotomy, while Judith seems to cross or queer it. But perhaps both images transgress a binary, if the unlimited blood of the bleeding woman prefigures the unlimited bleeding of Jesus.

The image of Jesus and the Woman with an Issue of Blood also goes by other names. "The Hemorrhaging Woman," it's sometimes called, with studied ambiguity, after Mt. 9:20, "The Hemophiliac Woman," scholars sometimes say, misleadingly. Those names shush or misdirect. Mark's account (5:25–34) – the earliest, most rustic and plainspoken – introduces

[10] The purpose of a purse, a mother taught her daughter, was not to carry money, but to hide her tampons from view, so that nothing might bring to the male-gendered mind the female-gendered bleeding.

[11] Mt. 26:6–13, Mk. 14:3–9, Lk. 7:36–50, Jn. 12:1–8. I owe the connection to Sarah Jobe.

her as "a woman who had had a flow of blood for twelve years" (Mk. 5:25, *rhusei haimatos*). At her healing (v. 29), the RSV says her "hemorrhage" stopped, but the Greek deploys a different phrase, *pyge tou haimatos,* where *pyge* is a positive word usually used for a spring of water; for example, Mary became a *zoodochos pyge,* a life-giving spring, to name a church at a Byzantine source. Thus the King James refers to the woman Christologically as having a "fountain of blood." Luke (8:43–48), after Mark, also introduces the woman as having a *rhusei haimatos* but shortens the story by half and removes the word for "spring" or "fountain" to stick with the language of "issue" or "flow" (*rhusis*). Matthew (9:20–22), also after Mark, further downplays the blood: the author shortens the story by two thirds, removes all freestanding words for blood, sanitizes Mark's "flow" and "spring" with the more clinical word "hemorrhage" (which the RSV smuggles into Mark), and in one manuscript bowdlerizes even "hemorrhage" with "asthenia," or weakness.[12] That one, a royal French copy of the Greek of Matthew, manages to scrub the story of women's blood altogether.

Sermons on the story are (predictably) rare, but Chrysostom writes:

> Wherefore did she not approach Him boldly? She was ashamed on account of her affliction, accounting herself to be unclean. For if the menstruous woman was judged not to be clean, how much more would she have the same thought, who was afflicted with such a disease; since in fact that complaint was under the law accounted a great uncleanness.

The Byzantine *Catena on Mark* confines itself to the woman's faith, and – even though it's billed as Mark – follows Matthew's lead to mention blood not at all. In the West, Augustine, Luther, and Calvin reduce the concrete issue of blood to Jews and Gentiles or even to "faith."[13] In the East, Romanos and Jacob of Serugh reduce blood to sin.[14]

[12] The "Regius" manuscript, Paris, Bibl. Nat., Gr. 62, listed as L in Nestle-Aland.

[13] For a brief but judicious history of exegesis with important examples from Christian iconography, see Christine E. Joynes, "Still at the Margins?: Gospel Women and Their Afterlives," in *Radical Christian Voices and Practice: Essays in Honour of Christopher Rowland*, ed. Zoë Bennett and David B. Gowler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 117–35. For texts, see Grant LeMarquand, "Appendix I: The Bleeding Woman in Pre-modern Interpretation," in *An Issue of Relevance: A Comparative Study of the Story of the Bleeding Woman (Mk 5:25–34; Mt 9:20–22; Lk 8:43–48) in North Atlantic and African Contexts* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 223–35.

[14] Except for metaphoric uses in Lev. 20:21 and Ez. 7:19–20, the Bible and the rabbis distinguish menstrual impurity sharply from questions of morality or sin. For a brief, reliable account, see Tirza Meacham, "Female Purity (Niddah)," in the *Encyclopedia of the Jewish Women's Archive* at jwa.org/encyclopedia/author/meacham-tirzah; the author is Professor of Talmud and Rabbinics at the University of Toronto. For an exhaustive

Except for pesky questions about marital sex and approaching the altar. Exegetical theology may disagree whether her flow of blood counts as menstruation or not, but practical theology confines the argument to menstrual terms. That's because social context uses the story to debate not Christology, but whether a bleeding woman may approach the altar or sleep with her husband (e.g., *Summa Theologiae* Supplement 64).

Prefeminist twentieth-century interpretation presents a choice of evasions that Grant LeMarquand calls "Diagnostic Exegesis" (reducing the problem to some specific disease) or the "Hermeneutics of Embarrassment" (refusing to acknowledge menstrual themes).[15] Readers from less embarrassed cultures understand what is at issue: blood that, whatever its origin, is understood to be or assimilated to menstrual blood.

Outside the Western mainstream, LeMarquand's African readers take the story as referring straightforwardly to menstruation that never stops:

> African readers cannot help but notice the blood. In evident fear, some African men with institutional church power read "power went out from him" (Mk 5:30) [to justify] separating women from holy things during menstruation. This separation is evidently meant to protect the men [such is the power of menstrual blood]. On the other hand, most African women read the story of the bleeding woman with evident empathy, noting the many dimensions of her suffering, the strength of her faith and hope, and most of all the injustice of her separation, assumed to be the reason for her stealth when she approaches Jesus. For most the implication of the woman's bleeding is clear: she would be childless (at least from the time the bleeding [began]), a great source of shame in African culture; she would be considered a danger, especially to men; she would be ostracized.[16]

What LeMarquand calls the Hermeneutics of Embarrassment in his texts, Peggy McCracken calls a "forbidden scene" in hers, and her term works even better, of course, for visual art. Texts and art identify a woman with the stereotype of women's blood – which paradoxically means she cannot conceive. Her image never shows blood and barely indicates it. Although the Woman with an Issue of Blood is often incised on amulets of a reddish-brown stone called hematite, of all the paintings and mosaics on Art Resource, not even one dresses her in red. The beautiful mosaic at

account, see Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

[15] LeMarquand, "A Story about Blood," in *An Issue of Relevance: A Comparative Study of the Story of the Bleeding Woman* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 169–216; here, 173, 176.

[16] LeMarquand, p. 215. I have abridged the passage and suppressed the ellipses. I take it that when LeMarquand writes "African" he has in mind Kenyan Christians.

Monreale cloaks her in green. Nothing identifies the woman except her gesture of touching Jesus's hem. That gesture alone is her identifying mark, her attribute.[17]

(A painting of Rachel makes a single exception. Rachel cites her period to sit undisturbed atop a saddle that hides the household gods [Gen. 31:34–35],[18] and Tiepolo makes her robe a gorgeous red, perhaps because he thinks the trope a trick, and feels free to paint the joke. But the trick is deadly earnest. Because Rachel is moving with her husband, she needs the gods to protect her matriline in a patriarchal land. Nancy Jay explains: Rachel had not taken a keepsake, an heirloom, a souvenir. She was not moved by sentiment: "Rachel had stolen her family's line of descent."[19])

The emblematic gesture of the bleeding woman is not just any reaching out; all sorts of onlookers reach out. She reaches out to a particular, material thing; she reaches out to the rolled or doubled cloth that hems Jesus's garment. Because only the garment of Jesus indicates the woman's bleeding, it becomes a metonym, an index in cloth of her blood. Without denying her faith, which the artist also cannot show, we can identify a material object, a cloth, that stops her flow of blood. His hem becomes, in effect, what Bible translations elsewhere call a rag. Because it is the hem of Jesus's garment that alone identifies her, the image serves to *transfer* the index of blood from her to him. Iconographically it points, therefore, not only to her, as her gesture of identification. It points also to him, to one who will, like her, come to be identified by an issue of blood. Her past will become his future. Her emblematic touch enacts her agency and prefigures his passion. All the agency in Mark is hers; Jesus doesn't initiate anything.[20] If Jesus is passive, in Greek, he "suffers"; that is, he undergoes her touch. If the hem of his garment is the rag that tamps her flow of blood, *he* is the one who wears it. Her touch feminizes him; it figures his blood as no longer contained and male but henceforth forward and female:[21] it figures him too as one with an issue of blood. His question, "Who touched me?," detects not only a touch or a transfer but a kinship. Like hers, his issue of blood will be involuntary; like hers, his will be without limit, as it suffices to save an unlimited number and increases at the Eucharist according to need.

[17] I discovered too late to use Barbara Baert, "Touching the Hem: The Thread Between Garment and Blood in the Story of the Woman with the Hemorrhage (Mark 5:24b–34parr)," in *Textile: Journal of Cloth and Culture* 9 (2011): 308–59.

[18] I owe the reference to Sarah Jobe.

[19] Nancy Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 41–60.

[20] A point I owe to Sarah Jobe.

[21] On "leaking," see Soskice, Morris, and Moss.

At high-church Eucharists, the hem of his garment unfurls at length or even multiplies to layer up communion linen, the clothes that both serve the chalice with its holy blood, and protect the people from the danger of the elements: a lavabo towel to dry the hands; an altar cloth to cover the table; a corporal to set a place; a veil to hang over the chalice; a pall to weight the veil; a folded napkin to clean the rim; a purificator to wipe out the chalice; a lengthy housel-cloth to overhang the altar rail, mark the sacred boundary, or bound the Sabbath space: all cloths, like the hem of Jesus, that hide and mark and ward a quantity of blood, and that at need absorb it. There is even a burse to carry the purificator – which is just Latin for the purse to hide the napkin.[22]

If the thought of all that eucharistic sanitation makes men queasy, that's just the awareness it's meant to repress. Sociological barriers, according to Durkheim, entrench, at last, in the gut. But the queasiness also holds off blood gendered female, the same gesture that, in Orthodox polity, Catholic practice, and Anglican history, forbids the altar to women. It refuses to take the blood of a woman as sacred.

Fencing off the sacred is well enough, as long as it is does justice to women and others. At Rotorua in New Zealand, St. Faith's Anglican is the oldest permanent Maori church and appears on the tourist circuit because of its gorgeous Maori carvings – and on account of the boiling mud nearby that had already sanctified the Maori site for over five hundred years. The crust of the earth is minimal at Rotorua, and the mantle, like elemental fire, seems ready to break through. The smell of sulfur and the sound of plopping mud had already heightened my nerves before I entered the church. My husband pointed out the words in raised and gilded gothic capitals along the rim of the communion table. As I approached the altar I saw the words "taboo, taboo, taboo," completely recognizable in their Maori spelling: **Tapu Tapu Tapu**.[23] I felt the hair rise on my arms, and I didn't want to touch the altar. In Maori that is also the way to say Holy, Holy, Holy. "Tapu, tapu, tapu" is the Trisagion and the prohibition in one. In the Polynesian languages from which first Captain Cook and then anthropologists took the word "taboo," it means "sacred, prohibited, restricted, set apart, forbidden, under … protection … [in] a supernatural condition … untouchable."[24] That is

[22] A connection I owe to Christina Ananias.

[23] Close-ups of the altar are (perhaps appropriately) rare. But you can see the TAPU TAPU TAPU in this photo: www.rotorua-travel-secrets.com/images/maori-wall-panels.jpg

[24] maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=TAPU For more see Excursus 2 to this chapter.

exactly the right thing to put around an altar. It wasn't that I wasn't supposed to touch it; it was that I was having a first-order experience of taboo and I didn't *want* to touch it. To invoke Rudolf Otto's idea of the holy as the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* is too grand. It was simpler than that. It was a shivering. So fencing off the sacred can rightly invoke religious emotions. It is not the definition of the sacred that has gone wrong. Rather, in the refusal of blood gendered female it is the definition of profane that goes wrong. The right thing to do is to include, appropriate, uphold, and honor what justly inspires awe in creation, as the Maori church takes advantage of the geothermal activity that brings the mud alive.[25] Without justice, the rite of the altar falls to the critique of Amos (5:21, 24), who hears God proclaim, "I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. . . . But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." That is a different ever-flowing stream from that of the woman with the issue of blood. But blood-flow and justice do belong together.

In any case it's necessary to distinguish two taboos. There's a taboo in favor of the altar and a taboo against women. Those taboos are not the same, but they are tangled up. They both invest blood with power, positive or negative. Both the blood of the altar and the blood of women acquire social power from taboos – even if the second shows its power in the backhanded sense of eliciting insults from men. Thus the two taboos construct gender differentially. Despite the feminine leaking of Jesus, the blood of the altar privileges men. Despite the life-giving of menstruation and childbirth, the refusal of blood gendered female disadvantages women.

According to Nancy Jay, the two taboos support one another: a male line of cultural descent from bishop to priest depends on and stands against a female line of biological descent from mother to child. The taboos mirror and lean against each other, in order to hold each other up. The line of priestly "fathers" maintains its privilege by mimicking the line of biological mothers. In Christianity, according to Nancy Jay, the privilege of this priestly father-line is called "apostolic succession."[26]

In Nancy Jay's theory of sacrifice, descent by blood in the sense of biological connection belonged in multiple societies to women alone; men had to prove descent by cultural means. That means also involved blood, in many societies: the blood of sacrifice. It was at a common meal over a large cooked mammal that a father acknowledged his children – especially his

[25] As I write this the church has been closed temporarily as the boiling mud encroaches. Step away from the plopping hole! Tapu, tapu, tapu! www.nzherald.co.nz/rotorua-daily-post/news/article.cfm?c_id=1503438&objectid=11824876

[26] Jay, 112–27.

sons – and created the social fact on animal flesh that modern bureaucracies create on paper (which was also on flesh when paper was sheepskin). Two incommensurable kinds of blood come together here: the maternal blood of relationship, and the paternal blood of sacrifice. It is tempting to contrast the blood of sacrifice, which Jay calls "men's childbearing" or their attempt to "do birth better,"[27] with something called "the blood of childbirth." The last phrase turns out to be a symptom of blood's logic.

On an earlier draft of this chapter, Sarah Jobe, a trained doula, wrote that "there's not that much blood at childbirth unless there is a *big* problem. [There is] lots of water/[amniotic] fluid at childbirth but not so much blood."[28]

Certain that I had gotten the contrast "blood of sacrifice"/"blood of childbirth" from Nancy Jay, I ascertained to my surprise that she never uses the second phrase. Karen Fields, in the Forward, tells a story about it:

> "I've been thinking about blood," [Jay] said, and paused. Yes, *blood*. It was odd, wasn't it, that in so many societies blood both purified and polluted. And wasn't it remarkable that the blood of childbirth and menstruation commonly polluted, while the blood of sacrifice, even of sacrificed animals, could purify? *The experience of childbirth could not have produced such an idea, [Jay] was sure,* using her own bearing of four children as a momentary example. Nor could its result, new human life [have produced the idea], for [new life] was valued everywhere. . . . If neither the experience of childbirth nor its result accounted for the opposite properties of blood, what might? It was not long before Jay was talking about the opposition between childbirth and sacrifice . . . as one between nature and society.[29]

Thus the "blood of childbirth" turns out to be another colonizing expression, where once again men read blood in where it hardly belongs. They imagine blood shed rather than shared.[30] They imagine (see below) a baby made of menstruum or bathed in blood, when neither is the case. (The newborn is covered in vernix, which is waxy and white.) What social forms give rise to this imagination?

Normal childbirth is neither bloodless nor hemorrhagic. There is a "bloody show," which is neither bloody (more of a blood-tinged mucus) nor much of a show, but more of a tell. "The wound in the uterine wall where the placenta shears off always bleeds," a New Zealand registered

[27] Jay, xxiv.
[28] Sarah Jobe, personal communication.
[29] Jay, x, paragraph boundary elided, "society and nature" reversed (my italics).
[30] An observation I owe to Greg Williams.

midwife explains. Authorities differ on what counts as normal. In Britain, 500 ml is a hemorrhage and 1000 ml is a major hemorrhage; in the US, from 2014, a hemorrhage begins at 1000 ml. By comparison, the mean blood-loss in menstruation is 30 ml, and by implication up to 80 ml is normal: a regular loss of over 80 ml may bring anemia. The same midwife comments that "although there isn't that much blood in childbirth unless there is a problem (if people are picturing floods of blood), no woman standing in the shower after giving birth with endless blood dripping down her legs would say that birth isn't bloody" at all.[31]

In normal childbirth, bleeding is incidental to birth. In crucifixion with nails, blood is incidental to death. Neither normal childbirth nor crucifixion with nails leads directly to the images of Christian atonement: blood to bathe adult bodies in, blood in floods, the blood, as Origen says, of hecatombs, or hundreds of cattle. Those images borrow from the infinite blood of God. Blood without exaggeration is not the same as blood without limit. That is why we might want to speak of the blood of not childbirth, but afterbirth.

The placenta, a component of the afterbirth, is, like a heart or liver, bloody by definition – not, again, in pictured floods, but neatly contained, in a flat, circular organ. The placenta is a membrane filled with blood, where mother's blood meets fetal villi to nourish and oxygenate the fetus. The mother's and the baby's blood meet but do not mix; they are united but unconfused. Nutrients and antibodies circulate.

(In the Maori language, the land makes such a tissue of circulation between the people and the sea, and is called *whenua*, which also means placenta.[32] The land, like a placenta, gives birth to the people of the land, *tangata whenua*; and they return the placenta to the earth.[33] At Rotorua, where Maori have worshipped for hundreds of years, and where the earth itself boils and

[31] Deb Ebert, personal communication. She supplies these references: The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) states that "experts typically report that the mean blood loss per menstrual period is 30ml per cycle and that chronic loss of more than 80ml is associated with anemia," implying that 80 ml or less is normal. ("Menstruation in girls and adolescents: using the menstrual cycle as a vital sign," Committee Opinion No. 651. ACOG, *Obstet Gynecol* 2015;126:e143–6; at www.acog.org/Clinical-Guidance-and-Publications/Committee-Opinions/Committee-on-Adolescent-Health-Care/Menstruation-in-Girls-and-Adolescents-Using-the-Menstrual-Cycle-as-a-Vital-Sign?IsMobileSet=false. WHO and Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (RCOG) classify blood loss of more than 500 ml as a postpartum hemorrhage and more than 1000 ml as a major hemorrhage. ACOG adjusted their guidelines in 2014 to classify a hemorrhage as more than 1000 ml. R. S. Kerr and A. D. Weeks, "Postpartum Haemorrhage: A Single Definition Is No Longer Enough," *BJOG* 124 (2017): 723–6.

[32] Tregear, 620, col. 2. I owe the observation to Aminah Bradford.

[33] Deb Ebert, personal communication. See also the Wikipedia article on *tangata whenua*.

plops, the placenta of the earth is thin, and something holy seems about to be born.)

In what follows, I speak of the afterbirth, which comprises the delivered placenta and fetal membranes: the place where blood was shared, in that protological state before birth. Ideally speaking, therefore, the *real* blood of childbirth – which is to say the blood of fetal *growth,* the blood that nourishes and protects the fetus through the placenta – opposes the blood of sacrifice "because it is not 'shed' at all. It is given without harm or reduction to the giver." Bracketing the distinctively human competition for resources between mother and child, that remark pictures a donation of Eden and heaven that becomes sacrifice only in between: it pictures "the protological and eschatological version of 'sacrifice' that is paradigmatically represented in Jesus."[34]

But the protological state before birth not only suggests a picture of life before sin. It also suggests a way of dealing with sin. The placenta does not only deliver nutrients. It also collects and carries off carbon dioxide and other waste from the baby's blood and transfers them for disposal to the blood of the mother.[35] Biologically, the waste and its disposal have no moral valence; eventually CO_2 and other waste become food for other creatures. And yet Christian theology has often (for good or ill) seen in waste and its disposal a metaphor for sin and its remission. Purity metaphors are often misused (see Chapter 7). Perhaps it is safer to speak with Mary Douglas of "matter out of place." It matters that the placenta not only feeds the baby but removes accumulated waste. On this picture, the placenta comes to anticipate those instruments of sacrifice – like the horns of the altar and the body of Christ – [36] that seem to attract, collect, and dispose of sin. With different figurations of quantity and place, the body of Christ, the horns of the altar, and the mother's placenta all hold blood, and they all cleanse, somehow, by means of blood. This picture suggests two ways in which the blood of Christ resembles the blood of a mother. Not only does it build up a new body. It also has the power to protect it from harm. Through the instrumentality of the placenta, the mother's blood, like that of Christ, can absorb what harms to carry it away, perhaps even, conceivably, for good uses elsewhere.

In Peggy McCracken, medieval French fathers maintained the privileges to name, claim, and dispose of their children by the fiction that the purified blood of semen formed the child.[37] Fathers and children shared blood

[34] Gregory S. Williams, personal communication, March 25, 2019.
[35] I owe this observation to a conversation with Lauren Winner. See also Jobe, *Creating with God,* 98.
[36] Cf. Jobe, 111.
[37] McCracken, 90.

because the semen conferred form, the child's very essence, making it the father's own. On that theory, the father shapes and owns the child while the mother only nourishes and incubates it. In this way, a father is related to his child by blood, and a mother is related to her child merely by food. Which is almost to say: a mother is not related to her child at all.

The blood of menstruation and afterbirth belies that simple picture – and threatens the power it upholds. Not only do men sacrifice. The bloods of menstruation and the afterbirth mark a counter-sacrifice on the part of the mother. Not to mention the pains of both, or the risk of death, by which the rabbis made Rachel a rival to Christ (Gen. 35:16–18).[38] Despite the elevation of the father's bloodline, the umbilical cord leads to the sacrificed sack of mother's blood, the afterbirth. You would think that the bleached out blood of the father in the semen could not compete with the bluish-red blood of the mother in the placenta. If you believe in the power of the blood, then the mere sight of the placenta, exposed as the afterbirth, ought to swamp the theory. "As a pregnant woman breaks open in labor," writes Sarah Jobe, "the blood and water that pour from her are perhaps as close as we will ever come to witnessing the blood and water that poured from Jesus' side on the cross."[39] In a culture where the very sight of the Eucharist sanctified, and "ocular communion" worked like darshan, seeing was believing. Like the bread of the Eucharist, the mother's blood might be food but it was not mere food. Like the wine of the Eucharist, this was sacrificial blood. If the blood of the Eucharist could make people divine, the blood of the mother could at least make them human. Couldn't it?

While the sight of the Eucharist was marked as powerful by the elevation of the elements, the ringing of bells, and the decoration of monstrances, the sight of childbirth was marked as powerful by being forbidden, by going unseen, at least by men. That was the reason, according to McCracken, that birth itself could not be shown.[40] It could not be painted, and, with exceptions that only prove the rule, men could not look upon it. Showing it would connect the birth with the afterbirth and reveal the child as living not by semen alone but also by its mother's blood. (And later by its mother's blood turned to milk.) Childbirth became the primal scene that could expose the fraud. Showing it would render undeniable that women too relate to their children by blood.

[38] Ellen Haskell, *Mystical Resistance: Uncovering the Zohar's Conversations with Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 15–38.
[39] Jobe, 85.
[40] McCracken, 77–91.

Or consider the birth of Jesus. Irenaeus not only accuses Gnostics of avoiding Christ's blood (*Adv. Haer.* IV.5.2); he also accuses Marcion of avoiding Christ's birth (I.27.2). Usually the most important moment of the incarnation, images of the birth of Jesus invariably show no such thing. They show the baby Jesus. They do not show his birth. They are almost Marcionite: they do not show – they refrain from showing – that Mary gives birth to God. In hiding her sacrifice, they deny her a priesthood. A few, rare images venture one step closer. They apply the strategy of Bathsheba bathing to the baby Jesus. They show him having a bath. They are showing, not the afterbirth, merely the after birth. If Moses at the Nile turned water into blood, and Jesus at Cana turns water into wine, these artists of the Nativity reverse those miracles: they thin blood into water.

Those then are some of the reasons why in the images of the Woman bleeding and of Bathsheba bathing we cannot see any blood, and why in the misnamed births of Jesus we see neither birth nor afterbirth. Those things have been hidden from us. They have been denied us. Those repressed things return, however, in the bloodying of Jesus and the baptism of believers.

Crucifixion kills by suffocation and requires no blood. Painters show Peter lashed to a cross to keep his blood from competing with Christ's. The unnecessary and excessive bleeding of Jesus feminizes and transgenders him both in physical leakiness and in generative power.[41] The power in the blood becomes paradoxically the power to overcome patriarchal distortions, because the death and resurrection of Jesus makes the blood of fertility inexhaustible and the water from his side a baptism. This figuration transfigures the story of the Woman with an Issue of Blood, a problem solved by more blood rather than less, because hidden blood becomes overt, birthwater baptizes, and placental fluids move in quantities uncountably figured to "cover" and to "bathe." The placenta is even an organ that animals and women are known to eat: their own flesh and blood without cannibalism, like the Eucharist.

(Rabbi David Kornreich raises the halachic question whether it is kosher for a woman to eat her placenta, for medicinal purposes and encapsulated into pills, and finds it "safe to conclude that שליא [the placenta] of humans is *muttar gamur* [completely permitted] according to all opinions [besides the Rambam who originally forbade the שליא of בהמה טמאה (an impure animal) which the Tur, Shulchan Aruch, Schach, Kreisi and Chavas Da'as permit].")[42]

[41] Graham Ward, "The Displaced Body of Jesus Christ," in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (London: Routledge, 1999), 163–81.

[42] judaism.stackexchange.com/questions/50865/is-human-placenta-kosher. I have not consulted the original article, which is in Hebrew.

Why does Christian blood seem to do "too much"? Because part of its logic is to exceed: to issue over barriers, beyond boundaries, saturating veils, exposing interiors, undamming taboos to free up the power they contain. This way the blood can be, not suppressed, sanitized, driven underground, but released to cover others to be reborn. The crucifixion needed no blood, but blood figured in its aftermath; a natural birth sheds little blood, but blood figures in its afterbirth. The crucifixion is a scene of birth, a primal scene, the scene that artistic canons forbade and Marcionite sensibilities denied.

If you crucify a woman, does she bleed? Apparently not. That's too much like menstrual blood to show. There is an example in St. Wilgefortis, sometimes called St. Julia. The painting of Hieronymus Bosch shows her in a full-length dress and proves the rule about the blood of a woman – either she doesn't bleed, or the dress is impervious. The blood of Jesus, returned to a woman, is bound anew by the rules against the blood of a woman and once again Cannot Be Shown.

That suggests, to Sarah Jobe, another picture: "The sacrifice isn't childbirth, but bleeding monthly. That sacrifice makes birth possible," as Christ's bleeding makes possible the resurrection and the birthwaters of baptism. Taken over a lifetime, childbirth is not as bloody as menstruation, because "our blood disappears into the child" of rebirth and resurrection.[43]

The symbols of water and blood interfere and belong together, life and death likewise. Part of their power lies in the fact that we can hardly keep them apart. Christians want to say, "in the blood is the life." Christians want to say, *felix culpa*, God makes the crucifixion an occasion of new life. Christians want to say, Jesus puts pain to a purpose,[44] and the Spirit brings communities out of suffering. Christians want to say, the resurrection is new birth. Under those circumstances, Christians even want to say that Jesus, at the Last Supper, turns the crucifixion into another invitation to the feast, so that suffering brings new life and prepares the resurrection.

Those reflections show why we might want to talk here not only about childbirth but also, carefully, about menstruation. Because it gets rid of an ovum, we do not want to say, menstruation is the same as birth. Because it prepares the way for a new implantation, we do not want to say, menstruation is like death. Rather, menstruation may resemble crucifixion in that it prepares – it makes ready – for new life. It reaffirms, with Leviticus, that "the blood is the life." (The Levitical taboo against menstrual blood testifies to its protean

[43] Sarah Jobe, personal communication.

[44] I owe the phrase, used somewhat differently, to Jobe, 84.

power: men may not touch the power of life itself,[45] any more than rockets may land on the sun.) There is something about its persistence, the persistence of blood, reappearing every month: "for blood is the life thereof."

Most mammals do not menstruate. They have estrous cycles, but only Old World primates, bats, and the elephant shrew overtly bleed. Most mammals isolate their periods of fertility. Humans remain in readiness, ovulating every month – practicing, like God, the openness to new life and renewed birth. People may often freight menstruation with a binary meaning – fertility or failure, "baby/no baby" – but even in that context, its habit of bleeding is a precondition for birth, the investment and sacrifice of bloody resources that a woman's body builds up and clears out every month "just in case":[46] this menstruation is less of a lost chance, and more of a costly renewal, in view of a perhaps, seventy times seven, holding a place where life might could be, a magnificent Mightcouldlichkeit. The blood of menstruation, because of its repetition, resembles the blood of the Eucharist: and if, as Barth says, the covenant grounds the creation, we might even say that the infinite blood of the covenant supplies the repeated blood of menstruation.[47] Those are some of the senses in which "the life is in the blood." Their persistence is another paradox of blood: the crucifixion means failure turned to hope, death turned to life, pain turned to purpose. Jesus *is* the bleeding woman, with her hope revealed.

That is why she appears by convention on early Christian sarcophagi, of which the Vatican alone holds at least six. What is she doing there? The woman finds her place among a series of miracles. They express a hope for the miracle of resurrection. But the resurrection they hope for is more than a miracle. Here too her recognizable sign is the cloth (the hem of Jesus) that will absorb her blood – in order to re-release it. *Her* healing restores the possibility of new life, as does the bleeding she transfers to Jesus. Saying, "Who touched me?" he acknowledges his kinship with her, and he absorbs her blood, the better to release new life. He becomes so much like a woman with an issue of blood, that their resurrection depends on it.

But we are not finished with the taboo that both hides and teaches the power of blood, the taboo that the Western Middle Ages called the *secreta mulierum*, "the secret secretions of women." The secret not only enacts the power of blood by hedging it with conditions – see how dangerous what cannot be seen! – it also increases and inflates it. In two widely separated

[45] David Biale, *Blood and Belief: The Circulation of a Symbol between Christians and Jews* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 35–6.
[46] I owe the idea and the phrasing to Sarah Jobe.
[47] I owe this idea to Greg Williams.

contexts, the secrecy surrounding secretions promotes their significance to render them cosmic. Like the matter of the Eucharist, women's blood became elemental.

Bettina Bildhauer interprets the medieval book by that title, *Secreta mulierum,* or *Secrets of Women* (pseudo-Albert the Great, ca. 1300) in terms of its more revealing, fifteenth-century South German commentary.[48] The "secret of women," to this presumably male author and his implied male audience, is their "secretion," menstrual blood. Doubly full of meaning, this blood is both the secret subject matter of the book and the material secretion of a woman's body, where both meanings emerge from the same, protean, medieval German word, "*matery*".[49]

But in the Aristotelian tradition of the Commentary on the *Secreta Mulierum* the wordplay is substantive. Menstrual blood is the very matter of the human being, since "every human being . . . is naturally generated from the seed of his father and the flow of his mother, which is called menstruum."[50] On this picture, menstrual blood is not only "a woman's contribution to the generation of the embryo," but it furthermore "nourishes the embryo in the womb and, after it has been further concocted into breast milk, also the baby."[51] The idea that Christ is likewise made of Mary's blood is one reason why her own parents must conceive her "immaculately": so that her blood will not taint his.[52]

In a cosmic conjecture or conceit, that is also why Maximus the Confessor associates the matter of the Logos with the blood of the Virgin. Centuries before the *Secrets of Women,* Maximus had already heard that the whole matter of the incarnation arose from the Virgin's blood: "Some among the saints say that the soul is sown by the Holy Spirit in the manner of the man's seed and that the flesh is formed from the virginal blood"[53] (a pregnant remark, to which the final chapter will return). On this conception, the blood of Mary – which is here the same as her menstrual blood – builds up the embryo and nourishes the infant. Indeed, Mary's menstrual blood, on this conception, just is the blood of Jesus.[54]

[48] Bildhauer, 32 n. 40.
[49] Bildhauer, 37–8.
[50] Bildhauer, 34 n. 45, her translation.
[51] Bildhauer, 33.
[52] Bildhauer, 90.
[53] Maximus the Confessor, *Questiones et dubia*, #50 (complete), trans. Despina Prassas as *St. Maximus the Confessor's Questions and Doubts* (DeKalb: Illinois University Press, 2010), p. 72. Cf. Bettina Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood,* chapter on *Materei*.
[54] For more, see Excursus 1 at the end of this chapter.

But his blood is not just any blood. By communication of the attributes, the blood of the human Jesus is the blood of the divine Logos. And the Logos, with the Father and the Spirit, is the Creator God; the Logos is the one to whom theologians appropriate the structure and rationality of the world. This is not yet to say that the matter of the world is menstrual blood, but something rather stranger: the matter of the *Creator* – the humanity that is the Creator's own – consists (absent any special pleading) of menstrual blood.

This is why the Woman with an Issue of Blood really matters. Jesus is her brother, and she is his sister, not only in the generic way in which Jesus is brother to all, but also in a more familiar way in which they are alike in their leakiness; they have inherited a family's hemophilia. The whole cosmos belongs to their family, if blood, menstrual blood is the matter of creation.

Earlier I said that observing childbirth should give the lie to the Aristotelian conception that blood is "mere matter." Bildhauer, reading Judith Butler, finds grounds already in Aristotle to bridge the divide between matter and form. Bodies that matter only make sense if Butler

> uses 'matter' not as opposed to form, as one could have assumed, but in a second, different sense: as always already attracting and striving for form. This second sense of matter, *hyle*, as a material which has at the same time generative, productive powers, 'a certain capacity to originate', is also implied in Aristotelian philosophy, [Butler] explains . . . . Bodies that matter in this sense, then, are bodies that are productive and significant, that have potentiality for form inherent in their matter. So matter is here no longer opposed to form, but participating in it.[55]

The biblical version of that idea appears in the Septuagint translations of all those verses from Genesis, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy that repeat that "the life is in the blood." The Septuagint, which is often the earliest witness to what the Hebrew might mean, translates the word *nephesh* (for which English has "life"), with the Greek word *psyche*. That picture does not put the soul, or the principle of animation (the Vulgate says "anima" in the same place) in the father's semen; it places it in the blood, which belongs to the mother.

The Christological version of that idea appears as the *logoi* in the Logos, the internal significations that the Logos builds into all created things, so that things, precisely in their createdness, participate in God's design. That doctrine leads up to Maximus's most profound and famous saying: "The Word of

[55] Bildhauer, 86, referring to Butler, *Bodies that Matter,* 16, 32.

God (who is God) is always and in all things seeking to accomplish the mystery of his embodiment."[56] The Logos strives, therefore, to bring forth in all things the matter – the blood – the menstrual blood – from which to become incarnate; and God enables them (all things) to strive with and into the Logos. That's more than matter seeking form; more than evolution; more than a providence that leads Israel or a teleology that lures the world. That is the matter of creation seeking to become God. The paradigm for that matter is the power in the blood of a woman. That's why Maximus can also say (in another remark to which the final chapter will return) that the "logoi of intelligible beings may be understood as the blood of the Logos."[57] Maximus doesn't spell it out, but he seems to imply that it's the blood of the Virgin – her menstrual blood – that strives in all things to make the world intelligible.

In the traditions common to Maximus the Confessor and the medieval literature of secrets, blood attains cosmic significance to become the matter of the universe and even of God. That blood is not just any blood, but menstrual blood, the blood of creation. That is the deeper reason, David Biale proposes, that the rabbis prohibit husbands from having sex with their menstruating wives: because creation is too powerful, too elemental, too cosmic for them to touch.[58]

What other blood could it be? It could, of course, be the blood of sacrifice. But if menstruation and childbirth are sacrifice, and the sacrifice of the Logos brings rebirth . . . . After all, when Jesus and women, it is their own blood that they shed. Jesus and women bleed for their children. In this Jesus resembles his mother, or his mother resembles him.

"Did the woman say, /When she held him for the first time in the dark of a stable, /After the pain and the bleeding and the crying, /'This is my body, this is my blood'?"[59]

[56] Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua*, translated as *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers* by Nicholas Constas, English and Greek text on facing pages (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Press, 2014–15), cited by Migne number. Here 1084C-D.

[57] Maximos the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium* 35, ed. and trans. Fr. Maximos [Nicholas] Constas in *On Difficulties in Sacred Scripture: The Responses to Thalassios*, Fathers of the Church Series 136 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 212–14.

[58] Biale, 35–6.

[59] Frances Croake Frank, *Did the Woman Say? in Celebrating Women*, ed. Hannah Ward, Jennifer Wild, and Janet Morley (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1986). I am grateful to Nancy Duff for the reference.

Excursus 1 Is the Blood of Jesus Menstrual Blood in Thomas Aquinas and John of Damascus?

The inference that the blood of Jesus is the menstrual blood of Mary is both so cogent that Thomas Aquinas seems explicitly to admit it: "Other men's bodies are formed from the semen and the menstrual blood" (*ST* III.31.5 obj. 3) – and so shocking that he finds it necessary to distinguish it: "Of such menstrual blood infected with corruption and repudiated by nature, the conception [of Christ] is not formed; but from a certain secretion of the pure blood which *by a process of elimination* is prepared for conception" (*ST* III.31.5 *ad* 3). That sounds as if Jesus had to be protected from the very impurity he came to cure. I believe it is not meant to be. Rather, Aquinas means to distinguish the blood that remains in the body and (by the fact that it remains) is presumed pure, from the blood that leaves the body and (by the fact that it leaves) is presumed to be carrying impurities away. He does not say that there are two kinds of blood, one of which is in itself impure. His reasoning is no special pleading about the intervention of the Holy Spirit; his reasoning is Aristotelian and qualifies the conception of every human being, since "the Blessed Virgin was of the same nature as every woman" (*ad* 1).

Thomas's own remark that, so far from needing protection, "Christ came to heal what was corrupt" (*ad* 1) suggests a rather better interpretation of Mary's blood than Thomas actually offers. John of Damascus, whom Thomas quotes as his authority, had written that "the Son of God, from the Virgin's purest blood, formed himself flesh, animated with a rational soul." Aquinas takes "purest" as a restrictive adjective. But John's fuller phrasing, "her holy and most pure blood," suggests that the adjective "purest" does not filter but elevates Mary's blood. We should translate not (restrictively) "from her purest blood," but (descriptively) "from her blood most pure."[60] So far from needing filtering, the blood of Mary receives such purity from the self-forming body of Christ as to dignify her blood with an agency of its own, so that "the pure and undefiled blood of the holy and ever-virginal One made His flesh without the aid of seed" (III.13). John's mechanism of purity is just as general as the one Thomas takes from Aristotle, but here it is the work of the Logos deifying the whole human race – dignifying the Virgin as all human beings, purifying her blood as the blood of all sinners.

[60] John of Damascus, *The Orthodox Faith*, trans. E. W. Watson and L. Pullan *in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 9, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1899, et al.), III.2.

Mary's blood needs no special pleading or filtering, because her purification is just the first of her son's work. His conception purifies the waters of her womb just as his baptism purifies the waters of the Jordan: not because he needs purity, but because other humans do. John includes Mary in that process because all humans need it; he does not exclude her from it out of danger to Christ. John's general principle that "creation has been sanctified by the divine blood" (III.4) applies first of all to Mary and her blood as the beginning of a sanctification that reaches back as far as sin: "He was made flesh and became [hu]man from [Mary's] pure and immaculate flesh and blood, satisfying the debt of the first mother [Eve]" (III.14). By Aristotle or Damascene, Christ's blood is not only Mary's blood, but her menstrual blood most pure.

Excursus 2 on Menstruation and the Origin of the Word "Taboo"

Speaking of things Maori – isn't there a Maori or Polynesian clue that makes the relation between "menstruation" and "taboo" much more immediate and direct? The legendary fact-checkers at *The New Yorker* have allowed their author to write "it is believed"[61] that the word "tabu" just comes from a Polynesian word for menstruation. Their careful formulation is true enough: it is so believed. The internet certainly thinks so. The internet tells you that *tapu*, the source of our "taboo," comes from *tapua,* which is widely believed (on the evidence of a Google search), to mean "menstruation." (The *b/p* variation occurs only in English and dates from Captain Cook. Polynesian languages have a single phoneme, represented in most of them by *p*.) Given the attractiveness of such a claim, it is frustrating that "*tapua*" appears in no Polynesian dictionaries.

All the formulations with "*tapua*" with an *a* as the first vowel – which turns out not to be the actual word – seem to descend from Judy Grahn.[62] Grahn cites Robert Briffault's classic *The Mothers*, a sort of proto-feminist *Golden Bough*. Briffault writes, "The Polynesian word 'tabu,' or 'tapu,' appears to be closely allied to the word 'tupua' [first vowel a *u*], which in Polynesian languages signifies 'menstruation.'"[63] Grahn has changed the first vowel of *tupua* from *u* to *a* (which are distinct, indeed far apart, in Polynesian languages), no doubt without conscious intent. The change does tend to improve the fit between the original *tupua* and the targeted *tapu* to promote it from a theory to a meme.

Briffault cites Tregear's venerable *Maori-Polynesian Comparative Dictionary* of 1891.[64] Under "tapu" (472 col. 2), a warrior touching a menstruating woman comes as the sixth and last example, but Tregear gives no indication of an etymological relationship, nor even any indication that the last example gives rise to the concept. It would almost be surprising, of course, if menstruation did not appear as an *example* of taboo.

Briffault's *tupua* with a *u* for the first vowel does appear in Polynesian dictionaries. Under *tupua* (with a *u* as the first vowel), as actually referenced

[61] Jerome Groopman, "Pumped: The Story of Blood" (review of *Nine Pints*), *The New Yorker*, vol. 94, no. 44 (Jan. 14, 2019), 58–64; here, p. 60, col. 1.

[62] Judy Grahn, *Blood, Bread, and Roses: How Menstruation Created the World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 4.

[63] Robert Briffault, *The Mothers: A Study of the Origins of Sentiments and Institutions*, 3 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1927); here, vol. 2, 412. A one-volume, abridged version is more common but lacks the relevant discussion.

[64] Edward Tregear, *Maori-Polynesian Comparative Dictionary* (Wellington, NZ: Lyon and Blair), 1891. Searchable facsimile: archive.org/details/maoripolynesian01treggoog/

by Briffault, we find again no reference to menstruation. But every page displays its first and last words in the header, and on that page *tupua* rides the header. So you could be forgiven for thinking that you were in that entry when you *did* glimpse a word related to menstruation. Higher up in the same column as *tupua*, but under the verb *tupu/tubu,* "to increase, to grow," we find the compound *tubukohi* (with a *b*) for menarche (p. 557, col. 1, s.v. *tupu; ko* and *hine* are both terms for "girl," s.v. *kohine,* p. 156, col. 1); it seems to mean something like "a girl grown up," in my conjecture: not much like taboo. The only verb defined as "menstruate" – and presumably there are also other verbs – is *maringi*, "to spill" (p. 217, col. 1). At the end of the volume lies a simplified English-to-Maori dictionary; under the English word "menses" (p. 679, one column), it gives two choices, *tahe* and *pakehe*. At the end of the trail, there appears to be no evidence that Polynesian languages derived the word *tapu* or taboo from a word for menstruation.

I wish it were true. The fact that we would like so much for it to be true, that we note with such satisfaction the idea that it should be true, and that we take it so readily to be true – those are facts about ourselves. I'm not suggesting that anyone is consciously trying to massage the evidence. But our wish fulfillment, with its chain of subconsciously motivated misprisions, is telling. Briffault takes a compound from *tubu* "to grow" and transfers it to *tupua*. Grahn takes the *a* from *tapu* and improves *tupua* to *tapua*. No one checks back to see what the menstruation words might be. Such beliefs and conjectures say something about us. We would certainly like to think that menstruation is *the* taboo, the Original Taboo, the Ur-taboo – because perhaps it is among the strongest taboos for us.[65]

[65] The standard etymology, "set apart, forbidden," is, after all, just a definition. Either that is as much as we know, or the word is composed of the element *ta*, in its meaning of "to mark" (p. 437, col. 1, definitions 14–16), as perhaps in "tattoo" (s.v. *tau,* p. 487 col. 1); and the intensifier *pu* (p. 864, col. 1, "exceedingly"). Again the etymology is suggestive even if it is not secure: taboos and blood both mark intensively.

Excursus 3 The *Pneuma* Is in the Blood

Late Antique Greek *pneuma* was a fluid *stuff,* not transcendent God; as such it animated and circulated in blood and semen, which had much to do with Paul's metaphors of the Holy Spirit creating "children" of God (literally sons, or children who inherit). The idea persisted well into the Middle Ages, including Aquinas.[66] Semen is also another form of blood – the kind that makes children blood relatives to their fathers.[67]

In the bits of Aristotle that separate matter and form, a child resembles mother and father for different reasons. The mother supplies the matter, but the father supplies the movement and origin. The father, therefore, contributes to the fetus its "shape and character."[68] Philo reports that "similarities of body and soul ... are preserved in seminal principles (*en tois spermatikois logois*)."[69] But – and here is where adoption and natural birth come together – a Greek or Roman father has to formally accept even his biological child, admitting it into the family by ritual.[70] This ritual is sacrifice, the ceremonious slaughter and eating together of a large animal. The father offers a sacrifice, legitimates the child, and gives the child a name. Baptism, the ritual drowning that makes a child of God, and Eucharist, the ritual breaking that names Christians after Christ, both retain elements of a father's accepting children by sacrifice. In inheritance disputes, family members had to testify that a father had admitted his heirs to family feasts. So Apollodorus testifies: "[My adoptive father] conducted me to the altars and to the members of the extended family and the clan. With them the same law applies both when someone introduces a natural son or an adopted son: he must swear with his hand on the sacrificial animal [about] the child whom he introduces, whether his own or an adopted son."[71]

Through the ritual of shared sacrifice, even adopted children "shared blood" with their adoptive fathers and brothers:[72] "Greek texts intuit an

[66] See the discussion at the end of the next chapter.
[67] For more about this, see Rogers, "How the Semen of the Spirit Genders the Gentiles," in *Aquinas and the Supreme Court: Race, Gender, and the Failure of Natural Law in Thomas's Biblical Commentaries* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2013), 289–97.
[68] Caroline Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 94–5.
[69] Quoted in Hodge, 27.
[70] Hodge, 27.
[71] Quoted in Hodge, 29.
[72] Hodge, 27; Jay, 107–8.

analogy between sacrifice and men's control of childbirth because sacrifice actually effected paternal control of children."[73] "Through sacrifice, children [receive] a place in the father's lineage; through ritual, men beget their heirs."[74] Nancy Jay puts it even more starkly: male sacrifice seeks to give birth culturally, by *cultus* or, literally, cutting; men seek, in short, to "do birth better."[75]

It is thus that the *pneuma* of the father naturalizes associations with sacrifice and feasting, fire and wine: because of deeply rooted cultural (or cultic) *practices*. Those associations do not float free of embodied activities like killing and eating; they arise from them.

Paul insists that Gentiles receive sonship of God by adoption (*huiothesia*, placing sons). Greco-Roman eulogies and encomia say that adopted children resemble their adoptive *patres*: but how? Indeed, children resemble even *invented* ancestors, and they resemble adoptive ones even when everybody knows they're adopted. Thus Julius Caesar claims descent from the goddess Venus, and Cicero continues to record genealogies he recognizes as decked out with "feigned triumphs" and "too many consulships."[76] If Cicero winks at inventions even as he perpetuates them, how much more easily can the rhetoric of family resemblance accommodate the adopted who may learn their posture and character from adoptive *patres*, absorbing it, as we say in English, from the air? That's not so far from saying, from the *pneuma*, which also means air. "The historian Diodorus of Sicily describes the heritage of Publius Scipio, who was not only born to a famous father, but also 'given in adoption to Scipio.' Diodorus goes on to cite both the birth *and* the adoptive family to prove the worth [of Publius]: 'Sprung from such stock, and succeeding to a family and clan of such importance, he showed himself worthy of *the fame of his ancestors*.'"[77] Which set of ancestors? Both. Is there a *pneuma* theory for adoption? Can it animate the air or circulate in the household? Certainly: but my application to adoption is an inference; so far I have no sources to tell me so directly.

Reading Durkheim would also make you think so. According to Durkheim, societies establish facts when they entrench them in individual

[73] Stanley Stowers, "Greeks Who Sacrifice and Those Who Do Not: Toward an Anthropology of Greek Religion," in *The Social World of the Earliest Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne A. Meeks*, ed. L. M. White and O. L. Yarborough (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 293–333; here, 301.

[74] Hodge, 27.

[75] Jay, 17.

[76] Hodge, 19, 32.

[77] Hodge, 30, citing Diodorus, *Bibliotheca historica XXXI.26.4*, ed. and trans. Francis R. Walton (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957).

minds, and societies entrench facts in individual minds when they meet together in "reunions" and generate "moral effervescence,"[78] social "juice" or electricity, such as at sacrifices, family feasts, Tigers' games, or the donning of the gowns. In Christianity, the social juice is the Holy Spirit – unless of course it's blood – and one of the effervescent reunions is the baptism with its extended families and fictive kin or godparents. I would like to say: Paul's adoption metaphors depend on a Greco-Roman adoption discourse according to which adopted sons resemble adoptive fathers by *pneuma*, which circulated both in the semen or blood (for biological children) and in the air or in the household (for adopted children). *Pneuma* would have circulated also in the blood and meat and community of sacrifice, as it does in the Eucharist, to leaven the bread and enflame the wine. Certainly, *Christianity* has a *pneuma* theory for adoption. It's called baptism. In it we find both sacrifice – by drowning – and birth done better, in the womb of the font. The Spirit, a fluid, extends by *krasis*, or mixing, into the water. So it extends all the more readily into that sacrifice in which the Son makes brothers by sharing his blood, into that mixed substance that modern Greek calls *krasi*, the wine: which celebrates the wedding feast that a father throws for his son, where the son says to his spouse, "this is my body, given for you."

The Spirit, I propose, is, even in antiquity, not *merely* a physical thing, but a *para*physical thing: one that works with and alongside but exceeds the physical. (I reclaim the notorious phrase of Romans 1 that refers to excessive Gentile love of men for men or women for women, because Paul repeats it in Romans 11 to describe the excessive love of Gentiles by God.[79]) Later theologians would think about the Spirit in terms of immanence and transcendence, but the ancients had no moderns to go by. Paul, as it happens, uses notably parabiological or paraphysical metaphors to include Gentiles. If Jews are God's children by nature, Gentiles become God's children by adoption; they are "fellow" heirs; the Spirit must *teach* them to call God "Father," which Jews already know; in Romans 11 Gentiles form branches *grafted* explicitly *para phusin*, in excess of nature, into the unaccustomed clefts of the Jewish olive tree. Normal would be to graft sweet or oil-rich olives onto

[78] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New York: Free Press, 1965), 240–2.

[79] See Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., "The Spirit Rests on the Son Paraphysically," in *The Lord and Giver of Life: Perspectives on Constructive Pneumatology*, ed. David H. Jensen (Philadelphia: Westminster/John Knox, 2008), 87–95, 174–6; "Paul on Exceeding Nature: Queer Gentiles and the Giddy Gardener," in F. S. Roden, ed., *Jewish/Christian/Queer: Crossroads and Identities* (Aldershot, Hants.: Ashgate, 2009), 19–33; and "How the Semen of the Spirit Genders the Gentiles," cited above.

the more vigorous rootstock of a wild tree; but God does the opposite, grafting *wild*, good-for-nothing olives onto a perfectly good domestic stock. This God is no longer the sober agriculturalist of Eden but a loopy plant-fancier: this God is a giddy gardener.[80] All these metaphors are paraphysical: they extend even to the breaking point the metaphors of kinship. Paul's "Spirit of adoption" also works paraphysically, expanding nature according to Greco-Roman adoption theory, where the father's *pneuma* is not just "spirit," but seminal fluid. Somehow, it causes both biological and adoptive children to resemble him.[81]

Shall we apply this analysis also to the wine, which is the blood of the community: *pneuma* animates blood, and therefore wine? On this view, the spirit in the wine is not only alcohol: it goes deeper: it belongs also to the blood. Christians certainly *pray* that the Spirit will be in the blood: "Send forth Thy Holy Spirit upon these Thy creatures of bread and wine that they may be fitted to become the Body and Blood of Thy Son."[82]

[80] These sentences first appeared to different purpose in "Giddy Gardener," 25–6.

[81] This idea first occurred to me in conversation with Stanley Stowers; it seems to be implied, but never quite stated, in Stan Stowers, "Matter and Spirit, or What Is Pauline Participation in Christ," *The Holy Spirit: Classic & Contemporary Readings*, ed. Eugene F. Rogers, Jr. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 92–105.

[82] Variations are common; this version appears in *Eucharistic Devotions* (London: Joseph Masters, 1870), 34. Greg Williams suggested that I quote it here.

Excursus 4 on Philoxenus of Mabbug

Why does the history of exegesis connect the blood of sacrifice so rarely to blood gendered female? (For the answer, see Nancy Jay.) In the history of exegesis of Hebrews 9:22, "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin," most commentators take blood so for granted that they have little to say – it's a premise for them, nothing they have to justify. The one exception I know of seems so far-fetched that one has to reach for subconscious motivation, Freudian repression, or a hermeneutics of suspicion to explain the connection between the labor of asceticism and the labor of childbirth that seems, after Nancy Jay, to leap to the eye. The Syriac bishop, theologian, and translator Philoxenus of Mabbug (d. 523) is plenty suggestive in his "Letter to Abba Symeon of Caesarea"[83] – even if he doesn't seem to know what or how much he's suggesting. I put some leading questions in square brackets.

> The practice of the commandments is not accomplished simply and by chance, for it is written that "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins." [How does that follow exactly?] Our nature first received renewal [What does "renewal" mean? Can it mean rebirth?] through the incarnation of Christ, and it participated in his passion and death. Then, after the renewal of the shedding of blood [What does "renewal of the shedding of blood" mean? Presumably it means "after the renewal wrought by Christ's shedding of blood. "But am I wrong to think of women's monthly renewal of the shedding of blood?] our nature was renewed and sanctified and became able to receive his new and perfect commandments. . . . [N]ow there is a secret labor [Can this include labor in the sense of bringing to birth, or must it be only work and nothing else?] that accompanies the new spiritual commandments. When the soul keeps these through the circumspection of the fear of God, they renew it, sanctify it and secretly heal all its members. . . . The operation of the commandments is perceived only by the healer and the healed, after the likeness of the woman who had an issue of blood.

My leading questions suggest, in short, that there is no forgiveness of sins without rebirth and the labor thereof, so that the blood without which there

[83] Philoxenus of Mabbug, "Letter to Abba Symeon of Caesarea," in Erik Heen and Phillip D. W. Krey, *Hebrews*, Ancient Christian Commentary series, New Testament vol. 10 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), under Hebrews 9:22. Although modern scholars attribute the text to Philoxenus, it comes down to us among the writings of Isaac of Ninevah, and hence the Ancient Christian Commentary takes it from *Ascetical Homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian*, trans. Holy Transfiguration Monastery [Dana Miller] (Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1984), 427–48; here, 436.

is no remission is the blood of fertility. This genders feminine both the believer and the blood. Furthermore, it does so secretly, hiddenly, or circumspectly, because the blood of childbirth recalls the woman with an issue of blood, where the blood of healing keeps itself secret. The blood of life, that is, remains as secret as the blood of menstruation to men, or the rebirth of the heart, wherein Christ is born within the believer.

Perhaps this interpretation is what Harold Bloom calls a strong misreading. The Syriac text hardly supports it. The word for labor or working is *'amla,* which is not used for the labor of childbirth. One correspondent writes that, since the blood of renewal is that of the cross, Philoxenus's "blood is definitely *not* gendered female, [not] blood associated with menstruation or childbirth [but] clearly is gendered male, sacrificial blood (thinking back to Nancy Jay, so to speak)."

Well, yes, the blood of Hebrews 9:22 must always be the labor of the cross, but that could include the labor of childbirth. And yes, Evagrian asceticism is a work this text genders male, but must the text mean that alone? After Bynum made it commonplace that in the West the monk – especially the Cistercian – labors to give birth with the labor of Mary, in the East, later than Philoxenus, Symeon the New Theologian considers spiritual pregnancy. Philoxenus does not know those texts. Consider another text that aligns men's and women's labor, one that Philoxenus does know:

In Genesis 3, God curses both the woman (v. 16) and the man (v. 17) with labor/pain/suffering (עִצָּבוֹן). That word distinguishes in order to unite; man and woman alike are punished with עִצָּבוֹן, labor, whether on the land or in childbirth. In the Syriac Bible, the Peshitta, the word in both verses is also the same; it is *ci'ba'*, which means pain, as in childbirth or illness. In both Hebrew and Syriac, Genesis unites the gendered labor of men and women under a single word that includes childbirth. In Philoxenus, therefore, we find a tension between prominent Evagrian words that exclude the labor of women and the tacit Genesis intertext that includes it.

Is it possible that an underlying or even unconscious picture connects the blood of atonement to the labor of childbirth – but has been rendered appropriate to a male, ascetic recipient and somewhat wider audience by using words from the Evagrian tradition of male ascetics – in order to avoid words for labor gendered feminine?

My correspondent's reference to Nancy Jay is pregnant. Jay argues not only that sacrifice produces a blood and a line gendered male, while childbirth, which men interpret as bloody, produces a "blood" and a line gendered female. Jay argues also that those separated things belong together, because sacrificing traditions attempt to create a male patriline that "does

birth better," that is, culturally rather than biologically. The blood of sacrifice, gendered male, *is also* a "blood" of childbirth. Or more accurately, the blood of sacrifice is one that men associate culturally with childbirth, even though biologically childbirth ought not to produce too much bleeding. Or even: For Nancy Jay and her readers, the blood of sacrifice, gendered male, *just is* the imagined "blood" of childbirth, transmuted into the culture of a patriline, a culturally constructed lineage of fathers and sons. The imaging of childbirth that gives sacrifice rise must therefore be present even when hidden. Thanks to Jay, I'm wondering whether these sacrificial versions of labor are gendered male in such a way that they hide, deny, repress, or repel connections otherwise apparent between ascetic labor and labor of childbirth. If childbirth becomes a metaphor that the ascetic must avoid, then that has its own interest. In "Marian Dogmas and Taboos," Cleo Kearns has done something much more sophisticated with instances where Catholic devotion to Mary grants her priestly attributes (as when she offers Christ in the Temple at his circumcision) and then runs screaming in the other direction with Jay-inflected denials.[84] Jay, like Genesis, genders in order to unite. Jesus, like the ascetic, sacrifices in order to renew; his blood, like the labor of childbirth, brings new life, as innocent as a baby. Childbirth, especially if it turns out like Rachel's, is also sacrifice.

Stillbirth, miscarriage, and menstruation as well. In the twelfth century, Rabbi Joseph Bekhor Shor argued that women need not be circumcised, because they menstruate. Circumcision is sacrifice: therefore menstruation is also.[85] Nancy Jay would see that logic as backwards and reverse it. Menstruation is naturally sacrifice. Circumcision is menstruation done culturally, by cutting.

[84] Cleo McNelly Kearns, *The Virgin Mary, Monotheism, and Sacrifice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 258–92.

[85] Shaye Cohen, *Why Aren't Jewish Women Circumcised: Gender and Covenant in Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), xv, 192–8, 205–6. I owe my attention to these passages to Ellen Haskell.