

Margery Kempe: A hysterical exhibitionist or a devout Christian?

Ask any reasonably well-educated person about Margery Kempe, or mention *The Book of Margery Kempe* to a well-read individual, and their immediate and prevailing reaction will be “Oh, yes, she was the woman who wept all the time wasn’t she?” Engage a little further in conversation with that person and they will tell you – more often than not – that she was “mad,” and that individual will also either laugh or tut-tut, empathising with those poor unfortunates of the early fifteenth century who, standing outside St Margaret’s, here in Bishop’s Lynn, overheard her wailing from within, or at first accompanied and then soon abandoned her on their pilgrimages.

TEARS OF COMPUNCTION OR FOR WORLDLY PROFIT?

We read in her *Book* that Margery, after having failed in two businesses, first as a brewer and then as a miller, realised these adversities coming on her from every side were no less than scourges of the Lord, sent to chastise her for her sin: her pride, her covetousness, and her desire for worldly dignity, and, ‘[she] began to enter the way of everlasting life’ (1: 2) recalling some three years later that, ‘she was glad in her conscience when she believed that she was entering upon the way which would lead her to the place that she most desired,’ i.e. heaven (1: 3).

In Chapter 3 of the *Book of Margery Kempe* we read that, ‘this creature had contrition and great compunction, with plentiful tears and much loud and violent sobbing.’ Why? ‘for her sins and for her unkindness towards her maker,’ that when she contemplated her wickedness ‘she could only sorrow and weep and ever pray for mercy and forgiveness.’

There are two significant points which we immediately notice in this third chapter.

First, that *contrition and great compunction* accompany Margery’s tears. In Chapter Four, for instance, we read of Margery’s ‘many bitter tears of compunction’ shed for repentance of her sins, and we read of daily weeping for two hours of compunction for her sins ‘with many bitter tears.’ Indeed, throughout the *Book* contrition and compunction and – to use one of Margery’s favourite phrases – ‘high meditations and high contemplation’ accompanied her tears.

Second, that <1> *'Her weeping was so plentiful and so continuous that many people thought that that she could weep and leave off whenever she wanted, and therefore many people said she was a false hypocrite and wept when in public for succour and worldly profit'* (I: 3).

I invite you to decide whether Margery's weeping was indeed for 'succour and worldly profit' or not, during the course of this talk. Don't worry: I won't ask for a show of hands! There is, in fact, a unique episode when the people of Lynn were grateful for Margery's tears: when there was a 'great fire' which burned down the Guildhall of the Holy and Undivided Trinity. Robert Spryngolde, the parish priest of St Margaret's, sought Margery's advice about taking the eucharistic host in procession out of the church and approaching the fire, in an effort to subdue it. 'Yes! Sir, yes!' came the immediate response. 'For our Lord Jesus Christ told me that it shall be very well.'

<2> *'On this day, in order to evade their physical peril, they allowed her to cry and weep as much as she liked, and nobody would command her to stop, but instead besought her to continue, fully trusting and believing that through her crying and weeping our Lord would take them to mercy'* (I: 67).

How fickle we can all be when our material belongings are endangered!

PENITENCE AND COMPASSION

In Chapter Seven we learn that Margery's tears were shed not only for her own sins but 'sometimes for the sin of the people, sometimes for the souls in Purgatory, sometimes for those who are in poverty or any distress, *for she wanted to comfort them all.*' In other words, Margery not only wept because she was penitent, Margery also wept because she was *compassionate*. When Margery was in Assisi on Lammass Day, a day of great pardoning with plenary remission, she prayed 'in order to obtain grace, mercy, and forgiveness for herself, for all her friends, for all her enemies, and [again] for all the souls in Purgatory' (I: 31).

We read that 'sometimes she wept ... for Jews, Saracens, and all false heretics,' and some of these and others are included in her own prayers, recorded, as an appendix, at the end of her *Book*. (I: 57).

A further point arises here that is worth noting. When Margery meditated and contemplated Christ's suffering for us, she was moved by our lack of love and wept for this deficiency. One day, Margery asked Jesus what she should think about, and our Lord Jesus told her 'Daughter, think of my mother, for

she is the cause of all the grace that you have' (I: 6). Margery began to meditate and straightaway saw St Anne 'great with child' and – soon after – the birth of Mary. These visions gave way to visions of the Visitation and the Nativities of John the Baptist and Jesus. And these visions, in turn, led on to visions of the Epiphany and the Flight into Egypt. These last very soon continued with Margery 'weeping bitter tears of compassion' as she was 'mindful of the painful death that [Jesus] would suffer for the love of sinful men.'

Sometime around these revelations Margery wept 'very abundantly and violently out of desire for the bliss of heaven, and because she was being kept from it for so long' – on another occasion praying to be taken out of this world (I: 57) – but she was told by Christ, 'I have ordained you to kneel before the Trinity to pray for the whole world, for many hundred thousands of souls shall be saved by your prayers' (I: 7). On another occasion Jesus assured Margery 'Daughter ... because of your great charity that you have to comfort all your fellow Christians, you shall have double reward in heaven' (I: 8). On many occasions, we are told, our Lord said to Margery:

<3> 'Dearly esteemed Daughter, love me with all your heart, for I love you with all my heart and with all the might of my Godhead, for you were a chosen soul without beginning in my sight and a pillar of Holy Church. My merciful eyes are ever upon you. It would be impossible for you to suffer the scorn and spite that you shall have, were it not for my grace alone supporting you' (I: 13).

GOD-GIVEN TEARS

And it is in the fourteenth chapter that our Lord revealed to Margery,

<4> 'Though I sometimes withdraw the feeling of grace from you, either in speaking or in weeping, do not dread this, for I am a hidden God in you, that you have no vainglory, and you should well know you may not have tears or such conversations except when God will send them to you, for they are the free gifts of God, not on account of your merit, and he may give them to whom he wishes, and do you no wrong' (I: 14).

Tears are the 'free gifts of God' ... given 'to whom he wishes.' How often do we read these words in articles, chapters in books, theses and dissertations that verbally ostracize her? Never, or hardly ever.

Later in Chapter twenty-eight, we learn that Margery's cryings came

<5> *'but seldom, perhaps once a month, then once a week, afterwards daily, and once she had fourteen in one day, and another day she had seven, just as God would visit her, sometimes in the church, sometimes in the street, sometimes in the/her chamber, sometimes in the field, when God wished to send them, for she never knew either the time or hour when they should come. And they never came without surpassingly great sweetness of devotion and high contemplation'* (I: 28).

God chose to give tears to Margery irrespective of how frequently, irrespective of where Margery is, and they never came 'without surpassingly great sweetness of devotion and high contemplation.' Are we starting to recognize *leitmotifs* in the *Book of Margery Kempe*, I wonder? Margery's tears moved her to devotion and enabled her to contemplate.

For her part, Margery was fully aware of the effect her tears had on others. We discover that as soon as she perceived that she was going to cry,

<6> *'She would keep it in as much as she might that the people should not hear it lest they should be annoyed,'* and a few lines later, *'she kept it in as long as she might, and did all that she could to withstand it or else to put it away, until she waxed the colour of any lead, and all the time it should labour away more and more in her mind until the time it burst out. And when the body might no longer endure the spiritual labour but was overcome with the unspeakable love that wrought so fervently in her soul, then she fell down and cried wondrously loud. And the more that she would labour to keep it in or to put it away, so much the more should she cry, and all the more loudly'* (I: 28).

In Chapter 61 is a similar passage: on listening to a sermon on Christ's Passion preached in St James' Lynn (in ruins since 1549), 'She kept herself from crying as long as she could, and then at last she burst out with a great cry and cried amazingly bitterly.' In the next chapter we read, 'she cried very bitterly against her will ... she would rather have wept softly and privately than openly if it had been in her power.' Even when Margery hid herself away to pray 'in secret' tears would come. Before her audience with the Archbishop of York, Henry Bowet, Margery stood at the back of the hall, 'saying her prayers for help and succour against her enemies with high devotion, and for so long that she melted all into tears' (I: 52).

Earlier, we read in the fortieth chapter, 'she could not weep except when God gave it to her, and often he gave it so abundantly that she could not withstand it. But the more she tried to withstand it or put it aside, the more strongly it worked in her soul with such holy thoughts that she could not stop. She

would sob and cry very loudly, all against her will, so that many men, and women too, were amazed at her because of it' (I: 40).

And a little later, Margery recalled that it was 'the fire of love', a Rollean phrase, that led to weeping and sobbing: 'The 'fire of love' kindled so quickly in her heart that whether she liked it or not she could not keep it secret, for it caused her to break out in a loud voice and cry astonishingly, and weep and sob very terribly that many men and women wondered at her because of it' (I: 46).

And during the final chapters of the first *Book* we learn that she also experienced a barrenness in the absence of tears: '[She] had such great pain for the desire that she had of them, that she would have given all this world, if it had been hers, for a few tears, or have suffered very great bodily pain to have got them with' (I: 82).

In the closing chapters of the first *Book*, in response to Margery's prayer that tears would only come when she was alone in her chamber, 'our merciful Lord Jesus' told her 'do not pray for this,' and, moreover, that 'you shall cry when I will and where I will, both loudly and quietly' (I: 77).

Not surprisingly, Margery's tears had a physical effect upon her: 'every Good Friday ... she was weeping and sobbing five or six hours together, and also cried loudly many times, so that she could not restrain herself from doing so, *which made her very weak and feeble in her bodily strength*' (I: 57). These attacks of weakness and feebleness are commented upon by Mary, the Mother of God, who said to Margery, 'Daughter, you are weak ... from weeping and crying, for both make you weak and feeble' (I: 66). Later, 'our gracious Lady' also told Margery, 'Daughter, all these sorrows that you have had for me and for my blessed Son shall turn for you to great joy and bliss in heaven without end' (I: 73). A similar weakness and feebleness attacked Marie d'Oignies, a late twelfth-/early thirteenth-century beguine, about whom we shall learn more later.

When Margery was in the Prior's Cloister here at St Margaret's in what used to be called Bishop's Lynn – until Henry VIII's time – she dared not go into the church 'for fear of disturbing people with her crying,' Jesus told her to enter the church, 'for I shall take away from you crying, so that you will no longer cry so loudly, nor in that kind of way that you have done before, even if you wanted to' (I: 63).

HER CALLING, ORDINATION, AND MINISTRY

Towards the end of *Book One*, we read of Margery's three-fold vocation, <7> 'Daughter,' said Jesus, *I have ordained you to be a mirror amongst [the people], to have great sorrow, that they should take example from you to have some little sorrow in their hearts for their sins, that they might thereby be saved... good daughter, do your duty and pray for them while you are in this world, and you shall have the same prize and reward in heaven ... daughter, I have many times said to you that many thousands of souls shall be saved through your prayers, and some who lie at the point of death shall have grace through your merits and your prayers, for your tears and your prayers are very sweet and most acceptable to me* (I: 78).

Earlier in Margery's first *Book* we read,

'If I could, Lord, give the people contrition and weeping ... as easily as I could give them a penny from my purse, I would quickly fill people's hearts with contrition so that they might cease from their sin' (I: 57).

Margery prayed, 'Merciful Lord Christ Jesus, in you is all mercy and grace and goodness. Have mercy, pity, and compassion on them. Show your mercy and your goodness upon them, help them, send them true contrition, and never let them die in their sin' (I: 20).

And so, Margery developed a kind of ministry. She promised to weep for a wicked monk (I: 57). She restored a woman's sanity (I: 75). She is invited to talk to the nuns at Denny. She wept for folk as they lay on their deathbed (I: 72). And, perhaps most telling of all, Margery's opinion was asked whether the two chapels of ease – St James and St Nicholas – should have their own fonts, or not. Margery's father had opposed the idea back in 1379 – when Margery was a little girl of about 6 years old – and she wholeheartedly supported her father in this in both 1426 and, again, in 1431. If the chapels had had their own fonts, St Margaret's would have lost some much-needed revenue (I: 25). A similar issue faced St Margaret's over burial plots tended by monks and friars, but I digress.

DE CLAMORE

In the unique manuscript of the *Book of Margery Kempe* we come across the phrase '*de clamore*', 'concerning noise.' As Margery arrived in Zierikzee in Zeeland in the first stage of her first pilgrimage, God visited this creature 'with abundant tears of contrition for her own sins, and sometimes for other people's sins as well. And especially, she had tears of compassion at the memory of our Lord's Passion' (I: 26), even when she saw a depiction of it, or of his Mother Mary weeping, as in a vision of Mary during her Son's Passion

(I: 79-81), or even before the pietà that was in St Stephen's, Norwich (I: 60), or at the sight of the holy sacrament (I: 72; cf: II: 6), or during the Palm Sunday procession. Most especially Margery 'wept, sorrowed, and cried as though she would have died' at Christ's words 'Touch me not' (I: 81).

Again, when the pilgrims journeyed towards Konstanz and heard that they would be harmed and have great trouble, this creature went into a church to pray and she prayed 'with all her heart, with much weeping and many tears, for help and succour against their enemies' (I: 26). And when they were *in* Konstanz an English friar, a Master of Divinity, the pope's legate, and a respected clerk who resided in that city, told Margery's companions, 'As for her weeping, it is not in my power to restrain it, *for it is the gift of the Holy Ghost*' (I: 27).

Arriving in Jerusalem, in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, as the friars guided the pilgrims to all the places where our Lord suffered his pains and his Passion, Margery advanced – as Santha Bhattacharji, the preeminent authority on Margery Kempe, comments – 'from tears of pure contrition to a deep emotional response to anything connected with the life of Christ' (232).

<8> *'The aforesaid creature wept and sobbed so plenteously as though she had seen our Lord with her bodily eyes suffering his Passion at that time. Before her in her soul she saw him truly by contemplation, and that caused her to have compassion. And when they came up on to the Mount of Calvary, she fell down that she might not stand or kneel, but wallowed and wrestled with her body, spreading her arms wide apart, and cried with a loud voice as though her heart should have burst apart, for in the city of her soul she saw truly and freshly how our Lord was crucified'* (I: 28).

'In the city of her soul' – a rare touch of literary beauty.

Her time at Mount Calvary was a profoundly significant turning point for Margery *and her tears*. When this creature and her companions came to the grave where our Lord was buried, 'she would have died for sorrow ... later she rose up again with great weeping and sobbing, as though she had seen our Lord buried right in front of her. Then she saw our Lady in her soul, how she mourned and how she wept for her son's death, and then was our Lady's sorrow her sorrow.' When she came to the place of crucifixion, 'she cried out and wept without control, and could not restrain herself.' After receiving communion on the Mount of Calvary 'she wept, she sobbed, she cried out so loudly that it was amazing to hear it.' Again, on Mount Zion this creature 'wept abundantly for compassion of our Lord's Passion' (I: 29).

During the time Margery was in the Holy Land, our Lady told her, 'Daughter, you are greatly blessed, for my son Jesus will infuse so much grace into you that the whole world will marvel at you,' and Margery called to mind what Jesus had said to her before she began this pilgrimage, 'Daughter, I shall make the whole world wonder at you, and many men and women shall speak of me for love of you, and will honour me in you' (I: 29). This experience of intense sorrow accompanied by floods of tears continued from her time in the Holy Land for about ten years.

ROME

From Jerusalem Margery journeyed on to Rome and it was here, whilst Margery was at Holy Communion, that she asked our Lord for yet another well of tears in order to receive his body with devotion. In Rome, too, she encountered another noteworthy affirmation of God's gift of tears working in her and through her. One time Margery was in the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore where the relics of St Jerome lay buried. Jerome was regarded in the Middle Ages as one of the major early Christian writers on tears and repentance, notably in his *Letter to Rusticus*, a man who had broken his vow of chastity. Jerome combed both Old and New Testaments for references to weeping which he included in his *Letter*. There, in the Basilica, Margery experienced a revelation of St Jerome who spoke to her saying,

<9> *"blessed are you, daughter, in the weeping that you weep for the people's sins, for many shall be saved thereby. And daughter, dread you not, for it is a singular and a special gift that God has given you – a well of tears the which no person shall ever take from you."* With such manner of conversation, he highly comforted her spirits. And he also greatly praised and gave thanks to God for the grace that he wrought in her soul' (I: 41).

WALTER HILTON, NICHOLAS LOVE, AND GROWING ATTESTATION FOR MARGERY

Back home in Bishop's Lynn, when she received holy communion here at St Margaret's her cries were heard outside the church in the street, as I have said. At other times, too, when Margery was lying down in the choir of St Margaret's, she was in 'great sweetness and devotion, with great abundance of tears ... weeping and mourning for her sins.' And she wept bitterly in the Lady Chapel 'at the memory of our Lord's Passion' (I: 85).

It is now known and generally accepted that Margery's habitual wailing was an integral part of many continental women's embodiment of compassionate

weeping but it is also important to know that Walter Hilton and Nicholas Love, both *English* spiritual writers (the one, Hilton, writing at the end of the fourteenth century, the other, Love, writing at the start of the fifteenth) attest this late medieval Christian tradition of weeping in their writings. In his *Ladder of Perfection*, which we know was read to Margery on more than one occasion, Hilton comments that at the beginning of someone's conversion, God enables a person to meditate, and this person grows profoundly sorrowful for their sins, that their crying continues, no matter how often they go to confession, and we know that Margery's practice of confession was unusually frequent. Hilton goes further and gives scriptural authority for such crying, noting that this inner travail is frequently depicted in the Psalms. The new convert then goes on to meditate on Christ's sufferings: this is a God-given gift. Hilton writes, 'you mourn and weep and cry with all the powers of your body and of your soul, and this is accompanied by 'many sweet tears' (*Ladder* I: 34-35).

Nicholas Love, Prior of the Carthusian Priory Mount Grace – where the *Book of Margery Kempe* was kept and annotated – made a Middle English translation of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* (attributed in the Middle Ages to Bonaventure), naming it the *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*. From this and similar texts the parish priest would read to the illiterate follower of Christ detailed directions from each scene from the life of Christ in order to visualise, to read Christ's body as it were, thereby building up empathy between the follower and Christ Himself.

From the eleventh-century Sarum Missal the priest, who could offer the votive mass *Pro petitione lacrimarum* at any time, would exhort his parishioners to ask *pro peccatis nostris compuncionem cordis et luctum fluminaque lacrimarum nobis semper largiaris* (may you ever grant us compunction of heart, and mourning for our sins, and rivers of tears).

Indeed, Margery's behaviour was so powerful, so full of grace, that it affected others. On one Corpus Christi Day in 1417, the creature followed the procession so 'full of tears and devotion, with [many] holy thoughts and [much] meditation, [such] bitter weeping and violent sobbing' that 'a good woman' came up to her and asked God to give her grace 'to follow the steps of our Lord Jesus Christ.' We are told, 'our Lord made some people love and cherish her greatly, and invite her home both to eat and drink, and have great joy to hear her converse of our Lord' (I: 45). Are reactions to Margaret about to change?

Returning from her second pilgrimage, this time to Santiago de Compostela, Margery's companions were now 'very nice to her, 'despite her many loud cryings' and 'abundant tears of compassion' (I: 45).

A man from Newcastle, Thomas Marchale was

<10> '[He was] *so drawn by the good words that God put in her to talk of contrition and compunction, of sweetness and of devotion, that he was completely moved, as if he had been a new man, with tears of contrition and compunction, both days and nights, as our Lord would visit his heart with grace, that sometimes, when he went into the fields, he wept so sorely for his sins and his trespasses that he fell down and might not bear it, and told the foresaid creature that he had been a very reckless and misdirected man, and that he sorely repented*' (I: 45).

MARIE D'OIGNIES, ELIZABETH OF HUNGARY, AND BIRGITTA OF SWEDEN

When the Franciscan preacher, William Melton, who preached in St James' Chapel yard, had read about Marie d' Oignies (whom I mentioned earlier) and of 'her manner of life,' Melton, who *had been* one of Margery's severest critics 'loved Margery more, and trusted in her weeping and her crying more than he ever did before.' It is a seminal moment. We read:

<11> '*He read of a woman called Marie d'Oignies, and of her manner of living, of the wonderful sweetness that she had in hearing the word of God, of the wonderful compassion that she had in thinking of his Passion, and of the plenteous tears that she wept, which made her so feeble and weak that she might not endure to behold the Cross, nor to hear our Lord's Passion repeated, without dissolving into tears of pity and compassion*' (I: 62).

Melton himself 'wept amazingly' when he was celebrating at the altar and 'well knew that God gave his grace to whom he would.' There is another story concerning Marie's priest who, reading the Gospel during Mass, 'wept wondrously so much so that he got his vestments and altar ornaments wet and could not control neither his weeping nor his sobbing' (I: 62).

During a meeting of the Chapter of the Preaching Friars in Lynn, a Dominican, Master Thomas Constance, supported Margery and told her, 'Margery, I have read of a holy woman to whom God has given great grace of weeping and crying as he has done to you' (I: 68). That holy woman was Marie d'Oignies. She, like Margery, caused a priest to weep with such devotion during a mass 'that he could not control himself' (I: 68).

In Chapter 62 we read, 'Elizabeth of Hungary also cried with a loud voice, as is written in her treatise.' Elizabeth was an early thirteenth-century Franciscan tertiary, devoted to the care of the poor and sick, whose *Revelationes* had been translated into Middle English by the 1430s.

But it is Birgitta of Sweden who influenced Margery most in their affective spirituality. It is recorded, twice, in the first *Book of Margery Kempe* that Birgitta's, or Bridget's *Revelationes Brigittae*, accounts of her visions were read on at least two occasions to Margery (I: 17), and these were indexed by Alan of Lynn during Margery's lifetime. It seems that God possibly held Margery herself in a higher degree, telling her that – when she has witnessed the sacrament fluttering like a dove – 'My daughter Birgitta never saw me in this way' (I: 20).

When Margery visited Rome, she spoke with Birgitta's maidservant, she knelt on the same stone upon which Birgitta knelt when Christ appeared and told her when she would die, she stayed in the room where Birgitta died, and she visited the chapel – formerly the room in which Birgitta died (at the Casa di Santa Brigida in the Piazza Farnese, a few metres from the site of the English Hospice. I: 39).

Like Birgitta, Margery, saw a vision of Christ's Passion, causing her to weep for the first time *during* a period of contemplation (I: 28; 187-88). There are other parallels too, such as almost falling off their asses in sheer religious ecstasy when they make their way to Jerusalem; a bowl of water being thrown over both Birgitta and another over Margery (I: 55; 10); both Birgitta and Margery had many children and then lived chaste lives; both Birgitta and Margery wore whiter clothes and had similar though not identical inscriptions on their rings; both Birgitta and Margery cared for lepers (I: 74); both Birgitta and Margery have their names inscribed in the *Book of Life* (I: 85; 99). And on July 23, 1436, St Birgitta's Day, the writing of the *Book of Margery Kempe* was begun.

JESUS' HUMANITY AND HIS MOTHER'S WEeping

Much visual and textual matter depicted Mary grieving at the foot of the Cross and when Margery was in Jerusalem she 'heard and saw in her spiritual sight the mourning of our Lady, of St John and Mary Magdalene, and of many others that loved our Lord' (I: 28). In his modern English translation of the *Book of Margery Kempe* Barry Windeatt notes 'this experience is the culmination of all her preceding absorption in hearing and practising meditation upon the Passion' (313).

Christ reminded Margery of his abiding grace and of her ordination:

<12> *'It is myself, Almighty God, that makes you weep every day for your own sins; for the great compassion that I give you for my bitter Passion; and for the sorrows that my mother had here on earth, for the anguish that she suffered and for the tears that she wept; also, daughter for the holy martyrs in heaven ... and also, daughter, for the great sorrow that you have for all this world ... My angels are ready to offer your holy thoughts and your prayers to me, and the tears of your eyes also, for your tears are angels' drink, and are truly spiced and honeyed wine to them'* (I: 65).

In the closing chapters of Margery's first *Book*, we learn of a change in the attitude of some clergy towards Margery. The Prior of Lynn, and Doctor of Divinity, Thomas Hevingham, 'bore with her most meekly and held nothing against her' and John Wakering Bishop of Norwich 'put up with [this creature's most violent crying and weeping] most meekly and patiently.' 'Often in [their] sermons' Master Robert Spryngolde and Master Alan of Lynn 'excused [Margery's] weeping and crying' (1: 88). Indeed, we read that apart from an unnamed Franciscan Friar (I: 62 and 69), no clerk ever preached openly against her crying (I: 69).

We have read very little from Margery's second *Book*. Here we read that, on one occasion shortly before her third and final pilgrimage, this time to northern Europe, Margery 'could gain [no tears of devotion] at that time' (II: 2). Yet, on her return to England, when she was in a church in Sheen, 'she had great devotion and very high contemplation. She had abundant tears of compunction and of compassion, in recollection of the bitter pains and passions which our merciful Lord Jesus Christ suffered in his blessed manhood. Those who saw her weep and heard her sob so violently were seized with marvelling and wonder as to what was preoccupying her soul' (II: 10).

CLOSING THOUGHTS

'Hysterical exhibitionist or devout Christian?' I think by the end of this *apologia* that there is little doubt that Margery was, in fact, the latter. Margery Kempe the devout Christian. Margery represented her full-bodied, passionate, sermon-disrupting weeping and wailing as a God-given gift, ratified in numerous visions of Christ and of his beloved Mother, who also said as much. Her highly physical crying, in response to the hair shirt worn in her heart, assumed a deeply penitential and compassionate intercessory character, and this crying was efficacious. The sufferings of Christ were the

prime stimulus for her tears. But it was, perhaps most of all, Margery's experience of seeing in her soul Mary weeping at the foot of the cross which was her principal catalyst. We have heard several references to St Margaret's. When I talk to you again, next year, I would like to share how important our church, St Margaret's, was to Margery and how one of its parish priests could have been involved in writing *The Book of Margery Kempe*.

