Julian of Norwich

Revelations of Divine Love

A new translation by Barry Windeatt

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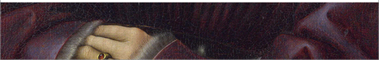

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REVELATIONS OF DIVINE LOVE

JULIAN OF NORWICH (1342–after 1416) is the earliest woman whose writing in English can be identified, but little is known about her life. Julian herself dates to May 1373 the revelations which were to be the inspiration of her writing, and she also mentions that she was thirty winters old when they occurred, but she does not reveal her name. Julian's book survives in two versions, and a scribal note to the shorter text identifies its author as a devout woman called Julian, who is a recluse at Norwich and still alive in 1413. From legacies in four surviving wills it is known that there was a recluse named Julian at St Julian's Church in Norwich between 1394 and 1416, although Julian probably became a recluse before this. She dates two breakthroughs that she made in understanding her revelations to 1388 and 1393. It was probably in 1413 that Margery Kempe of Lynn, the Norfolk visionary and holy woman, reports paying a visit to consult Julian about Kempe's own revelations, but the year of Julian's death remains unknown.

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JULIAN OF NORWICH

Revelations of Divine Love

Translated with an Introduction and Notes by

BARRY WINDEATT

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For my mother

Queenie Windeatt
(1922–2012)

‘The mother’s service is closest, most willing, and most sure; closest because it is most natural, most willing because it is most loving, and most sure because it is most true.’

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INTRODUCTION

Dying in Norwich—in May 1373—a thirty-year-old woman is gazing at a crucifix held before her eyes. Suddenly, blood trickles down from under the crown of thorns, and the painted artefact of the crucifix dissolves, filmlike, into moving image. This vision initiates a series of fifteen revelations that day, concluded by a sixteenth the following night. Duly recovered, the woman compiles two versions of a book—one much longer than the other—devoted to exploring and interpreting what had been shown in her visions. Her revelations bring her both joyous serenity and some anguishing bafflement: she can hardly doubt them, yet in their exaltation they seem to promise more than orthodox Church teaching. The outcome—self-effacing, yet implicit with spiritual autobiography—is a unique fusion of revelation with a searching theological enquiry into what has been revealed. From this experience derives the work of Julian of Norwich, the earliest woman whose writing in English can be identified.

A profound and radical thinker, Julian understands the divine redeeming of mankind from sin as a manifestation of Christ as mother of all humanity, whom he will bring through salvation to new birth and new life. Julian comes to see that it was needful that there should be sin in this world, yet the joy of humanity's redemption far outweighs the harm in mankind's fall. For Julian, despite our sinfulness, the human will remains fundamentally good, our bodily nature is nothing to regret, and our repented sins will be to our glory in heaven. In his love for us, which has no beginning as well as no end, God has always willed the salvation of the noblest thing he ever made, which is humanity. We cannot know everything here, and we may suffer, yet 'all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well' (ch. 27; p. 74).

The life of an anchoress[1]

At some point in her life Julian became an anchoress in Norwich. An anchoress was a female recluse who lived permanently confined

[1] This account of an anchoress's way of life is largely based on the various rules and recommendations in the thirteenth-century English guide for anchoresses, the *Ancrene Wisse*, which was much copied in later centuries. There were, however, many individual variations.

in a small cell usually built against the wall of a church.[2] The intending anchoress would have undergone some probationary testing before receiving approval to be enclosed, and assurance would also be required about sufficient arrangements for her continuing material support. Upon enclosure she would have taken solemn vows of obedience and chastity. The life of an anchoress was regarded as the living death of one who was as if dead to the world. Parts of the rite of enclosure were excerpted from the office for the burial of the dead, and the anchoress entered her cell singing the antiphon from the burial service, 'Here shall be my rest forever.'[3] The anchoress was then prayed for as if over a corpse, dust was sprinkled as at a burial, and the door to the cell was shut and sealed up from the outside. Normally the anchoress would never leave her cell alive again, and in some rites the sealing of the door is followed by a mass for the dead. Some anchorites were indeed buried in their cells, and one fifteenth-century rite for enclosure of recluses specifies provision of a shallow grave already dug within the anchorhold for the recluse to contemplate and to deepen himself.[4] Rather than admiring her ladylike white hands, an anchoress should use those hands to 'scrape up the earth every day from the grave in which they will rot'.[5]

Henceforward, the anchoress will live in a cramped and comfortless confinement bare of any ornament except a crucifix, and wholly dependent on others for all her needs of sustenance and sanitation.[6] The aim in principle was an austere habitation symbolically sealed off from the world, but in practice this was provided in some quite different accommodation.[7] A maidservant might occupy an adjacent

[2] Anchoress is the female of anchorite, a term for a recluse applied to both men and women and deriving from the Greek *anachorein*, to retire, retreat.

[3] On medieval English ceremonies for enclosure, see Ann K. Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons in Medieval England* (Berkeley, 1985), ch. 4.

[4] Roberta Gilchrist, *Contemplation and Action: The Other Monasticism* (London, 1995), 190–2, and E. A. Jones, 'Ceremonies of Enclosure: Rite, Rhetoric and Reality', in Liz Herbert McAvoy (ed.), *The Rhetoric of the Anchorhold* (Cardiff, 2008), 34–49.

[5] Bella Millett (ed.), *Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Edition of the Text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402*, 2 vols., Early English Text Society, original series 325, 326 (Oxford, 2005, 2006), 2.46 (my translation).

[6] In his *De Institutione Inclusarum* Aelred of Rievaulx forbids any 'paintings or carvings . . . hangings decorated with birds or animals or flowers' in a recluse's cell; see *Treatise and Pastoral Prayer*, trans. Mary Paul McPherson (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1971), 71.

[7] On the wide variation in the proportion of recorded anchorholds, see Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons*, 29–41. An anchorhold at Leatherhead, Surrey, was 8 feet

room with access to the anchorhold, but some maids went home at night; such maids were to receive no set wage, only their food and subsistence, so that theirs was also a kind of religious vocation. The anchoress's cell will have a window into the church—at Leatherhead only 21 inches square—which enables her to witness the celebration of mass. Communion is allowed fifteen times a year. Any family feeling is considered no longer appropriate in one dead to the world, and more than infrequent family visiting of an anchoress is discouraged. Her cell may have a small window to the outside, but this window will be covered with a curtain, and any touching of those callers who come to the window to consult her is to be shunned. No wonder that in one rite of enclosure the recluse is to think of himself as convicted of his sins and committed to solitary confinement as if to a prison.[8] No wonder that imagery of enclosure and indwelling is so integral to Julian's text. When Julian comments that 'This place is prison, and this life is penance' (ch. 77; p. 155), she may be referring not only to life in this world but to the life in her anchorhold.

The anchoress's day is occupied with the recitation of a round of prayers which begin with her waking moments and only cease with prayers said just before going to sleep. In such a day, which in winter would have begun at 3.30 a.m. and ended at 7.00 p.m., the saying of prayers can hardly have taken less than five hours and possibly more.[9] Otherwise the anchoress was expected to keep silent as much

square; one at Compton, Surrey, was 6 feet 8 inches by 4 feet 4 inches, with a separate space for sleeping, and another at Hardham, Sussex, was no bigger. Much larger was an anchorhold at Chichester Cathedral, which measured 29 by 24 feet. One in Shropshire contained at least three rooms; another still extant at Chester-le-Street, Co. Durham, had four rooms. There is record of anchorholds with gardens attached. Two recluses inhabiting adjacent cells was not unknown. During reconstruction of St Julian's Church, Norwich, in 1953 the foundations of the anchorhold presumably once occupied by Julian were discovered to indicate a space in the cell approximately 9½ by 11½ feet. See Father John-Julian (ed. and trans.), *The Complete Julian of Norwich* (Brewster, Mass., 2009), 38.

[8] Rotha Mary Clay, *The Hermits and Anchorites of England* (London, 1914), 193.

[9] A typical day of prayer might be as follows: 3.30 a.m. Preliminary prayers and devotions; 5.00 a.m. Matins, Lauds and Prime of our Lady, with other devotions; 8.00 a.m. Terce of our Lady, Litany of the Saints, The Seven Penitential Psalms, The Fifteen Gradual Psalms, Devotions before the cross and to our Lady; 11.30 a.m. Mass, Sext and None of our Lady, meal and rest period; 3.00 p.m. Private prayers and meditation, some vernacular reading; 4.00 p.m. Vespers of our Lady; 5.00 p.m. Compline of our Lady; 7.00 p.m. Bedtime prayers and devotions. Prescribed gestures and postures accompanied prayers: standing, kneeling, prostration, outstretched arms, signs of the cross, striking the breast, kissing the earth.

as possible. Between Easter and harvest-time in mid-September the anchoress can eat two meals a day, except on Fridays. During the other half of the year the anchoress is to fast as much as possible, except on Sundays. No meat or fat should be eaten, and no dairy produce on Fridays or in Advent. 'Eat vegetable stew willingly, and get into the habit of drinking little', advises the *Ancrene Wisse*, bracingly. An anchoress should always eat alone, as is appropriate to one dead to the world. It does not greatly matter what an anchoress wears in her unseen life, but anything worn next to the skin should be rough and coarse in texture, and the anchoress 'may perhaps wear drawers of haircloth tightly fastened, with the legs firmly cross-gartered down to the feet'. However, the wearing of haircloth, or self-flagellation with holly or brambles should only be undertaken with a confessor's permission; scourging the front of the body or mutilating it with cuts are specifically forbidden. Following St Paul (1 Corinthians 11: 6) the anchoress should keep her head covered, but not for adornment. The hair can be cut or shaved four times a year. As to personal hygiene, frequent washing is encouraged. No rings, brooches, fancy belts or gloves are allowed.

The anchoress makes herself a recluse from the world in order to be free for God, and in her cell she inhabits a liminal space between this world and the next, yet the life of an anchoress was not without paradoxes. By the later Middle Ages, as recluses became more of an urban than rural phenomenon, the anchoress found herself immured at the very heart of the community she had left behind. Her seclusion—dependent as this made her on the practical and material support of others—must often have been symbolic and conditional rather than absolute, not that this need diminish her inward solitude nor her spiritual ambition. There is ample evidence from wills of the loyal support and affection that anchoresses enjoyed in their local communities. In return, the anchoress supported the community through her prayers, gave spiritual counsel, and should provide an example of holiness, although engagement with the world left behind outside the anchorhold is regulated so firmly and in such detail as to suggest that much could go wrong. The *Ancrene Wisse* advises that an anchoress may have a cat but not a cow, which will only entangle her with worldly distractions even if it helps contribute to her support. Anything made by the anchoress can be sold to help meet her needs, and for anchoresses to support themselves by their labour was

well regarded by some (although not by all), but an anchoress must not conduct a business. Her needlework should be the sewing and mending of church vestments or clothes for the poor. Nor should an anchoress turn herself into a schoolmistress in teaching children, because this would distract her from her vocation. An anchoress is not to send or receive letters, and cannot write without permission, although with her confessor's agreement she can dispense guidance to those who seek it from her.

It was on account of Julian's reputation as such a spiritual adviser that she was consulted by Margery Kempe, a highly unconventional Norfolk visionary and holy woman, who records how she confided some of her own 'wonderful revelations, which she described to the anchoress to find out if there were any deception in them, for the anchoress was expert in such things and could give good advice' (see p. 168).[10] This reflects an assumption by the later Middle Ages that the lives of recluses would move beyond the ascetic towards contemplative experience: Julian's contemporary Walter Hilton (d. 1396) addresses to an anchoress the first book of his great guide to contemplation, *The Scale of Perfection*, while the celebrated English mystic Richard Rolle (d. 1349) wrote his *Form of Living* for a female recluse. In the account of her conversation with Julian, Kempe gleans her portion of the spiritual harvest from Julian's life as an anchoress. It was the solitary life as a self-martyrdom from every worldly consolation in order that, stripped and set free from all earthly and sensory distraction, the anchoress may pursue her path through prayer and meditation towards spiritual enlightenment.

Julian of Norwich: life and book

The author now known as Julian of Norwich divulges few details about herself, preferring her readers to focus on the revelations and not on their recipient. With studied anonymity she suppresses in her longer text some of the few personal details present in the shorter, including all reference to the author's being a woman. However, she does record precisely her age at the time, the date and hours of her revelations, and of her later breakthroughs in interpreting

[10] *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch. 18. For a translation of Kempe's account of her visit to Julian of Norwich, see Appendix 2, pp. 168–9.

them, lending the historicity of a documentary deposition to an anonymized account of what transcends time and defies description. The longer version of her revelations records that they occurred, depending on which manuscript, on 8 or 13 May 1373, when she was thirty and a half years old (ch. 2; p. 40). She was born, therefore, in late 1342 and was thus an almost exact contemporary of Chaucer. Her text also records how it was 'fifteen years and more later' (i.e. in 1388 or later) before she gained insight into the key overall significance of her revelations (ch. 86; p. 164), and not until 'three months short of twenty years' after the time of the revelations (i.e. February 1393) that she finally interpreted her parable-like vision of the Lord and Servant (ch. 51; p. 108). Any context for the revelations in place or social circumstance had already been excluded from the shorter text, so it is ironic that with a few added words a scribal rubric to the shorter version undoes all Julian's self-abnegation and enables her identification. It declares itself a vision shown 'to a devout woman and her name is Julian, and she is a recluse at Norwich and is still alive in the year of our Lord 1413' (Short Text, p. 3, hereafter ST[11]). Four wills variously provide evidence of an anchoress named Julian at Norwich and at St Julian's Church in Conesford, Norwich, between 1393/4 and at least 1416.[12] The four benefactors—priests, a Norwich layman, and a pious noblewoman—provide a glimpse of Julian's circle and repute, while the wills' bequests to her maids give some hint of Julian's daily companions and helpmeets in 'her highly industrial location, at St Julian's cell, near the busy quays

[11] Reference to the ST, which is not divided into chapters in the sole manuscript, is by page number only. See Note on the Text and Translation.

[12] The earliest evidence for Julian's enclosure as an anchoress occurs in the will of Roger Reed, rector of St Michael's, Coslany, Norwich, who on 20 March 1393/4 bequeathed two shillings to 'Julian anakorite' (Norwich Consistory Court, Reg. Harsyk, 194v; now much damaged). In his will of 19 May 1404, Thomas Emund, a chantry priest of Aylsham in Norfolk, bequeathed twelve pence to Julian, anchoress at the church of St Julian in Norwich, and eight pence to Sarah, living with her (Lambeth Palace: Register of Archbishop Thomas Arundel, I.f.540d). In his will of 24 November 1415, John Plumpton, a citizen of Norwich, bequeathed forty pence to the anchoress in the church of St Julian's, Conesford, in Norwich, together with twelve pence to her maid, and twelve pence to her former maid, Alice (E. F. Jacob (ed.), *The Register of Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury 1414–1443*, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1943–7), 3.413). In her will of 26 September 1416, Isabel Ufford, Countess of Suffolk, left twenty shillings 'a Julian recluz a Norwich' (*Register of Henry Chichele*, 2.94–7). Bequests are also recorded in 1423 and 1428 to an unnamed anchoress at St Julian's, Conesford, but these are probably to Julian's successor in her anchorhold.

of King Street, Conesford'.[13] Julian was probably an anchoress well before 1394, but the dates of her enclosure and of her death are unknown. It is often claimed that even her own 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. In fact, there is little historical evidence for such a practice, and Julian was a not uncommon girl's name at the time. Nor does her book give itself a name, and the titles of all printed editions of Julian's work are editorial choices.[14]

It was probably in 1413, while visiting Norwich, that Margery Kempe felt herself divinely bidden 'to go to an anchoress in the same city who was called Dame Julian'.[15] Although Kempe gives Julian the title of 'dame', which was customary for nuns, all the wills naming Julian as a beneficiary refer to her as an anchoress or recluse rather than as a nun, as also does the rubric of the shorter text. Whether Julian was a nun before her enclosure as an anchoress remains a matter for debate. The nearby Benedictine nunnery of Carrow held the advowson of St Julian's Church (i.e. the right to nominate its rector), but no evidence remains to connect Julian with this house, although Julian's longer text has survived through copies made centuries later by exiled English Benedictine nuns. Julian may have received some early schooling from the nuns of Carrow and later may have enjoyed their support in her years as an anchoress. Indeed, Julian may have been still in secular life at the time of her revelations, for her account mentions her mother and others around her (ST, pp. 12, 15, 31). Whether this would be likely if Julian were already enclosed as an anchoress remains a matter of dispute: it is unclear whether an anchorhold could accommodate these onlookers, and whether the rules of enclosure would be waived in the event of grave illness. It may be that after the revelations, influenced by them, Julian entered religious life as an anchoress. It has been argued that Julian may have been a widow at the time of her revelations,

[13] Carole Hill, *Women and Religion in Late Medieval Norwich* (Woodbridge, 2010), 14.

[14] For this translation the traditional title has been used, which derives from the first printed edition of 1670 by Serenus Cressy. Separate titles have not been given to the short and long texts, which are versions of one work.

[15] Norwich was one of the most important medieval English cities, with a notably vibrant religious culture, and with more hermits and recluses recorded than in any other English town; see Norman P. Tanner, *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich, 1370–1532* (Toronto, 1984), 58.

with speculation that she had been a mother herself, not that this is necessary to explain the special place of an understanding of Christ as our mother in her meditations.[16]

If a laywoman, Julian evidently had the circumstances and the leisure to allow for devotion. The manuscripts of her work variously describe her as ignorant (ST, p. 10), and as a simple uneducated creature (ch. 2; p. 40),[17] and although the claim in the longer text may be to ignorance of Latin rather than to illiteracy, it was no doubt prudent at times for Julian to claim both. It may be that she refers simply to her lack of literacy at the time of her revelations rather than the education she later attained. Her likely revisions of her work—detailed and meticulously phrased—make it seem improbable that Julian could not read and write in English, as do her references to the alphabet as an elementary level of learning (chs. 51, 80; pp. 113, 159). Even so, Julian may well have worked at revising her text in a copy which had been dictated to an amanuensis for convenience rather than because Julian was unable to write herself: writing was a laborious process in medieval circumstances. Julian's 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 or other pointers to books read. Even biblical reference—with many echoes of John and Paul—does not always follow the letter so much as the spirit of the original, but Julian appears to echo scripture because she has taken its truths to heart, not because she is concerned to parade biblical citations to authorize herself. Her awareness of texts' content may have derived in part from hearing them read and from conversation with spiritual advisers, and so is re-expressed later in her own words. Julian's text is a marvel of stylistic subtlety and grace: rhetorically patterned, theologically precise, and with the impress of a distinct personality. It combines an unmannered rhetorical sophistication—which bespeaks an accomplished literacy—with some of the energy and fluidity of a more oral style.

[16] Sister Benedicta Ward, 'Julian the Solitary', in Kenneth Leech and Sister Benedicta Ward (eds.), *Julian Reconsidered* (Oxford, 1988), 10–31.

[17] The manuscripts of the long text variously refer to Julian in Middle English as 'unlettered' or 'that cowde [knew] no letter'.

The revelations

Julian's revelations, which start when the supposedly dying woman sees the blood on a painted crucifix begin to trickle and spread, prompt her to a lifetime of subsequent contemplation. In meditating on Christ's life, and especially his Passion, medieval people were encouraged to enter imaginatively into the scenes of that life and relive them in their mind's eye, imagining themselves present in heart and mind, and often enlarging and elaborating upon aspects and circumstances of Christ's suffering and the sorrows of those who witnessed it. In her *Book* Margery Kempe exemplifies such affective devotion, stepping through the frame and into the picture as she imagines herself acting as the Virgin's companion and helper during the events of the Nativity and the Passion. Such devotion was regarded as appropriate for beginners in meditation and especially for women, and an extensive literary and visual culture, including many reported visions, developed under its influence. It was believed that Christ's Passion was a historical event which, uniquely, made itself available to be witnessed and inhabited mentally by those living in later historical periods who could not witness the historical Passion physically. In the *Horologium Sapientiae* of the Rhineland mystic Henry Suso—of which a partial translation became available in medieval England—Christ remarks of his Passion: 'Even here and now it is granted to you through my dispensation in some fashion to look upon this.'[18] As such, the accessibility of Christ's life by means of meditation—his real presence in the meditating mind—was held to be a special extension of Christ's giving of himself in the incarnation. In recording her initial wish to receive a more intense awareness of the Passion, and to feel herself there, sharing and reliving the experience of his first followers at the foot of the cross, Julian acknowledges this type of meditation even as she proceeds to transcend it.

Having previously prayed for an experience of witnessing Christ's Passion, what Julian does see and contemplate of the Passion is highly selective. Not only do her revelations not correspond chronologically with the Passion narrative, but most of its events are omitted,

[18] 'Et hoc quoque iam in praesenti tibi aliqualiter videre dispensative conceditur' (*Horologium Sapientiae*, ed. Pius Künzle (Freiburg, 1977), 394). Suso adds that frequent recollection of the Passion makes the ignorant most learned and turns amateurs and simpletons into teachers (p. 494).

contrary to the consecutive approach to the chronology of events followed in many medieval Passion meditations. Julian sees nothing of the Last Supper, the Agony in the Garden and Betrayal, or the trial. Julian is shown nothing of the bearing of the cross or of the process of Christ's being crucified, both traditional objects of devotional meditation. The sorrows of Mary on Calvary—beloved topic of affective devotion—are acknowledged only obliquely and almost abstractly (ch. 18; p. 64). Julian specifically records that she was not shown the Jews who put Christ to death, and in Julian's attention to Christ's wounds there is no identification of those who inflicted them. The moment of Christ's dying is not shown—or rather, Julian sees a miraculous change—nor does she mention Christ's cry of dereliction by God (Matthew 27: 46). Julian variously alludes to Christ's descent into hell before his resurrection but passes in silence over the confrontation between Christ and the devil which accompanies that. The resurrection is mentioned in the Lord and Servant chapter (ch. 51; p. 114) but otherwise sparsely.

As visions, Julian's revelations are strikingly dissimilar: they are unequal in length, type, or content. Not all are of the Passion, not all are primarily visual, and they prompt different kinds of revision after meditation, becoming less visually centred as the work progresses. The first and eighth revelations present almost cinematic close-ups of the bleeding of Christ's head and the congealing and drying of his body. This pathological focus is not for its own sake, but offers a cue for meditation on the spiritual implications of these quasi-photographic details, observed with a painterly eye perhaps influenced by the rich artistic culture of medieval Norwich.[19] The second revelation develops an extended meditation from just one intently observed visual shot of Christ's face discolouring on the cross. With contemplation, the fourth revelation of Christ's body bleeding, as if at his flagellation, develops into another dimension, so as to see Christ's blood streaming through the firmament, and to envisage Christ's blood, rather than the figure of Christ, as descending into hell and ascending into heaven for us. Mysterious transformations of normal space and dimension are deployed in other revelations, like the tenth, which opens out from its initial focus on the wound in Christ's side.

[19] See also P. Lasko and N. J. Morgan (eds.), *Medieval Art in East Anglia 1300–1530* (Norwich, 1974), and B. Windeatt, 'Julian of Norwich and Medieval English Visual Culture', in N. Jacobs and G. Morgan (eds.), 'Truthe is the beste' (Bern, 2014), 185–203.

The third revelation of God 'in a point', or the first revelation's vision of something as small as a hazelnut yet understood to be 'all that is made', also work by challenging normal ideas of space and form. The concluding sixteenth revelation of Christ enthroned in majesty in the human soul is the culmination of Julian's pervasive spatial discourse of enclosing and inclusion. This last revelation of Christ's enclosure within us mirrors back across the book Julian's first revelation of our enclosure within Christ. Fundamental to Julian's interpretation of her revelations, this final vision prompts recurrent cross-references to her contemplations, as does the twelfth revelation of Christ glorified. For Julian, this twelfth revelation defeats all attempts to picture it, but presents God proclaiming himself in a prose poem of self-description ('It is I. It is I. It is I who am highest . . .', ch. 26; p. 74).

Understandings vouchsafed in words rather than images form the core of a number of revelations, where further insights may be developed in visual terms. Julian understands that: the devil is vanquished (fifth revelation); Christ thanks her for her youthful suffering (sixth revelation); if it were possible for Christ to suffer more, he would willingly do so (ninth revelation); Christ's question—'Would you like to see her?' (ch. 25; pp. 72–3)—introduces the vision of Mary at the Passion (eleventh revelation); Julian will be taken suddenly from her suffering and come to heaven (fifteenth revelation). 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 parable-like account of the Lord and Servant. The seventh revelation—without a visual focus, and consisting of rapidly alternating feelings of exaltation and desolation—is exceptional in remaining 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 revised longer text.

Turning revelation into writing—the text that Julian attempts to translate from the medium of moving image, visualization, and intuition in her revelatory experience—confronted Julian with intractable problems in both form and content that remain part of the challenge in reading her work. The original revelations as recorded in the short text do not present an immediately connected thematic sequence: they can seem fragmentary and enigmatic; a series of segments, without much foreground or background, and in no particular order.

Absence of formal subdivision within the short text perhaps retains Julian's earlier sense of her experience as a stream of revelatory consciousness, where boundaries between revelations are still merging and emerging to her perception. Along with such boundaries would come an understanding of relative priority and significance that eventually enables the later demarcation and numbering of revelations. As an answer to Julian's earlier prayer to have more bodily sight of the Passion, her revelations' montage-like series of images and impressions, sensations and heard words, is so singular and deconstructive of traditional expectations as to pose real challenges to interpretation. Julian's intensely individual focus in her visions opens up new insights even into such iconic images. Yet although Julian's contemplative life was founded on the unrepeatable revelations of May 1373, her subsequent inner life of heightened forms of insight and understanding is no less part of her revelatory experience as a whole.

Visions and revisions

The survival of two authentic versions of Julian's text provides a remarkable opportunity to chart the spiritual and creative process by which an account of revelatory experience is revised and reinterpreted over a lifetime of meditative aspiration. Julian's work survives in a shorter form, the Short Text (ST), preserved in one mid-fifteenth-century copy, and in a version four times longer, the Long Text (hereafter LT), only preserved complete in three post-Reformation manuscripts. The shorter text survives in a manuscript also containing some abridged versions of other contemplative texts, which raises the possibility that this shorter text might itself represent an abridgement of the longer (whether by another hand or by Julian herself for some particular purpose). Overall, however, the nature of the shorter text points to its representing an authentic earlier state of Julian's work. Only the short text includes certain circumstantial details recording the revelations as an event: the priest who brings the crucifix has a boy with him and addresses Julian as 'daughter' (ST, p. 5); Julian's posture on her sickbed (ST, p. 5) and the position of her head and hands (ST, p. 5) are specified; the crucifix 'stood at the foot of my bed' (ST, p. 30); Julian's mother is present at the bedside (ST, p. 15). On balance, such details would seem more likely to have been recorded in a testimony written nearer in time to

the experience than to have been inserted into one abridged later, whether by a scribal editor or Julian herself. Yet the shorter text is still deemed worth copying as late as 1413 (probably within a few years of Julian's death), and the rubric in the shorter text which gives this date has some authority in implying that this text was copied by someone who knew or knew of Julian, by then in her seventies.

The date and purpose of the shorter text can only be deduced from internal evidence, but it remains a powerful statement that can stand in its own right. Its relatively undeveloped commentary on the revelations and its circumstantial details may identify it as a form of memorandum set down not long after the revelatory experience of May 1373, and perhaps connected with the process of Julian's gaining approval to be enclosed as an anchoress. A passage near the opening of the shorter text affirming Julian's belief both in Church teachings and also in 'paintings of crucifixes' (ST, p. 3) has been interpreted as reflecting a concern not to be associated with heretical Lollard hostility towards images, and this would be more likely to date from the 1380s than the 1370s. In view of the substantial revision occurring between the shorter and longer texts, such a later dating of the shorter might then imply a composition date for the longer version rather later than 1393, when Julian indicates that she was vouchsafed her crucial understanding of her revelations (ch. 51; p. 108). Yet if an anxiety about Lollardy really underlay this passage in her short text, Julian might have been expected to retain it in her longer version rather than omit it, since such concerns over heresy became more pressing later in Julian's lifetime, and may explain in part the lack of evidence for much circulation of the longer text. By the early fifteenth century—in the context of growing concerns about unorthodox texts in English—there were ample grounds for a female visionary to hesitate before publishing so profound and audaciously original a work as Julian's longer text. By the same token, this passage about the painting of crucifixes may indicate no more than that this particular redaction of the shorter text does indeed date from 1413 as it declares and has had a cautious disclaimer added to its opening sentences, which may not have been present in earlier copies of the short text. In the light of just how much Julian can be proven to have rewritten her work, it would be naïve to assume that a version of the short text copied decades after the event it describes would have remained unrevised as first written.

Unlike some visionaries (including Margery Kempe), Julian does not record in so many words that she was divinely charged to write down her revelations, but she does understand that God wants them made known. This is the context of her declaration in the short text, confronting and rejecting the notion that, just because she is a woman, she should not make public what she has learned by revelation, while also distancing herself from any problematic claim to be a woman who teaches (ST, p. 10). That this passage no longer appears in the 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 in the long text declares that her book is not yet completed (ch. 86; p. 164), and it may well be that Julian kept her full text to herself as work-in-progress. 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 challenges that Julian encountered in them, not least in that the revelations seemingly went beyond orthodox teaching. In responding to such challenges, it is quite probable that Julian's text developed through a number of stages and layers.

Taken as a whole, the features of the short text read as if earlier in that lengthy process of developing understanding and interpretation which the long text acknowledges to have occurred. By comparison with the longer version, the revelations in the short text are quite sparely related, closer to speech, and possibly dictated; they are introduced with little preface or context, and unlocated in time. Some of Julian's more vivid visual insights do not figure in the short text, including some details of her Passion revelations. Indeed, there is not only more meditation but also more visualization in the longer text. Absent from the short text are the parable of the Lord and Servant (ch. 51) and the chapters on Christ our mother (chs. 58–63), with the chapters of profound meditation that precede and follow. Express indications in the short text that Julian's work is aimed at contemplatives no longer appear in the longer version. References to Julian in the first person in the short text tend to be revised away in the long text, while references in the short text to 'he' and 'they' are rewritten into a more inclusive first-person plural 'we' that characterizes the long text. The short text is more tentative than the long text in presenting its account of the revelations, and more defensive in asserting its conformity to orthodox Church teaching. A sense of sin, as too of

the devil, seems always near in the short text, reflected in a less settled and serene style.

Most of the shorter text's content is carried over into the longer, as if Julian works on and from a copy of the short text; passages undergo some re-expression, but much phrasing remains scarcely altered. Little material is positively discarded, and compression or resequencing in the longer text of material from the shorter is the exception (as in chs. 40–4; pp. 90–7). The longer text treats the shorter one curatorially, as if the words of the short text conserve the core documentary testimony of the revelations. It is around the short text that the longer version frames the apparatus of what can resemble an edition of this original testimony, with numerous additions of extended meditative commentary on the revelations' content. Textual divisions in the sole manuscript of the short text are signalled by blue initials rather than by chapter numbering, dividing the text into twenty-five sections. Only eight of such divisions correspond with the beginning of a new revelation, and there is no evidence as to whether these divisions are scribal or authorial. With the longer text come both the numbering of the revelations and the division into numbered chapters. The numbering of revelations apparently goes back to Julian herself, because cross-reference between revelations by number is instrumental to the way that Julian interrelates her thoughts about her revelations in the long text and draws her work into a whole. The chapter divisions are less clearly authorial, and the chapter summaries, at least in their extant form, apparently do not derive from Julian herself, but since she has only thought to number the first, second, and sixteenth revelations within her text, it is through the apparatus of these chapter summaries (in MSS S1 and S2), or the chapter headings (in MS P), that the other revelations are numbered and demarcated. What survive here may be layers of early editorial assistance, because it is likely that an enclosed anchoress would need clerical support in producing such an ambitious text.

Julian's mode of developing her text between its shorter and longer versions involves adding many new passages, as well as weaving new matter into existing sentences, transforming content and style through cadenced prose patterning. The succinct report in the short text is carried forward into new contexts where it is framed by understandings of her initial statements that Julian has come with meditation to perceive. A vivid core of initial perception is set within

subsequent interpretative commentary, in a way that allows for qualification and realignment of problematic passages. The long text has evolved through the intensive interpolation into a version of the short text of interleaved commentary in added paragraphs, as well as interlineated expansions that incorporate new sentences into existing passages and new clauses into sentences surviving from the short text. Much of what is now viewed as Julian's characteristic style and language is the work of the long text, where Julian gains control of what previously seemed uncontrollably problematic, and such mastery is reflected stylistically. A brief observation jotted down like a memo in the short text ('love was revealed to me most of all—that it is closest to us all', ST, p. 34) will be transformed in the longer text in terms of what the soul now understands of God's will in the original insight ('the soul received most understanding of love; yes, and he wishes that we perceive love in all things and rejoice in it', ch. 73; p. 149).

What had started in the short text as the story of Julian's visions becomes in the long version the history of how she comes to understand them. As an authorial re-edition of the earlier text—and something of an unconscious autobiography in recording a process of meditative retrospection—the long text now includes within itself so much reflection on the earlier narrative of Julian's revelatory experience as to shift the balance and revise the focus of the briefer account and refashion its genre. In essence, the short text had presented a narrative self-account of an experience of revelation. In the long text, however, the original narrative line gives way to the more exploratory unity of a meditative commentary. Here are foregrounded all the analytical subtleties of a contemplative and theologically-informed mind that discerns patterns, categorizes, and subdivides with a spiritual sense of number.[20] Indeed, it is commentary that comes to define the continuity of the longer version. In the course of meditating on her first twelve revelations Julian has interleaved many additional paragraphs, but her thirteenth and fourteenth revelations prompt Julian to such an extended excursus of commentary that a narrative history

[20] Julian analyses 'three objects in our seeking' (ch. 10; p. 55), 'three ways of contemplating' (ch. 21; p. 67), 'three kinds of expression in our Lord' (ch. 71; p. 146), 'three kinds of knowledge' (ch. 72; p. 148); she sees 'two attributes in what our Lord was conveying' (ch. 41; p. 91), 'two ways of working within one love' (ch. 48; p. 102), 'two kinds of sickness' (ch. 73; p. 148), 'four ways in which the body dried' (ch. 17; p. 63), 'four kinds of fear' (ch. 74; p. 150), and much more.

of the revelations received on the first day can barely re-establish itself before commentary on the completed revelations as a whole takes over until the text's conclusion. The questions implicit in Julian's initial account have prompted such an extended response that the narrative framework has been pushed outwards from within by the pressure of meditation at the centre of the work. A sense of its own narrative continuity no longer controls the book, for the first text has been turned inside out. Instead, the narrative of the original day's visionary experience is held in fractured form within what is now the real continuum of Julian's meditations on her visions. Julian's original narrative of two days ends up almost splitting at the seams under the exploration of its own implications, but this is the paradoxical effect of the several time-schemes. There are the two remembered days of revelation along with responses at that time, now seen through the retrospect not only of Julian's intervening meditations over many years but also, as she variously implies, of some subsequent illuminations (ch. 65; p. 139).

In the long text the modern reader gains access to a work that—for all its formal textualization and its alertness to Julian's fellow Christians—retains something of the layered, interleaved structure of a private working draft. It has not been reconfigured into a logical linearity for the benefit of readers who have not shared its author's experience and is criss-crossed with references forward to revelations that have not yet been reported. The acknowledged delay in reaching key understandings fifteen and twenty years after the original revelations would have been sufficient reason for the non-circulation of an uncompleted text, and beyond this Julian may have had other unresolved uncertainties that go unreported in the text as it survives. It is entirely possible that there were more stages and states of Julian's text intervening between the short and long texts which do not survive, whether or not they were ever circulated or remained her working copies. Part of the text's great integrity as a commentary-in-progress derives from Julian's candid admissions of uncertainty and lack of understanding, which are left to stand in her text alongside a record of the process by which she did attain understanding, or accepted what she could not yet know. It is as an uncompleted project shared with the reader that the long text subsumes any more direct but simpler claim to didactic intent in the short text, instead reflecting through its very form the history of an individual's meditative exploration

towards greater understanding. The long text adds no schematic contemplative programmes for readers to apply for themselves and is not structured by metaphors of spiritual progress: no ascents or pilgrimages are outlined. In essence, Julian offers her own experience as a witness, and her only claim on her reader lies in her conviction that her testimony's value lies not in any endorsement of her singular experience in her secluded life but in its import for all her fellow Christians.

'The noblest thing he ever made is mankind'

Some of the uniqueness of Julian's response to her visionary experience—and the consequent challenge for modern readers of the resulting text—lies in the depth and originality with which Julian considers her revelations from theological perspectives, which become inseparable from how the revelations are perceived. At the heart of the longer text, Julian's meditations on her thirteenth and fourteenth revelations include some of her most familiar concerns: the challenge represented by sin, the role of prayer, our 'godly will' that never consented to sin, and Julian's understanding of how Christ is our mother. There is much that is exploratory and much that may seem reiterative in Julian's method in these chapters, where Julian's characteristically independent exposition of the structure of the soul helps inform an understanding of the implications of the incarnation which unifies Julian's concerns in her meditations and how she resolves them.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE SOUL: SUBSTANCE AND SENSORY BEING

Made in God's image, there is nothing more like God than the human soul (ch. 58; pp. 126–8). Unlike the human body, which is created out of earthly matter, God would take nothing for the making of the human soul (ch. 53; p. 119). The soul is created, but out of nothing that is created, by God who is himself uncreated, and with the consequence that there neither can nor shall be anything between God and man's soul (ch. 53; p. 119). Moreover, all human souls were made all at once, and kept united to God (ch. 58; p. 126). Our souls have a pre-existence in the Second Person of the Trinity before individual bodies are created in the course of time.

As the higher part of the soul, God created its substance or essence, and the highest part of the soul, its apex, is that portion of the soul's substance that remains grounded in God's substance, his uncreated being. Our soul dwells in God's substance, and we participate in God's substance. Our soul, made from nothing, has a natural affinity to the unmade substance of God's nature. Julian avoids claiming that God and the human soul can be one and the same, suggesting rather that the substance of our soul exists in God without being identical to him. Julian also makes a careful distinction between what she was shown and what she nevertheless understands. Although she may have seen no difference between God and our substance, she understands that our substance is in God: which is to say, that God is God, and our substance is a created thing in God (ch. 54; p. 120). Moreover, although the soul may always be like God in nature and in substance, restored by grace, it is often unlike God in condition through sin (ch. 43; p. 95).

The other part of the soul is what Julian terms in Middle English our 'sensuality', or sensory being.[21] Julian goes beyond the conventional, in ignoring not only the traditionally gendered view of a masculine higher and a female lower part of the soul, but also the customary stress on a divisive split between body and soul. Nor in practice does Julian much emphasize substance and sensory being as higher and lower than each other—even if she acknowledges this (ch. 55; p. 122)—for there is only one soul, and all language of space, division, and higher or lower, may mislead. For Julian the sensory being is an integral part of us, for substance is united with sensory being at the very moment that the soul is embodied in a human being. Indeed, God is the means that keeps the substance and the sensory being together so that they shall never separate (ch. 56; p. 123), and this is effected in Christ's incarnation (ch. 57; p. 125).

What Julian understands by the sensory being is evidently more capacious and positive than many medieval definitions. It signifies that part of the soul concerned with bodily knowing and the feeling of bodily things. It is our bodily being in the world of time, informed by our soul, a nexus between the bodily and the spiritual, between

[21] 'Substance' remains a technical theological term, as it was for Julian, and so has not been translated. The modern English 'sensuality' is too limited and negative in meaning to translate Julian's Middle English 'sensualite', which has generally been translated as 'sensory being'.