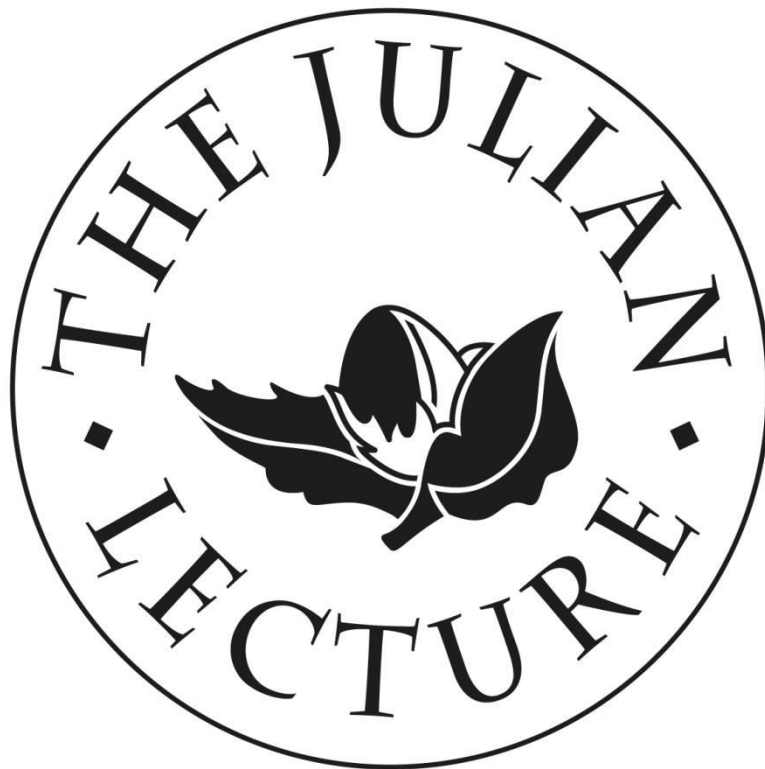


The Julian Lecture 2010

Julian's *Showings*: Work in Progress



Professor Barry Windeatt

^[1] **Julian's Showings: Work in Progress**

Professor Barry Windeatt, MA, LittD
Emmanuel College, Cambridge

Barry Windeatt went to Emmanuel as a College Lecturer in English in 1978. In the Faculty of English he has been a University Assistant Lecturer and Lecturer (1983-1995), Reader in Medieval Literature (1995- 2001) and from 2001, Professor of English.

In Emmanuel he has been Director of Studies in English (1979-1997) and Tutor (1983-1995). At various times he has also acted as Admissions Tutor in Arts, Tutor for Advanced Students, Financial Tutor, Librarian and Archivist.

He is Keeper of Rare Books and Special Collections in the College Library, and since 1990 he has curated the College's collection of portraits and paintings and is preparing a revised catalogue of them.

Barry Windeatt's research interests lie in comparative literature (largely but not exclusively of the Middle Ages), in literature and the visual arts, and in the literature of mystic experience.

[2] **Julian's Showings: Work in Progress**

It is a special privilege to be invited to talk to you today about Julian of Norwich here near the presumed site of her revelations, and indeed, on the very date, 8th May, that she gives for those 'showings'.

My subject is Julian's *Revelations of Divine Love* as a work in progress, because the book seems to me definingly exploratory and experimental, and this sense of something under way, something in process, in her text is at once both informative about the development of the visionary as artist and also spiritually instructive and rewarding.

The character of the *Revelations* as a work in progress derives from the survival of two convincingly authentic versions of Julian's book: there is the longer and usually read version, but the survival of a much shorter version which is not just an abridgement suggests that, for Julian, coming to understand and interpret what she received in her *Revelations* was a lifelong voyage of discovery and one that - fortunately for posterity - was closely related to, perhaps inseparable from, recording that process in written form.¹



[3] As she lay, thinking she was dying, in Norwich in May 1373 a young woman is gazing at a crucifix held before her eyes. Suddenly, blood trickles down from under the crown of thorns. The painted artefact of the crucifix dissolves, filmlike, into moving image: a montage of vivid

and singular revelations or 'shewings', whose strangely-angled, defamiliarizing readings of the Passion invite deconstructive reassessment of meditative tradition. Duly recovered, the woman compiles a book out of her experience in meditating on the meaning of these revelations over subsequent years. To her, the shewings bring both joyous serenity and some anguishing bafflement: she can hardly doubt them, yet in their spiritual exaltation and optimism they seem to promise more than orthodox church teaching.

From this experience derives the text now attributed to Julian of Norwich, the earliest woman whose writing in English can be identified. Julian discloses so few details about herself - surely a very willed self- abnegation - preferring her readers to focus on the revelations and not on their first recipient. Yet she does document precisely the dates of her shewings and of her two later breakthroughs in interpreting them. The longer version of her shewings records that they occurred on 8 or 13 May 1373 (according to the Sloane and Paris manuscripts respectively), when she was thirty and a half years old. It must be significant that while Julian omits to tell us so many other things about herself, she does specify her age as essentially the same as that of Christ when he began his ministry. Her text also records how it was 'fifteen years and more later' (ch.86) before she gained insight into the key overall significance of her revelations (that would make it 1388 or later), and not until 'twenty years ... all but three months' (ch.51) after the time of the shewings that she finally arrived at her interpretation of her vision of the Lord and Servant (which would make it, rather precisely, February 1393).²

Both these dated breakthroughs had a special significance for Julian in ^[4]coming to understand what she had been shown in her original visions. On one level, her understanding, set out in her concluding

chapter, that 'love was his meaning' in showing her the revelations might seem rather a self-evident understanding to take fifteen years to achieve. But not when one sees the depth of implication in Julian's understanding of God's love for the soul. Moreover, her eventual decoding of her parable-like vision of the Lord and Servant (ch.51), which takes even longer to achieve, comes as the resolution to a worrying disparity, as it seems, between orthodox teaching about humanity's postlapsarian blameworthiness and the fact that in her revelations Julian cannot see God assigning any blame to humankind.

As Julian records:

This was what amazed me: that I saw our Lord God blaming us no more than if we were as pure and as holy as angels in heaven', and she records the Lord asking himself in regard to his servant, the Adam-Christ figure who has fallen 'would it not be proper for me to give a gift that would be better for him and give him more glory than if he had never been injured?(ch.51)

It was probably in 1413, while visiting Norwich from her home in Lynn, that Margery Kempe felt herself divinely bidden 'to visit an anchoress in the same city, who was called Dame Julian'.³ According to this contemporary witness, it was on account of Julian's reputation as a spiritual adviser that Margery confided some of her own revelations to Julian in order to discover from her whether there was any deception in them 'for the anchoress was an expert in such things and could give good advice'. When dictating her own *Book* some twenty-five years later in the 1430s Kempe duly records her recollections of Julian's advice, although she makes no mention of

Julian as a visionary or of a book of Julian's visions, which had perhaps been kept uncirculated.

Despite this evidence of some contemporary local fame for Julian, there remain now so many important uncertainties about Julian's circumstances and the background and education that are implied by the writings attributed to her. The vividness of the inward experience ^[5]rehearsed and analysed through the *Revelations* creates the sense of a very present human being- albeit one whose circumstances remain mostly undivulged - but this has proved unsettling and unacceptable to modern scholars unprogrammed for interpreting creativity other than in relation to historical context, whether social, political or economic. On the basis of the wisdom and the conjunction of theological daring and surefootedness displayed in her text, Julian has been credited with extensive education and Latinity based on wide access to books, although the evidence for where and how all this was supplied remains to be discovered.⁴ Wishful speculation continues that Julian was, before her enclosure as an anchoress, a Benedictine nun at Carrow,⁵ a widow who had had children,⁶ or a lay woman still unmarried at thirty like Elisabeth Paston (1429-1488).⁷ All are unprovable scholarly attempts to frame and contextualize rather than taking the text as it is in itself, just as some other modern interpreters seek to make self-seclusion from the world and a life of contemplative prayer more acceptable in modern terms by imagining how 'socialized' an anchoress like Julian was. Yet even her name is uncertain, for the anchoress might have taken Julian' as her name in religion from the patronal saint of the church to which her anchorhold was attached, although this too is far from proven.⁸ The manuscripts variously describe her as 'lewed' (i.e. ignorant) and as a simple creature 'unlettered' or 'that ^[6]knew no letter', and although the latter may be a claim to ignorance of Latin rather than to illiteracy, it was no doubt prudent at the time for Julian

to claim both. It may be that she refers simply and humbly to her lack of literacy at the time of her revelations rather than the education that she later attained. Her process of revising her work, with much detailed verbal revision, makes it improbable that Julian could not write even in English, as does her reference to the alphabet, when she says of her Lord and Servant exemplum 'this wonderful parable gives me some teaching, as if it were the beginning of an ABC, through which I may have some understanding of our Lord's purpose' (ch.51). Her text is a witness to its author's intellect and her knowledge of spiritual writings, but its learnedness is suffused and implicit, without direct citation of sources. Even biblical reference - with many echoes of John and Paul - does not always follow the letter so much as the spirit of the original, possibly because Julian's awareness of texts often derived from hearing them read and from conversations with spiritual advisers, and so is re-expressed later in her own words. How Julian came by the learning manifest in her text, and if it is hers, remains a matter of speculation, but the Norwich of her day materially wealthy and rich in a vibrant religious culture - could have provided Julian with spiritual advisers and aesthetic models.⁹ Margery Kempe's recollections (*Book*, ch.58) of how the same helpful priest read to her over the course of seven years from the spiritual classics and the 'Bybil wyth doctowrys therupon' (i.e., with commentaries) suggests the sheer extent of how much spiritual instruction might be diffused by word of mouth and through pious conversation.

Unlike some visionaries, including Margery Kempe, Julian does not record in so many words that she was divinely charged to write down her revelations. Unlike Kempe, Julian does not include any account of difficulties she encountered in getting her text written down by others, perhaps with the implication that she could write it herself or at least easily ^[7]get it written. But Julian does understand, clearly and

firmly, that God wants her showings to be made known. This is the context of her declaration confronting and rejecting the notion that, 'Just because I am a woman, must I therefore believe that I must not tell you about the goodness of God?' (Short Text, ch.6) and hence not make public what she has learned by revelation, even though she carefully distances herself from any problematic claim to be a woman who teaches. That this passage no longer appears in the much fuller and more ambitious long text suggests that Julian moved so far beyond such defensiveness about her vocation as thinker and writer that she no longer felt the need to address it. Yet her last chapter declares: 'This book was begun by God's gift and his grace, but it seems to me that it is not yet completed'. It may well be that Julian always kept her full text to herself as a work-in-progress, for there is no evidence for its being much circulated in the Middle Ages, apart from some extracts, along with extracts from Walter Hilton on contemplative life, in a mid-fifteenth-century anthology.¹⁰

It is not necessary to posit three distinct versions completed before and then after the understanding she attains in 1388 and then revised after that of 1393, in order to imagine that Julian's text developed through a number of stages and layers. There was only ever one book for Julian to write, because there was only one subject: her revelations of 1373, understood cumulatively over time in response to the various unclarities, problems and challenges that Julian encountered in them. If several authentic states of Julian's text survive, their differences can help us follow and understand the pilgrimage of a mystic's mind. To chart the evolution of Julian's contemplative commentary on her original revelations is to understand them better by comprehending something of Julian's method as a contemplative and a writer.

Some of the differences between Julian's shorter and longer versions of the *Revelations* represent moves to edit her shewings for a readership, a wider audience than that envisaged earlier on. Implications that the ^[8]shorter text is aimed at fellow contemplatives (*Short Text*, chapters 4, 13) are dropped from the long text. Yet notwithstanding all Julian's careful editing, the mixture of comfort and bafflement in the original revelations makes provisional any written text that Julian attempts to translate from the original medium of moving image and visualization in her shewings. Turning revelation into writing confronted Julian with intractable problems in both form and content that remain part of the challenge in reading her work. The original revelations do not immediately present a connected thematic sequence: they seem fragmentary, even disjointed: a series of segments, without much foreground or background and in no particular order. There is an absence of formal subdivision in the shorter version, which perhaps retains Julian's earlier sense of her experience as a stream of revelatory consciousness, where boundaries between shewings are merging and emerging to her perception.

Somewhile before her revelations occurred, Julian had prayed for three things: especially vivid perception of the Passion; physical illness when aged 30; and the three wounds of contrition, compassion, and longing for God. As an answer to Julian's earlier prayer to have more bodily sight of the Passion, this cinematically vivid montage of images and impressions, sensations and heard words, is so singular and so challenging to traditional expectation as to pose real questions for interpretation. The contemplative has gone to work on this series of visionary images like the film-editor, splicing, pacing, shaping what is seen briefly and what enlarged upon, and creating continuity in her edited later version.

As visions, Julian's showings are strikingly dissimilar: they are unequal in length, type or content. Not all are of the Passion - indeed, remarkably for a medieval Passion meditation, the crucifying itself as an action and event is passed over in silence. Not all the showings are primarily visual, and they prompt different kinds of contemplative revision. But as to the Passion showings: the first and eighth shewings present almost cinematic close-ups of the bleeding of Christ's head, and of the congealing and drying of his body. Included is Julian's nightmarish preoccupation with how the crown of thorns is seen to be encircled - 'garland upon garland' - by a further circlet formed from the dead skin that has been gouged from Christ's head by the thorns. As in many dreams which break off before the close of some suspenseful situation, Julian is in ^[9]a state of suspense lest this circlet fall off. Such a pathological focus on aspects of Christ's suffering is not for its own sake, but offers Julian a cue or prompt, a point of departure, for contemplation on the spiritual implications of these quasi-photographic details. Julian is naturally well aware, as she states, that the Passion occurred only once historically in time. What she sees are like vividly visualized new takes on a perhaps almost overfamiliar picture. The gruesomely detailed observation of the drying out of Christ's body as he hangs on the cross on what feels like a cold windy Norfolk day prompts Julian to extended contemplation, not present in the shorter version, of the larger and ongoing spiritual significance of Christ's thirst which she comes to understand as his enduring and unquenchable longing for us.

The second shewing develops an extended contemplation from just one intently observed visual shot of the two halves of Christ's face alternately discolouring on the cross. It is a vision perhaps relatable to devotion to the 'Vernicle' relic which Julian mentions: the cloth offered by St Veronica, on which Christ wipes his face on the *via dolorosa* and which was miraculously imprinted with his

countenance. With meditation Julian comes to see this discolouring as an emblem of Christ's taking on our fleshliness through the incarnation. Julian candidly admits that she was worried at first whether her vision of such a seemingly insignificant visual detail of the Passion could indeed be a true revelation. Characteristically, after she has attained her understanding of this second revelation she does not censor her original doubts and tidy them away out of her text, but instead leaves them and the process of arriving at understanding as part of the way she presents to her reader this second showing and its interpretation. With meditation, Julian's fourth shewing of Christ's body bleeding, as if at his flagellation, is developed literally in another dimension, so as to understand his blood streaming through the firmament, descending into hell and ascending into heaven for us. It is as if his roles in the Harrowing of Hell and the Ascension are being performed anew, not by the Christ of the Gospel narratives but by his blood, now endowed with the power to speak for us.

Mysterious transformations of normal space and dimension are comparably deployed in other shewings, like the tenth, which opens out ^[10] in a film-like way from its initial focus on the wound in Christ's side. The third shewing of God 'in a point', or the first shewing's vision of something as small as a hazelnut yet understood to be 'all that is made', work by challenging normal ideas of space and form. The concluding sixteenth shewing of Christ enthroned in majesty in the human soul is the culmination of Julian's pervasive spatial discourse of enclosing and inclusion, in order to explore the theology of a kind of reciprocity of indwelling in which God inhabits the soul and the soul dwells in God - imagery that enables Julian to work towards her understanding of the essential being of our souls as grounded in God, in whose image our embodied or sensory soul is united. Fundamental to her interpretation of her revelations, this

vision prompts recurrent cross-references to it across her contemplations, as does the twelfth shewing of Christ glorified. For Julian, this shewing defeats all attempts to picture it but presents God proclaiming himself in a prose poem of self-description ('I it am that is highest... I it am that is all', ch.26).

Such understandings vouchsafed in special words or locutions also form the core of a number of shewings, where further insights may be developed in visual terms. Julian understands that: the devil is vanquished (fifth shewing); Christ thanks her for her youthful suffering (sixth shewing); if it were possible for Christ to suffer more, he would willingly do so (ninth shewing); Christ's question of 'Will you see her?' introduces the vision of Mary at the Passion (eleventh shewing); she will be taken suddenly from her suffering and come to heaven (fifteenth shewing). It is two non-visual revelations - the thirteenth (on sin) and the fourteenth (on prayer) that prompt the most extended contemplative commentary, culminating in Julian's analysis of her allegorical (or as she terms it, 'double') vision of the Lord and Servant. The seventh shewing - without a visual focus and consisting of rapidly alternating feelings of exaltation and desolation is exceptional in remaining barely altered between Julian's shorter and longer versions and unsupplemented by subsequent meditation, whether because Julian moved beyond such fluctuating feelings or because she saw them as worked through in the production of her much longer revised text.

With the insights of intervening meditation, Julian's response to the ^[11]earlier text recording her shewings is to interpolate additional material analyzing and expanding on the original's significance. Many such interpolations are responses to challenging aspects of the shewings - such as that 'sin shall be no shame, but worship to man' (ch.38) - which have provoked lengthy meditations to arrive at their

interpretation. Many other interpolations are on a much smaller scale. Julian often weaves new matter into existing sentences so as to transform them in content and style through her fuller later analysis of love's role, expressed in her characteristically ordered and cadenced prose patterning, often in patterns of three that reflect a pervasive devotion to the Trinity (the dedication of Norwich Cathedral, after all), which is another aspect of the longer text as yet barely developed in the shorter version of the Revelations.

Julian's two accounts of her compact tenth showing in her shorter and longer texts can serve to encapsulate her characteristic editing and deepening of visuality and interpretative frame. The core of the original tenth revelation is that a vision into Christ's wounded side - seeing there his flowing blood and the sacred heart - substitutes for an inability to see into the Godhead. The germ of this showing perhaps lies in meditation on the Gospel episode of Doubting Thomas, but in insight and in style this has been transformed as both vision and interpretation in Julian's longer text. Here, in cinematic fashion, the audience's looking now follows and responds to the presented looks and gazes of those on screen ('our Lord looked into his side and gazed, rejoicing; and with his dear gaze he led his creature's understanding through the same wound into his side', ch.24). The camera then pans out into a mysterious perspective inside Christ's side, visualized as an interior so vast as to confound any earthly sense of space ('he revealed a beautiful and delightful place which was large enough for all mankind who shall be saved to rest there in peace and love'). Where the shorter account of the tenth shewing has implicitly disclaimed vision of the Godhead ('if you cannot look at my Godhead', ch. 13), the longer version of this same tenth revelation has been rewritten into a claim to precisely such a vision (and with this sweet rejoicing he revealed to my understanding some part of the blessed Godhead', ch.24). In the remainder of this

brief showing the original divine locution from the short text ('Look how much I loved you!') is interpreted through Julian's habitual technique, whereby revelation merges with commentary, and ^[12]commentary is presented as revelation, in an expansive meditative paraphrase that allows considerable license to the contemplative author to interpret 'as if he had said'.

If Julian's fuller text can be construed as her re-edition of the shorter text, it is one that includes such extensive commentary on the earlier narrative of her experience as to shift the balance and focus of her earlier self-account and re-make its genre. The predominance of a narrative line gives way to the more exploratory continuum of commentary that displays all the analytical subtlety of a mind that discerns patterns, categorizes and sub-divides. Indeed, the thirteenth and fourteenth shewings each provoke such a major excursus of commentary that the narrative of the first day's fifteen shewings can barely re-establish itself before the commentary on the completed revelations as a whole takes over until the end of the book. What had been at first the story of her visions becomes the history of how she came to understand them, with attempted categorizations of the different aspects of bodily sight, spiritual sight, 'words formed in my understanding', and so on. Her perplexing but crucial revelation of the Lord and Servant is presented inseparably from the problematic process of how Julian learns to analyze it and then applies the lesson, although the endpoint concerns her more than recording intervening stages of enlightenment: her original and subsequent understandings of this shewing and of all the shewings as a whole 'are so united in my mind that I neither can nor may separate them' (ch.51). Julian's work retains something of the layered, interleaved structure of a private working draft. It has not been reconstructed into a logical linearity for the benefit of readers who have not shared

the author's experience, and it is interlaced with cross- references in the meditations to revelations that have not yet been narrated.

Driving this exploratory and experimental nature of Julian's text is a concern with authority. Her visions represented a privileged insight uniquely vouchsafed to her, which she, a woman, felt called to communicate, necessarily in the vernacular, and potentially to a wider audience than her local circle of clerical contacts. Whether or not her visions had motivated Julian to become an anchoress, they must have been central to her sense of herself. Yet aspects of the shewings, especially in hinting at universal salvation, appeared to go beyond orthodox teaching.

[13] In unsettled times, and with no settled English tradition of female visionaries or female authorship, this may well have felt like an exposed position, which seems to be reflected in the authorial voice in Julian's text. Julian is studiously anonymous and self-effacing, yet with its intensely inward focus of a personal testimony in first-person narrative, her text cannot but have an intrinsically autobiographical quality, while striving to present itself more generally as the progress of a soul.¹¹ Julian's selectivity in disclosing information gives the text a distinctive voice, at once individual yet universal. Any context in place, circumstance or status has been occluded, but her gender and her age at the time of the shewings are divulged. The precise dating of the revelations to the year, month, day and very hour ('the first ... began early in the morning, at about four o'clock, and they lasted... until it was well past the middle of the day', ch.65) lends the historicity of a documentary deposition to an account of what transcends time and defies description. Yet acknowledgement within the text of the fifteen and twenty year gaps needed for its understanding only confirms explicitly what the whole work implies of a protracted and anxious spiritual journey towards understanding.

It is this uncompleted project shared with the reader, that takes the place of any more direct claim to didactic intent in her earlier text. Julian offers no scheme or programme for her readers to borrow and develop for themselves. She deploys no overarching metaphors of spiritual progress as a journey, pilgrimage or ascent because she does not present herself as a guide on such a journey, and she does not analyze advancement (for herself or potentially for her readership) through successive stages of purgative, illuminative or unitive contemplation. In essence, Julian offers her own experience as a witness, along with her attempts to interpret that experience, and her only claim on her reader lies in her conviction that her testimony's value lies not in any endorsement of herself but in its import for all her fellow-Christians.

A significant movement in her fuller text as a whole - paradoxically for 'showings' or revelations - is that Julian learns from what she is not shown and comes to be reconciled to what is not going to be revealed, and which she cannot therefore address in her text. To Julian's bewilderment ^[14]as to how all *can* be well, given the harm done by sin, God's argument is simply that, since he has already made well the great harm of Adam's fall through the atonement, then everything else that needs to be made well is a lesser evil. Julian comes to understand that while everything about our salvation is clear and available, everything that is not necessary for our salvation belongs to God's 'privy counsels' and is hidden and closed from us (as much as would be the proceedings of a king's privy council). If we fret and busy ourselves to pry improperly into these secret counsels we shall always be further from them, instead of being like the saints in heaven who have no wills but God's. All this does enable Julian to locate her own work within a licensed searching, not into those secrets properly withheld from us, but into those mysteries hidden from us through our own blindness and ignorance and which God

wants us to understand -- and crucially this will include the subjects of her revelations. As Julian puts it:

He shows us everything that is valuable and useful for us to know in this world; and the things which he wants to remain a mystery for the time being he nevertheless because of his great kindness shows us in a veiled way as from this showing he wants us to believe and understand that we shall really see them in his everlasting bliss. So we ought to rejoice in him for all that he shows and all that he hides ... (ch.36)

When Julian rather exceptionally seeks to learn more by revelation about the fate of a particular acquaintance, she comes to understand that she hinders herself by such a particular focus. This places her at an unusual angle to that vocation as a seer and prophet about the fate of dead souls which was often seen as the remit of holy women such as Margery Kempe.¹²

Instead, Julian's wish for a vision of hell and purgatory is not granted, so that how a loving God exacts eternal punishment, by not being shown her, becomes a point of anxious uncertainty. Neither is Julian shown sin at any point in her revelations, and she both draws comfort from what she concludes must therefore quite literally be its non-entity, its nothingness, yet remains fearful of its perils. Nor can it be an accident that Julian's revision to her third shewing adds a distinction between God's ^[15]vision outside time and what humankind may perceive as chance ('and so in our blindness and ignorance we say that this is accident or luck but to our Lord God it is not so', ch.11), because some of the wisdom of her longer vision is to accept that her revelations cannot be wholly revelatory during this life and within time, although the comfort is to remember that 'God never began to love mankind... humankind has been, in God's

foresight, known and loved according to God's righteous purpose, since before time began' (ch.53). Indeed, for a modern world fascinated by how our universe began there is a special wisdom in Julian's identification of eternity with God's love, for she seems much less engaged with an unending eternity than with one that perhaps even more unimaginably for us is without beginning. Part of what Julian comes to see in her fourteenth shewing on prayer explodes any human concept of prayer within time - as our prior petition for something, duly followed by God's subsequent granting. For as the shewing reveals, before we want anything and pray for it, God's will is that we have it and then that we want and pray for it ('then how could it be that you should not have what you pray for?', ch.41').

Despite fallen humanity's sins, Julian famously learns that 'all shall be well', but equally importantly she must come to accept the other half of the equation, for the comfort of 'all shall be well' must be balanced by a realization that she cannot yet comprehend the 'great deed', ordained from without beginning, by which God will indeed make all things well at the end of time. By implication, this is likely to involve a universal salvation that will transcend our limitedly human notions of sin and attributions of blame and will fulfil the redemptive potential in our fallen bodiliness revealed to Julian in her shewings. Yet in Julian's text as we have it such a universal salvation - a controversial but highly topical subject in her day - remains an implication of her work in progress in understanding the potential meaning of her revelations. A concern with the fate of the damned, the heathen, is a recurrent preoccupation to Julian, for the orthodoxy that pagans, Jews, Saracens and others are damned would seem to run counter to the universalist optimistic implication of her revelations. The accommodation that Julian reaches between orthodoxy and what her shewings revealingly do not show about the fate of non-Christians does seem both topical and for all time in

addressing Christianity's need to ^[16]address its interaction with other faiths.¹³

In a particularly fascinating sequence of changes between the shorter and longer texts, in which Julian reworks her understanding of a great union between Christ and us', her meditation on the response of pagans to the eclipse and other natural disturbances that accompanied Christ's death extends a sense of God's universally sustaining love into its 'green' and ecological dimension:

At the time of Christ's dying, the firmament and the earth failed for sorrow, each according to their nature. For it is their natural property to recognize as their God him in whom all their natural power is grounded; when he failed then by their very natures they had to fail with him from sorrow at his pain... And everyone... even those who did not know him, suffered from a failure of all comfort except the strong and mysterious care of God... (ch.18)

To Julian's universalist perception, the natural world is sustained by God's love for all humankind ('God in his goodness makes the planets and the elements function according to their nature both for the blessed and for the damned'). In her longer text Julian has come to see how a discerning pagan's intuitive respect for the meaning manifest in the pain and dislocation being suffered by the natural world leads on to a reverence for its unknown but evidently suffering creator:

St Denis or Dionysius of France, at that time a pagan] when he saw the sorrows and terrors that happened then said: 'Either the world is coming to an end, or else he who made all nature is suffering'. Therefore he had this written on an altar: 'THIS IS THE ALTAR OF THE UNKNOWN GOD' (ch.18).¹⁴

Part of modern rediscovery of Julian has been a recognition of her ^[17]achievement as a theologian.¹⁵ Her spiritually imaginative and wonderfully tender analysis of God as our mother has propelled Julian to celebrity as a woman writer who re-genders the Christian God,¹⁶ although this tends to overlook her inconvenient insistence in context that the maternal is one among other divine aspects, for God is our father, mother, spouse, brother and lord (chapters 52, 57). Julian sees these as our five great joys, so that her exploration of God as our mother is characteristically spiritually generous and optimistic, but it does belong in balance with a larger familial model for conceptualizing our relationship with God. This profound spiritual optimism and Julian's magnanimous understanding of the incarnation's implications for humankind in bodily nature are also part of her work in progress, being substantially developed between her two texts and so presumably over the course of her career as a contemplative. This includes her electrifyingly optimistic version of the later medieval theology of synderesis and the spark of conscience inextinguishable in the human soul: that there remains a part of the human soul that has never assented to sin. It also includes her idea of how the sins we do commit will come to be regarded almost as badges of honour. Julian declares 'God wants us to know that the noblest thing he ever made is humankind' (ch.53), just as her revelations lead her to understand that the Trinity could not be more pleased with the making of the human soul. Even more remarkably she comes to see that:

... in every soul that shall be saved there is a godly will that never consented to sin and never shall - just as there is an animal will in our lower nature which can have no good impulses, there is a godly will in our higher nature which is so good that it can never will evil but only good, and that is why

God loves us and why we do what pleases him forever (ch.37).

By chapter 53, after the Lord and Servant parable and in the light of it, her ^[18]thinking on this has been developed into something even more ringing:

in every soul that will be saved there is a godly will which never agreed to sin, nor ever shall. This will is so good that it can never intend evil, but always and constantly it intends good and does good in the sight of God...

and continues

for beings of the kind that will people heaven must need by God's justice be so bound and united to him that there would always remain a higher nature in them which never could nor should be separated from God.

If these sections of Julian's work - absent from her shorter text - are less well-known than her vivid realizations of Christ's sufferings in his flesh, they nonetheless represent Julian's developing understanding of just what such incarnated divine love for humanity may imply. Julian comes to her realization that:

God also showed that sin shall not be shameful to man but his glory - for in the same way as God's justice gives every sin a suitable punishment so God's love gives the same soul a joy for every sin. (ch.38).

In an astonishing interpretative leap Julian comes to understand our sins less as crimes awaiting punishment or even damnation than as

the sorrows and sufferings endured in our nature, for which humanity will be proportionately rewarded and even honoured:

For just as sins are punished according to their seriousness] they will be rewarded in heaven according to the grief and pain they caused the soul on earth... for God's goodness never allows any soul that is to come to heaven to sin, unless the sin is rewarded; and the sin is made famous for ever and blissfully restored to grace by surpassing glory.(ch.38)

Behind all this lies Julian's own re-working of the idea of the fortunate fall, whereby man's fall in Eden, made good through the incarnation of Christ in Our Lady, brings humanity an incomparably greater spiritual good than humankind would have had if we had never fallen - just as we accept that such prominent sinners as King David, Mary Magdalene, Peter, Paul and Doubting Thomas have all gained their reward ('our kind Lord ^[19] gives us a partial vision here on earth of their perfection in heaven; for there the badge of their sin is changed into glory'). And in this context Julian makes space in her longer text for the eighth-century English saint, John of Beverley, drawing on a lost tradition that, having first allowed him to fall in some way that is now unrecorded - 'in heaven God has given him infinite joys, surpassing those he would have had if he had not fallen' (ch.38).

The fullest implication of Julian's work in progress on her shewings - liberating and astounding - is to dissolve and supersede much of the negative Christian tradition of self-hating guilt and self-blame. Her thirty- ninth chapter, which opens with how we may be lashed by the scourge of sin, goes on to declare: 'Although a man has the scars of healed wounds, when he appears before God they do not deface but ennoble him'. Since in her revelations Julian is shown neither sin nor

hell, and is not shown God blaming humanity for its sins, she comes to doubt therefore whether these have any reality. On the other hand, she also sees that God's taking on of human form in Christ - while traditionally seen as a condescension to our fallen faultiness - also works both ways in celebrating just how much of what is human, made in God's image, can be on the way to divinity, and will be, through God's love. The implications of Julian's eventual interpretation of the Lord and Servant parable - she passes in silence over the misogynistic tradition of woman's culpability in man's fall, making no mention of Eve in her version of Adam's story - are quite extraordinarily and dynamically positive for humanity. In Julian's perception, because Jesus has taken upon himself all our guilt, the Father neither may nor will assign any more guilt to us than to his own son. Indeed, Julian goes so daringly far as to affirm that:

our foul mortal flesh which God's son took upon himself... was made by our Saviour newly beautiful... fairer and richer than the clothing that I saw on the Father... (ch.51)

The clothing that is our human flesh is so transfigured by the incarnation that our new clothing, renewed by Christ, outshines that worn by the Father - an astonishing re-evaluation of redeemed human fleshliness.

[20]Such theological independence of spirit may be read as radical, yet that Julian could also be so otherworldly and apolitical as to be a mystic - or that as a visionary her text might claim any authority beyond her own authorship have become for some of her modern admirers an embarrassment and are downplayed or denied. The audacious theological implications of Julian's valuing of humanity remain to be integrated within a balanced view of her writing as a visionary and contemplative for whom 'this place is prison and this

life is penance, and who longs for the fullness of perception and knowledge that is beyond this world.

Confronted with what is unknown about Julian herself yet known about her work's development, any devil's advocate would certainly ask whether it isn't actually more likely that the book of this great foremother was penned at least to some degree by a man? Margery Kempe's acknowledgement of how she dictated her text to an amanuensis, leads her modern interpreters to credit that man not so much with the transcription as the authorship of 'her' book. Julian portrays herself as unlettered but has produced a profoundly original theological work, derived from her claim to have seen visions, yet presented so surefootedly as to be proof against any narrow-mindedly orthodox censure. Might Julian not only have dictated her meditations but composed the polished longer text in collaborative interchange with some of the learned spiritual directors to whom she could have had access in medieval Norwich? Could this explain where the learnedness implicit in her text derives from, especially in her longer version? Might this explain the transformation between the two versions in penetration of theological analysis as well as in rhetorical accomplishment and editorial textualization? It might indeed, and yet those tantalizingly faint but precious echoes in the *Book of Margery Kempe* of Julian's reported conversation with her visitor on those days in 1413 suffice to testify that Dame Julian spoke much as her text is written - luminously, with compassionate wisdom, and inflected with scripture - and that her mind and her book were essentially one.

Barry Windeatt

References

1. The *Short Text* is found only in one mid-fifteenth century manuscript, British Library MS Additional 37790. The longer text is preserved in copies made in the convents of English nuns in exile in France and the Low Countries after the Reformation. The earliest is that in the *Bibliothèque nationale de France*, Paris, MS fonds anglais 40; the paper is datable by watermarks to c.1580. There are two later seventeenth-century copies in British Library MS Sloane 2499 and Sloane 3705. Both the Paris and Sloane 2499 manuscripts have been used for modern scholarly editions; Sloane is thought to be generally more faithful to the language of its medieval English original, but Paris retains many preferable individual readings.
2. All quotation of Julian in this lecture is from the admirably accurate and sensitive version: *Julian of Norwich: Revelations of Divine Love* (translated by Elizabeth Spearing), with an Introduction and Notes by A. C. Spearing (Penguin Classics, 1998).
3. *The Book of Margery Kempe* (1985, translated by B. A. Windeatt). London; New York. Penguin Classics. Chapter 18.
4. This is the Julian constructed in the introduction and notes to Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (eds), *A Book of Showings to the anchoress Julian of Norwich*, 2 vols, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies (Toronto, 1978).
5. For speculation that this is 'likely', see Watson, Nicholas & Jenkins, Jacqueline (eds) (2006). *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision shown to a Devout Woman and A Revelation of Love*. Turnhout, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press. p. 4. The likelihood seems to derive

from a modern inability to identify another institutional source in Norwich for Julian's education.

6. Ward, Benedicta, 'Julian the Solitary', in Leech, Kenneth & Ward, Benedicta (1988). *Julian Reconsidered*. Oxford: SLG Press.
7. Watt, Diane. (2013). *Medieval Women's Writing: Works by and for Women in England, 1100-1500*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press. Chapter 4.
8. Jones, E. A. (2007). 'A mystic by any other name: Julian(?)'. *Mystics Quarterly*. 33:1-17.
9. Tanner, Norman P. (1984). *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich, 1370-1532*. Toronto, Canada: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies; Rawcliffe, Carole & Wilson, Richard (editors) (2006). *Medieval Norwich*. London: Bloomsbury; Hill, Carole (2010). *Women and Religion in Late Medieval Norwich*. Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press.
10. Westminster Cathedral Treasury MS 4; see James Walsh and Edmund Colledge (trans.) (1961), *Of the Knowledge of Ourselves and of God: A Fifteenth-Century Spiritual Florilegium* (London). I argue elsewhere that this text was made for nuns.
11. Abbott, Christopher (1999) *Julian of Norwich: Autobiography and Theology*. Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer.
12. Watt, Diane (1997). *Secretaries of God: Women Prophets in Late Medieval and Early Modern England*. Woodbridge, UK: Boydell and Brewer.
13. Grady, Frank (2005). *Representing Righteous Heathens in Late Medieval England*. New York: Macmillan.
14. Julian contrasts Dionysius' reverence for a creator apprehended through his creation with Pontius Pilate, without labouring the contrast with Pilate's failure to believe even when Christ is actually before him.

15. Jantzen, Grace (1987). *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian*. London: SPCK.; Nuth, Joan M. (1991). *Wisdom's Daughter: The Theology of Julian of Norwich*. New York: Crossroad.
16. Heimmel, Jennifer (1982). *God is Our Mother: Julian of Norwich and the Medieval Image of Christian Feminine Deity*. Salzburg; Pelphrey, Brad (1989). *Christ Our Mother: Julian of Norwich*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd.