BRILL

CHURCH HISTORY AND
RELIGIOUS CULTURE 94 (2014) 297–315

Church History
and
Religious Culture
brill.com/chrc

"he is bothyn modyr, broþ*yr*, & syster vn-to me"

Women and the Bible in Late Medieval and Early Modern English Sermons

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Abstract

Examining recent claims that the early modern Bible served as an empowering force for women, this article draws evidence from English sermons designed for quotidinal lay instruction—such as the late medieval sermons of *Festial*, the sixteenth-century Tudor Homilies, and the seventeenth-century sermons of William Gouge and Benjamin Keach. As didactic religious texts written and delivered by men but also heard and read by women, sermons reveal how preachers rhetorically shaped the contours of women's agency. Late medieval sermons include women specifically in scripture and authorize women through biblical role models as actively participating within the church. Conversely, early modern sermons were less likely to add women into scripture and more likely to use scripture to limit women by their domestic identities. Thus, through their approaches to biblical texts, medieval preachers present women as more visible and active agents whereas early modern preachers present women as less visible and more limited in their roles—thereby presenting a more complex story of how the Bible affected women across the Reformation.

Keywords

women – Bible – English sermons – gendered language

* I would like to acknowledge the Louisville Institute, a Lilly Endowment Program, for supporting the research for this project through their Sabbatical Grant for Researchers, 2013–2014.

 | DOI: 10.1163/18712428-09403001

The late medieval English matron and self-proclaimed holy woman Margery Kempe found encouragement through Christ's words to his disciples that, "He þ*a*t doth þ*e* wyl of my Fadyr in Heuyn he is bothyn modyr, broþ*yr*, & syster vn-to me."[1] These words—first spoken by Jesus, as recorded in Matthew 12,50 of the Vulgate, "Quicū*que* em̄ fecerit voluntatē patris mei qui in celis est: ipse me? fra/ter/soror & mater est."—strengthened Kempe's resolve to participate, as a married lay woman, in acts of excessive and often public piety, including praying for the souls of strangers and engaging in devotional weeping. Moreover, even though Kempe did not have access to a physical Bible, she explained where she probably learned this biblical reference: "for comowny*n*g in Sc*ri*ptur whech sche lernyd in s*er*mownys & be comowny*n*g w*yth* clerk*y*s."[2] Middle English sermons thus conveyed to Kempe the biblical expectation that women too should do the will of God, which she interpreted as performing pious acts.[3]

Approximately 150 years after *The Book of Margery Kempe* was written, William Perkins preached a sermon in Cambridge that too quoted these words of Jesus: "*whosoeuer shall doe my fathers will, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother*." Unlike Kempe who used this biblical passage to authorize her pious actions, Perkins emphasized that doing the will of God meant having "true faith." Even Mary the mother of Jesus, Perkins wrote, could not have been saved "if shee had not as well borne him in her heart by faith, as shee did in her bodie."[4] The sermon audience would have been steered toward self-examination instead of pious action because only faith mattered: "Christ wil not acknowledge all and euery man to bee his."[5] In contrast to Kempe's use of

1 *The Book of Margery Kempe: The Text from the Unique MS. Owned by Colonel W. Butler-Bowdon*, ed. S.B. Meech and H.E. Allen (London, 1940), pp. 30–31.

2 *Biblia Basileae*, Froben, 1509. See also Mark 3,35. Luke 8,21 records the event but it is worded differently enough to indicate Kempe's version was drawing from Matthew (possibly Mark). In Luke, Jesus responds: "Mater mea & frēs mei hi sunt q*ui ver*bū dei audiūt & faciūt." It is possible that the mother first in Luke 8,21 influenced Kempe's rendering of Matthew 12, 50. *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 29.

3 Christ explained these words to Kempe: "wha*n* þu wepyst & mornyst for my peyn & for my Passyon, þa*n* art þow a very modyr to haue co*m*passyon of hyr chyld; wha*n* þow wepyst for oþ*er* mennys sy*n*nes | and for adu*er*sytes, þan art þow a very syster." Doing the will of God was more than hearing God's word; it meant performing piety—a connection which Kempe also would have heard in sermons. *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 31.

4 M. William Perkins, 'A Godly and Learned Exposition of Christs Sermon in the Mount: Preached in Cambridge' (Cambridge: Thomas Brooke and Cantrell Legge, 1608), p. 523. *Early English Books Online* provided access to all sixteenth and seventeenth-century texts.

5 Ibid., pp. 526–527.

Matthew 12,50, Perkins did not authorize pious activity which would draw public attention to women or distract them from the household.

In short, even as scholarship concentrates on how the English Bible empowered early modern women, *The Book of Margery Kempe* provides evidence for a biblical text (probably heard in a sermon) empowering a late medieval woman to participate in acts of public piety. A seventeenth-century sermon presenting the same biblical text encouraged private introspection instead of pious action. Sermons thus complicate our understanding of the impact of the Bible on women across the Reformation. As didactic religious texts written and delivered by men but also heard and read by women, sermons reveal how preachers rhetorically shaped the contours of women's agency. Through their approaches to biblical texts, medieval preachers increased women's visibility in sermons and helped authorize women as independent agents. In contrast, the ways in which early modern preachers approached biblical texts reduced women's visibility in sermons and placed more emphasis on women's limited roles.

1 The Bible in Late Medieval and Early Modern English Sermons

"Vnto a Christian man, there can be nothyng, either more necessa-rie, or profitable, then the know-ledge of holy scripture:"[6] This opening sentence of the first sermon of the 1547 Tudor Homilies proclaims one of the distinctive ideals of the Reformation era: *sola scriptura*.[7] The Reformation elevated the Bible as the central source of authority for Christians. Medieval Catholicism taught that the Bible was indeed important, but only part of a broader apostolic tradition from which one received faith.[8] Plagued by controversy and concerned about ignorant lay reading, ecclesiastical leaders in the late medieval church discour-

6 Thomas Cranmer and others, *Certayne Sermons, or Homelies, appoynted by the kynges Majestie, to bee declared and redde, by all persones, Vicares, or Curates, every Sondaye in their churches, where they haue cure* (London: Rychard Grafton, 1547), p. A.iii.v.

7 "For Luther, scripture, has become the sole measure of all Christian theology. Where current practice diverges from scripture it must be abandoned." David M. Whitford, *Luther: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Bloomsbury, 2013).

8 Susan Wabuda, *Preaching During the English Reformation* (Cambridge, Eng., 2002), pp. 75–78. David Aers, *Faith, Ethics and Church: Writing in England, 1360–1409* (Cambridge, Eng., 2000), pp. 121–122, as quoted by Judy Ann Ford, *John Mirk's Festial: Orthodoxy, Lollardy and the Common People in Fourteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, Eng., 2006), p. 114.

aged vernacular Bible translations.[9] Protestants, although also uncomfortable about ignorant lay reading, supported vernacular Bible translations proliferating during the sixteenth century.[10]

This critical difference between medieval Catholicism and early modern Protestantism marked their use of scripture in sermons. Scripture references abound in Middle English sermons, and by the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries sermons were preached on Sundays as well as during the week.[11] The point of these sermons was not Bible instruction; it was to teach parishioners the necessary components of their faith in order to help them achieve salvation and avoid purgatorial pain. Eyal Poleg explains: "It was faith and behavior, doctrinal matter rather than biblical, to which preachers aspired. The Bible supplied the means to do so, alongside other authorities, such as the church fathers or even pagan writers."[12] Most often categorized as either *temporale* (proper of time; sermons associated with annual cycle of Sundays and moveable feasts mostly associated with Christ) or *sanctorale* (proper of saints; sermons associated with fixed-day feasts for saints and a few with Christ), Middle English sermons usually contain text from the Gospels or Epistles but focus

9 Nicholas Watson, 'Censorship and Cultural Change in Late Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409,' *Speculum* 70:4 (1995), pp. 822–864.

10 Henry VIII followed the preference of late medieval Catholicism for preachers to teach scripture. Lori Anne Ferrell, 'The Preacher's Bibles,' in *The Oxford Handbook of the Early Modern Sermon*, eds. Peter McCullough, Hugh Adlington, and Emma Rhatigan (Oxford, Eng., 2011), pp. 21–33, there 22. David Whitford also discusses the Protestant discomfort with vernacular translations. David M. Whitford, *The Curse of Ham in the Early Modern Era: The Bible and the Justifications for Slavery* (Burlington, VT, 2009), pp. 90–91.

11 H.L. Spencer, *English Preaching in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 20–77. Phyllis Roberts, 'The *Ars Praedicandi* and the Medieval Sermon,' in *Preacher, Sermon and Audience in the Middle Ages*, ed. Carolyn Muessig (Leiden, 2002), pp. 41–63, there 59–61. Some sermons contain more scripture than others. *Temporale* sermons following the liturgical readings from the gospels or epistles include more scripture than occasional sermons. Some *sanctorale* sermons include a great deal of scripture. Sermon cycles which emphasize narratives (such as *Festial*) have less scripture than those which draw primarily from biblical texts (such as Wycliffite sermons). But, Middle English sermons overall draw "fundamental inspiration from Scripture." Roberts, 'The *Ars Praedicandi*,' p. 59. Unlike early modern preachers, medieval preachers did not expect their audience to look up biblical referernces and were not concerned with literal accuracy. Eyal Poleg, *Approaching the Bible in Medieval England* (Manchester, 2013), p. 179.

12 Eyal Poleg, '"A Ladder Set Up on Earth": The Bible in Medieval Sermons,' in *The Practice of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (New York, 2011), pp. 205–228, there 212.

on issues of Christian behavior and doctrine.[13] A fifteenth-century Dominican sermon cycle, preserved in full in four manuscripts, contains mostly *temporale* sermons and follows the lectionary of the Sarum missal. Yet its sermons are also filled with *exempla* (forty-nine didactic tales) and center around issues of Christocentric piety, pastoral care, and doctrinal beliefs. Thus, despite overflowing with scripture, it rarely attempts biblical exegesis.[14]

Scripture flows through Middle English sermons. *Festial*, the most popular vernacular orthodox sermon compilation in late medieval England, contains more than 500 direct biblical references.[15] The previously mentioned Dominican sermon cycle contains more than 900 direct biblical references. But the biblical text always stands alongside church doctrine and tradition.[16] Bible verses are mostly in Latin, and vernacular renditions are paraphrases often molded to support the points of the sermon.[17] A Lenten sermon in the printed

13 Poleg, 'A Ladder Set Up on Earth,' pp. 207–212. Veronica O'Mara and Suzanne Paul, *A Repertorium of Middle English Prose Sermons*, 4 volumes (Brepols, 2007), there Vol. 1, pp. li–liii. Since the 36 manuscripts of the Wycliffite sermon cycle comprises approximately 22% of extant 162 Middle English sermon manuscripts, and *Festial* manuscripts comprise 25% of all extant manuscripts (33% including the *Festial*-related manuscripts/ 41% of orthodox manuscripts), these two collections comprise approximately half of the extant sermon types. Only the widely-popular *Festial* represents normative Catholicism. It complements the liturgical calendar, although it does not adhere to the structure of theme, protheme, and antitheme. Susan Boynton, 'The Bible and the Liturgy,' in *The Practice of the Bible*, pp. 10–33; Carolyn Muessig, 'Sermon, Preacher, and Society in the Middle Ages,' *Journal of Medieval History* 28 (2002): pp. 73–91; Richard W. Pfaff, *The Liturgy in Medieval England: A History* (Cambridge, Eng., 2009), p. 6.

14 Stephen Morrison, ed., *A Late Fifteenth-Century Dominical Sermon Cycle*, 2 Vols., EETS o.s. 337 (Oxford., Eng., 2012 for 2011), Vol. 1, pp. xxi–liii.

15 Susan Powell, *John Mirk's Festial: edited from British Library MS Cotton Claudius A.II* (Oxford, Eng., 2009). For more information about gendered language in *Festial*: Beth Allison Barr, *The Pastoral Care of Women in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2008), pp. 36–61 and pp. 125–134. The first recension of *Festial* manuscripts are the most gender inclusive, along with several of the more fragmented collections, while the second recension manuscripts are less gender inclusive. All *Festial* manuscripts reflect gender inclusive language especially when discussing issues of pastoral care. See also: Susan Powell, 'Preaching at Syon Abbey,' *Leeds Studies in English* n.s. 31 (2000), pp. 229–267, and Susan Powell, *The Medieval Church in the Sixteenth Century: The Post-Reformation History of a Fourteenth-Century Sermon Collection* (Salford, 1998).

16 Ford, *John Mirk's Festial*, p. 120.

17 *Festial* sermons rely more on English paraphrases of biblical texts than Latin quotations. Medieval English Bibles did exist, but they were less common. Richard Marsden, 'The Bible in English in the Middle Ages,' in *The Practice of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, pp. 272–295.

1532 *Festial* focuses on how the story of Moses and the law prefigured Christ and grace as delivered through the teachings and sacraments of the medieval church.[18] The scripture passage is shaped accordingly—even expanding the fourth commandment to include godparents and the medieval clergy, "thou shalte worshyp thy father & thy mother that brought the into this worlde & thy godfather & thy godmother that made the a chrysten man. And thy father under god that hath cure and charge of thy soule."[19] The biblical text plays a secondary role within the sermon as it provides support for the medieval pastoral program.[20]

Scripture plays a more central role in early modern sermons. Rejecting the Catholic position that "scripture was insufficient without tradition," Protestants viewed biblical preaching as integral to their faith.[21] John Downe, a

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By the later middle ages, the Wyclif Bible was the most common vernacular text which did find its way into orthodox sermons (such as the Dominican sermon cycle which overlaps with *Festial*). Canon law never forbade vernacular translations, although some local authorities did. The concern was not so much for vernacular texts, but for unvetted translations that could foster heresy. The medieval Bible had been associated with Latin since Jerome, and medieval worship and tradition had strengthened that connection for hundreds of years. It is not surprising that attempts to introduce non-Latin translations of the Bible were, at least at first, regarded with suspicion. But a lack of physical Bibles did not equal lack of biblical knowledge for medieval people. Biblical study exploded in the late middle ages and biblical knowledge was conveyed to ordinary people through a variety of methods. For further information: Poleg, *Approaching the Bible*, 2013; Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, Eng., 1983); Lesley Smith, *The Glossa Ordinaria: The Making of a Medieval Bible Commentary* (Leiden, 2009); Frans van Liere, *An Introduction to The Medieval Bible* (Cambridge, Eng., 2014); James Morey, *Book and Verse: A Guide to Middle English Biblical Literature* (Chicago, 2000).

18 The 1532 printed edition is based on an expanded edition of the Group B *Festial* manuscripts. Lillian L. Steckman, 'A Late Fifteenth-Century Revision of Mirk's *Festial*,' *Studies in Philology* 34 (1937), pp. 36–48; Alan J. Fletcher and Susan Powell, 'The Origins of a Fifteenth-Century Sermon Collection: MSS Harley 2247 and Royal 18 B XXV,' *Leeds Studies in English* n.s. 10 (1978), pp. 74–96.

19 *The Festyuall* (London: Wynkyn de Worde, 1532), pp. 23v–24r.

20 J.W. Blench also noticed how scripture was often subordinated to the pastoral program in Middle English sermons. Blench, *Preaching in England in the Late Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (London, 1964), pp. 5–9. Poleg writes: "Sermons were not constructed primarily to elucidate the biblical text. Rather, preachers employed the Bible to support their dissemination of church doctrine, typically moral admonition." Poleg, *Approaching the Bible*, p. 187.

21 Arnold Hunt, *The Art of Hearing: English Preachers and Their Audiences, 1590–1640* (Cambridge, Eng., 2010), p. 40. The expansion of biblical preaching had medieval roots. Lucy

Devonshire minister in the early seventeenth century, argued that the goal of preaching was to convey scripture: preaching was "the publishing, or notifying, or making knowne of Gods word."[22] Sermon literature reflects not only this emphasis on biblical centrism but also a sharp increase in biblical literalism.[23] England went from having only sporadic vernacular access to biblical texts in the late medieval period to multiple English versions produced between 1526 and 1611: including, the Geneva Bible, the Bishops' Bible, and the King James Version.[24] Early modern preachers filled their sermons with vernacular scripture (often from multiple versions) and stayed word-for-word faithful to the biblical text.[25] William Gouge, a popular Anglican minister who served at St. Ann Blackfriars in London from 1608 until 1653, provides a typical example of a bibliocentric sermon. He preached *A Recovery From Apostacy* on October 21, 1638, for the occasion of Vincent Jukes reconversion from Islam. Gouge opened the sermon with a direct quotation from Luke 15,31, "He was lost, and is found." He carried this verse throughout the sermon, citing it multiple times, and organizing the text around its context: the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15). He also incorporated numerous verses and even recognized that he mirrored biblical texts, stating that "the Lords freeman" was "the Apostles phrase." In fact, Gouge directly quoted words, phrases, and entire passages from more than 200 Bible verses.[26] Biblicism informed the focus, the organizational framework, and even the language of Gouge's sermon.

The changing function of scripture in sermons—that the Bible should not only inform about behavior and doctrine (as it did within late medieval sermons) but should actually be the focus itself—combined with the increased availability of printed Bibles, however, did not markedly change the sermon as a primary vehicle for teaching scripture. For late medieval parishioners, the word of God was conveyed through liturgy and sermons. In the same vein, Arnold Hunt has remarked, "for many Protestants, the spoken word of the sermon actu-

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Wooding, 'From Tudor Humanism to Reformation Preaching,' in *The Oxford Handbook of the Early Modern Sermon*, pp. 329–347, there 345.

22 As quoted in Hunt, *The Art of Hearing*, p. 36.

23 Wooding, "From Tudor Humanism," pp. 335–340.

24 Ferrell notes that a "near-century of humanist and Protestant biblicism in the homiletic practices of England's protestantized clergy" encouraged their incorporation of biblical texts from multiple versions within sermons. Ferrell, 'The Preacher's Bibles,' p. 30.

25 Hunt, *The Art of Hearing*, p. 77.

26 William Gouge, 'A Recovery from Apostacy' (London: George Mider, Joshua Kirton, and Thomas Warren, 1638), pp. 1, 9–16, 22, 12. The sermon includes in the text or margins multiple citations from more than 45 biblical books.

ally took precedence over the printed word of the Bible."[27] William Perkins stressed that preaching was "the central platform of the godly programme." "[E]very good minister," he wrote, should be "a good text man," and all the godly should be "bound … to frequent sermons."[28] The medieval Catholic preference to hear scripture instead of to read scripture continued to manifest itself in English Protestantism. This is especially critical when thinking about female piety since evidence shows women (late medieval and early modern alike) as consistently faithful in sermon attendance.[29] Margery Kempe lamented that she was unable to hear enough sermons to satisfy her in the fifteenth century, and Peter Lily lamented in the seventeenth century that if he didn't "speake" to women, "who (for the most part) are the chiefest in this assembly," than "to whom should I speake?"[30]

Because sermons played a critical role in teaching scripture across the Reformation and because women consistently filled sermon audiences, preachers played a key role in rhetorically shaping how women heard biblical messages about their sex. Some scholars have already begun to make connections between the presentation of women in English Bibles and constructions of gender.[31] Naomi Tadmore has argued that the English Bible transformed Hebrew texts to fit contemporary understanding of marriage and even relationships between husbands and wives.[32] In other words, contemporary perceptions of women—such as mostly defining women by marital status—became divinely

27 Hunt, *The Art of Hearing*, pp. 21–22.

28 As quoted by Kevin Sharpe, *Reading Authority and Representing Rule in Early Modern England* (London, 2013), p. 65.

29 Katherine French, *The Good Women of the Parish: Gender and Religion after the Black Death* (Philadelphia, 1998), p. 1. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing* (Cambridge, Eng., 2003), p. 143. See also: G.R. Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England: An Introduction to Sermon Manuscripts of the Period c. 1350–1450* (Cambridge, Eng., 1926), p. 173. Women themselves testify to regular sermon attendance. Sara Heller Mendelson, 'Stuart Women's Diaries and Occasional Memoirs,' in *Women in English Society, 1500–1800*, ed. Mary Prior (London, 1985, reprint 1986), p. 155 note 56. Jeanne Shami, 'Women and Sermons,' in *The Oxford Handbook of the Early Modern Sermon*, pp. 155–177, there 166–167.

30 *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 142. Peter Lily, 'Two Sermons: Viz 1. A Perseuariue Lilie to Cure Souls. And 2. How to Seeke to Finde Christ,' (London: Thomas Snodham, 1619), p. 32.

31 Christine Peters, *Patterns of Piety: Women, Gender and Religion in Late Medieval and Reformation England* (Cambridge, Eng., 2003), p. 349. See also: Femke Molekamp, *Women and the Bible in Early Modern England: Religious Reading and Writing* (Oxford, Eng., 2013).

32 Naomi Tadmore, *The Social Universe of the English Bible: Scripture, Society, and Culture in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, Eng., 2010), pp. 171 and 58–67.

authorized by contemporary translations. Valerie Lucas similarly found that seventeenth-century preachers used the Bible to make women "accept their inferior status" in a way different from their sixteenth-century counterparts.[33] Femke Molekamp looks more favorably on how the English Bible affected women, arguing that how the Bible was read and used by women empowered them. Michele Osherow likewise argues that early modern female writers modeled themselves on "rhetorically powerful women scattered throughout the Bible's pages."[34] Regardless of interpretative differences, the collective arguments of Tadmore, Lucas, Molekamp, and Osherow show that the Bible shaped women's agency (either directly motivating women to act or indirectly constructing gender identity) and that, even with access to physical Bibles, early moderrn women still learned biblical knowledge from sermons just like their medieval counterparts.[35]

2 Women in the Biblical Text of Sermons

Through their approaches to biblical texts, medieval preachers increased women's visibility in sermons while early modern preachers reduced women's visibility. Since *Festial* was the most popular orthodox sermon compilation in medieval England (sermon manuscripts related to *Festial* comprise 41% of extant orthodox Middle English sermon manuscripts) and the most widely printed pre-Reformation text, *Festial* sermons provide a glimpse of late medieval English preaching. First produced by John Mirk, an Augustinian prior in Shropshire, sometime between 1382 and 1390, *Festial* became a medieval "bestseller"—copied in more than 40 manuscripts during the fifteenth century, printed until the very eve of the Reformation, preached until the late sixteenth century, and read throughout the Elizabethan era.[36] Just as vernac-

33 Valerie Lucas, 'Puritan Preaching and the Politics of the Family,' in *The Renaissance Englishwoman in Print: Counterbalancing the Canon*, eds. Anne Haselkorn and Betty Travitsky (Amherst, 1990), pp. 224–240, there 226–227.

34 Michele Osherow, *Biblical Women's Voices in Early Modern England* (Farnham, 2009), p. 9.

35 Augustine Thompson, OP, 'From Texts to Preaching: Retrieving the Medieval Sermon as an Event,' in *Preacher, Sermon and Audience in the Middle Ages*, ed. Carolyn Muessig (Boston, 2002), pp. 13–40. In the same collection: Beverly Mayne Kienzle, 'Medieval Sermons and their Performance: Theory and Record,' pp. 89–126.

36 Susan Powell, 'John Mirk's 'Festial' and the Pastoral Programme,' *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 22 (1991), pp. 85–102; Powell, 'Preaching at Syon Abbey,' p. 240. Veronica O'Mara, 'A Middle English Sermon Preached by a Sixteenth-Century 'Atheist': A Preliminary

ular Bibles proliferated in sixteenth and seventeenth-century England, Protestant sermons and sermon collections also proliferated. Published first in 1547, the compilation of Tudor Homilies was created to combat popular sermon cycles like *Festial*.[37] Hence it provides a good comparison to *Festial*. Preachers like William Gouge (London Anglican minister, d. 1653) and Benjamin Keach (Particular Baptist Minister in Southwark, d. 1704) who served lay congregations and left behind print versions of their once orally-delivered sermons also provide comparable evidence. While substantial differences do exist between the medieval priests who adapted and incorporated *Festial* sermons into their preaching collections and early modern ministers like William Gouge, the sermons preached by these men incorporate substantial amounts of biblical texts and were designed for quotidinal instruction to ordinary men and women.

Late medieval Catholic sermons enhance the visibility of women in biblical texts by writing them into scripture. A Shrovetide sermon, the sermon for the Second Sunday before Lent in the *Festial*-related sermon manuscript Bodleian Library Greaves 54 does exactly this with John 6,44. The Vulgate reads: "Nēo pōt venire ad me/nisi pr̄ qui misit me traxerit eŭ."[38] Greaves 54 renders it instead, "that ys to say [n*o*] man nother woman comythe to me but my fader [...] draw hym."[39] A medieval audience would have heard no distinction between the biblical text and the gender inclusive addition. In the same way, the Vulgate renders John 8,47 as "Qui ex deo est/ verba dei audit: p*ro*ptea vos nō auditis: qr ex deo non estis."[40] The Passion sermon in Greaves 54 reorders and rephrases the text to make it more gender inclusive: "ther*e* for 3e her*e* no3t for 3e be no3t of god; lo frendys, here may 3e [see] 3e be of *G*od: loke ev*er*y man and woma*n* that hathe reydyu hys herte to her the worthe of *G*od and kepe hyt yn wyrchyng, he ys of *G*od."[41] The Dominican sermon cycle also scripts women seamlessly into the Bible. The sermon for the 17th Sunday after Trinity revolves around the parable of the feast in Luke 14. The first time the sermon translates Luke 14,11, it is with a masculine orientation: "For every man that inhaw'n'cythe hymselfe, he schall be lowned, and he that [mek]ethe hymselfe, he schall be hy3hed" (this

Account,' *Notes & Queries*, n.s. 34 (1987), pp. 183–185. Alan Fletcher, 'John Mirk and the Lollards,' *Medium Aevum* 56:2 (1987), pp. 217–224, there 217.

37 Ashley Null, 'Official Tudor Homilies,' in *The Oxford Handbook of the Early Modern Sermon*, pp. 348–365, there 349.

38 *Biblia Basileae*, Froben, 1509.

39 Bodleian Library MS Greaves 54, p. 35v.

40 Biblia Basileae, Froben, 1509.

41 Ibid., p. 51r.

is almost verbatim the Wyclif New Testament, which the Dominican sermons draw from). The sermon clarifies the masculine language by addressing "Wel beloved frendis," and impressing upon them that this verse means for "every cristen creature" to understand that when "every man and woman" enters the house of almighty God "every man and woman" should desire spiritual bread just as Jesus desired material bread. When the sermon quotes Luke 14,11 a second time, it includes male and female nouns: "For every man and woman that exaltythe himselfe in this synne of pride, he schal be made low …"[42] Women become visible in Luke 14,11 in the Dominican sermon cycle just as they become visible in John 6,44 and John 8,47 of Greaves 54.

Women are much less visible in the biblical text of early modern sermons. The first sermon, "A fruitfull exhortation, to the readyng and knowledge of holy scripture," within the 1547 Tudor Homilies opens with the statement, "Vnto a Christian man, there can be nothynge, either more necessarie, or profitable, then the knowledge of holy scripture." It continues that learning scripture is "mannes duetie"; draws from Matthew 4,4 ("Man shall not liue by bread onely") to urge "forsakyng the corrupt iudgement of carnall men" in exchange for hearing and reading scripture "whiche is the foode of the soule"; and claims that "whatsoeur is required to saluacion of man, is fully conteyned in the scripture of God." When discussing scripture as "heavély meate," the sermon references Luke 11, 27–28 and draws from Jesus' statement that those are "blessed" who "hear" and "keep" his word.[43] The sermon makes no reference to the fact that Jesus was talking with a woman when he said this, the same woman who inspired Margery Kempe to challenge the Archbishop of York. The Tudor sermon completely overlooks this biblical woman "with a loud voice" who played a significant role in Middle English sermons.[44] Indeed, a later example in the sermon inserts masculine language into biblical texts usually rendered gender neutral. The Wyclif Bible, the Coverdale Bible, the Geneva Bible, and the 1611 KJV each record Matthew 7,7 as gender neutral: "Aske, and it shall be giuen you: seeke, and ye shall finde: knocke, and it shall be opened

42 Morrison, *A Late Fifteenth-Century Dominical Sermon Cycle*, pp. 348–354.

43 Cranmer, *Certayne Sermons, or Homelies* (London: Rychard Grafton, 1547) pp. A. iii. v and A.4.r-v.

44 *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 126. Greaves 54, like many contemporary sermon collections, contains a sermon revolving around the woman in Luke 11, pp. 43v–46r. More than 20 Middle English sermons reference this. O'Mara and Paul, *A Repertorium of Middle English Prose Sermons*: Part 4, pp. 2765–2766. The fifteenth-century Dominican sermon cycle call this woman by her traditional name, "Marcella," a servant of Martha. Morrison, *A Late Fifteenth-Century Dominical Sermon Cycle*, pp. 85–87.

vnto you." "A Fruitefull Exhortacion" following the overall pattern of the sermon and perhaps the previous statement that "the humble man maie searche any truthe boldely in the scripture," renders Matthew 7,7 instead: "He that asketh, shall haue, and he that seketh, shal find, and he that knocketh, shall haue the doore open."[45] The Tudor Homilies was created to give Protestant preachers ready-made sermon material similar to the purpose of *Festial*. Yet while the sermons of *Festial* wrote women into the biblical text, the Tudor Homilies did not.

The sermons of William Gouge, the famous London preacher of Blackfriars, likewise did not make women more visible within biblical texts. This is interesting as Gouge claimed to have addressed the concerns of female audience members within the written version of one of his sermon series, "Of Domesticall Duties" (preached as a series on Ephesians and printed in 1622). Apparently, the women objected to Gouge's specific neglect of them. In the preface to "Of Domesticall Duties," Gouge explained why he employed masculine nouns even when speaking and writing to a combined audience of men and women: "*Because there is not one word to comprise under it both masters and mistresses, as fathers and mothers are comprised under* Parents, *and sonnes and daughters under* Children, *I have according to the Scripture phrase comprised Mistresses under Masters*."[46] Despite that his sermon audiences were filled with women and despite his assumptions that women would be reading his printed sermons, Gouge chose a masculine noun (masters) over gender-specific phrasing (masters and mistresses). Gouge explained his neglect by citing the Bible: "*I have according to the Scripture phrase*." This preference for masculine language permeates "Of Domesticall Duties." When he explicated the biblical command, "*Thou shalt loue thy neighbour*," for example, Gouge explained this as our duty to "*doe good to man*," described the neighbor as "our brother like to our selues," and those as hypocrites who praise God but "are scornfull, and disdainfull to their brethren, and slothfull to doe any seruice to man: *These mens religion is vaine*." According to Gouge, "*loue thy neighbour*" is a command directed to "men" concerning their "brethren."[47]

Benjamin Keach also omitted specific references to women from biblical texts. When he quoted Galatians 3,28 in his 1698 sermon series "Christ Alone

45 Cranmer, *Certayne Sermons, or Homelies*, pp. B. iii. r-v, The Tudor Homilies are not as male-oriented as seventeenth-century sermons; instead they serve as an evolutionary step.

46 William Gouge, 'Of Domesticall Duties Eight Treatises' (London:*Iohn Haviland* for *William Bladen*, 1622), pp. A2r–A5r.

47 Gouge, 'Of Domesticall Duties,' p. 3.

the Way to Heaven," he omitted the gender inclusive phrase "man or woman" from the biblical text, explaining to "Brethren" instead: "*where there is neither Greek nor Jew*, &c. *but Christ is all, and in all*."[48] Indeed, Peter Lily, a notable seventeenth-century preacher and pluralist sponsored by Richard Bancroft, mostly obscured women in biblical texts. His sermon was driven by Mark 16,16, "*He that shall beleeve and be baptised, shall be saved: but he that will not beleeve, shall be damned*." Even though Lily commented that women filled his sermon audience (and were indeed "Christs souldiers"), he mostly followed the male generic terms of Mark 16:16: "man, men, he, him, and him." In fact, when he explicitly addressed women with a biblical text, it was to reprimand them: "Yet in one thing, I thinke, women cannot bee excused, and that is in painting of themselves; which howsoever some defend, the most religious and learned Fathers have condemned. *Cyprian* sayth, that they which paint themselves, doe (in a sort) make Christ a lier: For, whereas our Saviour sayth, *Yee cannot make one haire black or white*, they have a mean to make them all of what colour they list."[49]

The biblical text of early modern sermons obscured women more so than did the biblical text of Middle English sermons. Greetings to sermon audiences provide a final demonstration of this. Middle English sermons often refer to the sermon audiences as "Good friends" and "Good men and women." These greetings proliferate in *Festial*. The 1532 *Festia*l broadly includes women in 60 of its 61 sermon salutations with either the gender specific opening "Good men & wymmen" or the gender inclusive "Good friends." Other *Festial* versions are even more gender inclusive—62 of the 69 sermons in Bodleian Library MS Gough Ecclesiastical Topography 4 begin with a variation of "Good men and women," as do 66 of the 70 sermon in Cambridge MS Gonville and Caius College 168/89, 64 of the 71 sermons in Southwell Minster MS 7, 85 of the 88 sermons in Bodleian Library MSS Douce 60 and 108, and all 51 of the sermons in British Library MS Lansdowne 392.[50] Indeed, Alan Fletcher concluded that "Good men and women" was not only "John Mirk's favourite form of address," but that it was a "common opening for many vernacular fifteenth-century sermons, *ad populum*."[51] Sermon collections such as Greaves 54 opens 27 of 33 sermons

48 Benjamin Keach, 'Christ Alone the Way to Heaven' (London: Benjamin Harris, 1698), p. 39.

49 Lily, 'Two Sermons,' pp. 1 and 33. Women are more visible in his second sermon (pp. 37–65) which revolves around the resurrection account of the women at the tomb, but it is still striking how much the sermon assumes a masculine perspective.

50 Barr, *The Pastoral Care of Women*, pp. 36–61.

51 Alan J. Fletcher, *Late Medieval Popular Preaching in Britain and Ireland: Texts, Studies, and Interpretations* (Turnhout, 2009), p. 212.

with a variation of either "Friends" or "Good men and women," and "Good men and women" peppers the Dominican sermon cycle. Stephen Morrison argues that this address helps prove the Dominican sermons were actually preached: "utterances of a formulaic character point unmistakably to the pulpit as the place of dissemination," including "the habitual forms of address—*Good men and women, Frendys*."[52]

A common greeting found in seventeenth-century sermons is much less gender inclusive. Despite that their sermon audiences were filled with women, many preachers used the phrase "Men, Fathers, and Brethren" to address their audience. Joseph Hall used a variation of this phrase in a 1623 sermon ("The Great Imposter Laid Open in a Sermon at Grayes Inne"), as did Daniel Featley in a 1619 sermon ("The Faithfull Shepheard"), Nathaniel Hardy in a 1653 sermon("Divinity in Mortality"), and Anthony Horneck in a 1698 sermon ("Several sermons upon the fifth of St. Matthew"). This phrase is a direct quote from English Bible translations of Paul's sermon in Acts 22. Paul greeted his audience in Jerusalem with the Hebrew phrase (as translated by Tyndale in 1526), "Ye men, brethren and fathers." Seventeenth-century sermon authors used this salutation not because it was appropriate for their sermon audiences, but because it was used in the Bible. Although rarely drawing from Peter and Paul's sermons in Acts, *Festial* incorporates a paraphrase of Acts 2 containing Peter's Pentecost sermon. The last edition of *Festial* does not exclusively mirror the masculine translations of English Bibles. The 1532 *Festial* clarifies the "Syrs and breþern" addressed by Peter: "there were in Jherusalem people of all nacyons," "were the people astonyed whan they herde the apostles speke," and Peter responded, "We be not dronken … the holy goost sholde be gyuen plenteously to the people," and "than the people turned fast/ and so within fewe yeres the fayth was in all the worlde." *Festial* also salutes its audience with the common address, "Good men and women."[53] Peter's "men" in *Festial* became "people." In short, English sermons before the Reformation often clarify biblical texts to include women whereas early modern sermons often mirror the masculine renderings of biblical texts.

52 Morrison, *A Late Fifteenth-Century Dominical Sermon Cycle*, p. lii.

53 *The Festyuall*, pp. 44r–v. Some *Festial* texts are mixed, including both "men" and "people"—such as Oxford, Bodlein Library, Gough Ecclesiastical Topography, MS 4, pp. 93r–v. The Gough manuscript, however, does not mirror Peter's "Syrs and breþren" in addressing the sermon audience, stating twice "Good men and woymen" (pp. 92r and 94v).

3 Implications for Women

Of course, it is an old story that masculine language dominates in early modern English Bibles. Looking at early modern sermons from the perspective of medieval sermons adds a new dimension to this old story. Scripture in both late medieval and early modern sermons authorize the didactic messages conveyed to sermon audiences, allowing preachers to rhetorically shape the contours of women's agency. Through their approaches to biblical texts, medieval preachers help authorize women as independent agents whereas early modern preachers place more limitations on women—thereby complicating the story of how the Bible influenced women's agency in early modern England.

The pre-Reformation preachers who used *Festial* wanted their parishioners committed to the pastoral program—participating in the sacraments, attending the feast days and rituals of holy church, and believing in church doctrine. As such, *Festial* uses biblical texts and stories in ways which encourage women to be public participants in the medieval church. Specific references to women as active parishioners—separate from their domestic identities—fill the sermons, such as the reminder in the Easter Sunday sermon, "therefore euery chrysten man and woman sholde serche well theyr conseyence" and in the Rogation Days sermon that all are required to "go in processyon/ man/ woman/ & seruaunt/ for we be al synners/ and haue nede to praye god for helpe/ grace & mercy."[54] The sermon for the second Sunday in Lent alternates between masculine language and female specific examples, ensuring the orientation of the sermon towards the "Good men and women" that it addresses in the salutation.[55] It uses the metaphor of a vessel to explain "mannes conscyence." It follows this metaphor of "mannes conscyence" with parallel biblical stories of Jacob and the woman of Canaan, emphasizing that a "mannes conscyence" applies to "all good seruauntes that desyre to gete the blessyng of the father of heuen." When it uses masculine language to illuminate the story of the woman of Canaan, "This woman and her doughter betokeneth a man whose conseyence dothe labour and trauayle with a fende of deedly synne," it makes the man applicable to women by amplifying the point with the story of a "woman that had done an horryble synne & wolde fayne haue ben shryuen thereof/ & durst not."[56] This Lenten sermon uses the biblical woman of Canaan and further elucidates with the narrative of the woman who had done a horrible sin to help make its

54 *The Festyuall*, pp. 36v and 38v.

55 Ibid., p. 17v.

56 Ibid., pp. 17v–19v.

pastoral message specifically applicable to women who—just like their male counterparts—needed to participate in the sacramental system.

Luke 7,36–50 in *Festial* accentuates how medieval preachers use biblical texts to authorize women as distinct from their domestic identities. According to Catholic tradition, Mary Magdalene was the woman in Luke 7 who anointed Christ's feet. But, in *Festial*, she became more than a sinful woman. Christ gave her the "grace to knowe herselfe / and to haue repentaunce for her synnes." She became "a myrour to all other synners that wyll forsake synne and do penau*n*ce." Moreover, the sermon highlights her as the heroine of the resurrection: she goes to the tomb when "no man durst go thyder for fere" and Christ appeared to her and "sufred her to touche hym & to kysse his feet." She also becomes a miracle-performing preacher both recognized and blessed by the apostle Peter. Mary Magdalene, like most women in *Festial*, is not important for her domestic status as a jilted-bride and single woman or her sexual-status as a reformed-prostitute. What is important to *Festial* is Mary Magdalene's example as a penitent who devotes herself to the teachings of Christ and helps spread orthodox Christianity. As the text reads, "they fou*n*de Mary prechynge & techynge the people … Mary bad they sholde destroye the temples of mawemetry /& buylde chyrches & make fontes & chrysten þe peo-ple. And so within shorte tyme all þe lande was chrystened." Even Martha, Mary's sister who was reprimanded in the Bible for spending time on housework instead of listening to Christ, was not identified by her domestic status. *Festial* expands this biblical story to portray Martha as an exemplar of active piety: serving the poor, helping the sick, caring for the prisoners, and generally performing the seven works of mercy.[57] Middle English sermons like *Festial* use the biblical accounts of Mary and Martha to teach parishioners the importance of actively participating in the medieval church. This emphasis highlights women as vigorous actors in corporate Christianity, deflecting attention away from their domestic and subordinate identities.

In contrast, post-Reformation preachers not only center their sermons on the authority of scripture but imbue their sermons with scriptural authority by quoting verses word-for-word and even mimicking biblical language. English Bibles, a product of the early modern "social world" of their translators, reflect in sermons a greater emphasis on identifying women by their domestic relationships. William Gouge used a variation of the word "wife" 305 times within the first treatise in "Of Domesticall Duties," whereas he only used a form of the word "woman" 20 times. Probably reflecting the difference in subject matter,

57 Ibid., pp. 113v–116r and 133r–v.

the imbalance for William Perkins in his "A godly and learned exposition" was less extreme but still visible. He used a form of "wife" approximately 60 times while using a form of "woman" 20 times less. Benjamin Keach rarely referenced women specifically within his sermons, and when he did, it was often within a domestic context. For example, in "God Acknowledged" which he preached in 1695, he used the noun "women" twice, "wife" four times, and female pronouns four times. Seven of these references occur within a discussion of marriage.[58] This pattern demonstrated by Gouge, Perkins, and Keach fits well with what Naomi Tadmore has discovered about the English Bible: it helped popularize "wife" as an almost interchangeable word with "woman." When early modern translators examined the Hebrew Old Testament, they found that the primary word for woman, *ʿishah* "appears in the Hebrew Bible 569 times in singular forms." But it was a complex word: applying to both an adult woman and a woman "belonging" to a man—as a monogamous wife, a concubine, a wife within a polygamous relationship, even a slave. Translators of the English Bible simplified matters by mostly rendering *ʿishah* as either "woman" or "wife," resulting in the KJV referencing "woman" 259 times in the Old Testament and "wife" 312 times. Hence Rebekah became Isaac's wife and Laban's daughters, Rachel and Leah, became Jacob's wives, along with their servants Bilhah and Zilpah. Even the raped woman in Deuteronomy 21 became a wife.[59] *Festial*, of course, identifies women as wives (approximately 35 times), but more frequently references women as "women," which it does (in some form) almost 200 times.[60]

This emphasis on women as wives combined with the masculine perspective of English Bibles to further limit women in early modern sermons. Even when William Gouge discussed Ephesians 5,21 ("*Of euery ones submitting himselfe to another*") within his sermon series "Of Domesticall Duties" dedicated to family roles, for example, he mostly followed the masculine perspective of scripture. The roles he elaborated on as requiring submission were those of traditionally masculine offices: kings, magistrates, governors, and ministers. Indeed, when Gouge summarized the tiers of submission as "Princes, Parents, Masters" and "*Magistrates*," "*Ministers*," "*Fathers*," "*Husbands*," "*Masters*," he described them as the "men" to "be feared."[61] The predominantly masculine vision of "Magistrates,

58 Gouge, 'Of Domesticall Duties'; Perkins, 'A Godly and Learned Exposition'; Benjamin Keach, 'God Acknowledged' (London, 1696), pp. 12–13.

59 Tadmore, *The Social Universe of the English Bible*, pp. 52–67.

60 This is based on the sermons in the fifteenth-century manuscripts Gough Ecclesiastical Topography 4 and British Library Cotton Claudius A II.

61 Gouge, 'Of Domesticall Duties,' pp. 9 and 6.

Parents, Masters" parallels the scripture passages which inspired it: Romans 13 and Ephesians 5–6. Gouge cited Romans 13, that "every soule" should be subject "to the higher powers" rendering "tribute to whom tribute is due … feare to whom feare," as a source for the civil authority prince or magistrate as well as the final chapters in Ephesians as a source for the authorities parents and masters.[62] Like the pattern of masculine language appearing in "Of Domesticall Duties," these scripture passages give preferential treatment to masculine nouns and reference governing authorities in masculine terms. Romans 13 in the 1611 KJV describes the higher power as a ruler "for hee is the minister of God." It also uses masculine language to reference its audience: "owe no man anything, but to loue one another: for he that loueth another, hath fulfilled the Law." Romans 13 in the Geneva Bible describes the higher power as "Magistrates"—a term which the marginal notes in the Geneva Bible exclusively discuss in masculine terms. The marginal notes in Titus 3 reference Romans 13 in its description of the "Principalities and powers" which govern the world as the subjection "which men owe to men."[63] As for the parents and masters, Ephesians 5–6 in the 1611 KJV does acknowledge that women are included as wives and mothers. But it emphasizes the secondary nature of women's role, reminding wives that they owe submission to their husbands, and stressing the primary duty of the father.[64] It also only uses the masculine noun "masters" when discussing the submission of servants, and privileges masculine nouns when discussing its audience: warning servants against being "men-pleasers" and challenging them "with good will doing seruice, as to the Lord, and not to men," and encouraging the audience as "my brethren, be strong in the Lord." The letter concludes in a thoroughly masculine way: directing itself to "the brethren" and exhorting them with the metaphor of a soldier who puts on the armor of God. Thus Gouge's masculine envisioning of the governing authorities "Magistrates, Parents, Masters" follows the masculine orientation of its scriptural source. The biblical literalism not only limited women by their domestic roles (wives and mothers in its brief discussion of Ephesians 5–6) but it also obscured women as secondary within the discussion.

62 Ibid., pp. 4, 6, 8, 9–10.

63 *The Geneva Bible*, p. 109r.

64 Gouge likewise emphasized women's subordinate position. He described a wife as "in an inferiour degree" to her husband, "a lower ranke," and that a father is "a gouernoure ouer child, mother, and all." 'Of Domesticall Duties,' pp. 27 and 546–547.

4 Conclusion

While it is important to recognize that the English Bible "fostered authorial agency" for some early modern women, as Femke Molekamp has found, it is also important to recognize the complexity of their agency.[65] The gendered messages conveyed through biblical texts were not constant across the Reformation, and indeed, the evidence of sermons suggests that the use of biblical texts in late medieval England made women more visible and presented women as more active agents than in early modern England.[66] Christ's description of his true family, recorded in Matthew 12,50, as quoted by William Perkins in the early seventeenth-century and Margery Kempe in the fifteenth-century, reflects the complex nature of this story. Perkins adhered to the order of scripture in "A Godly and Learned Exposition," placing the women after the man: "*my brother, and sister, and mother*." *The Book of Margery Kempe*, however, altered the biblical order of Matthew 12,50. Kempe, like the pattern in medieval English sermons of emphasizing women in biblical text, placed a woman first: "He þ*a*t doth þ*e* wyl of my Fadyr in Heuyn he is bothyn modyr, broþ*yr*, & syster vn-to me."[67] Although this study is not exhaustive, it shows that pre-Reformation sermons like *Festial* include women specifically when using scripture and presenting women with biblical role models authorizing them (in certain situations) as active agents in the medieval church. Early modern sermons, the evolution beginning with texts like the Tudor Homilies, were less likely to add women into scripture and more likely to use scripture to limit women by their domestic identities. The Bible's authorization of Margery Kempe's agency makes sense within the context of late medieval English sermons. The Bible's authorization of women's agency in early modern sermons, however, seems less straightforward.

65 Molekamp, *Women and the Bible*, p. 12.

66 This evidence in sermons supports what Katherine French has found in the late medieval parish. "The imposition of the Reformation on English parishes redefined appropriated religious behavior for women. It was still predicated on household tasks and concerns, but it was no longer as collective, visible, and active." French, *The Good Women of the Parish*, p. 230.

67 Perkins, 'A Godly and Learned Exposition,' p. 523; *The Book of Margery Kempe*, pp. 29–31.