

JULIAN

RECONSIDERED



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Sister Benedicta SLG

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The drawing of the Julian cell on the cover is by Sr Catherine SLG.

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Here is a vision shewed by the goodnes of god to a
 devout woman and her name is Julian that is recluse at
 Norwiche and yet is alive. Anno dñi m^o cccc^o lxiij
 vij. In the which vision is full many comfortable wordes and
 greatly stirring to alle they that desire to be crystes
 lovers.

I desire three graces be the gyfte of god. The first was
 to have mynde of cryste as passion. The second was
 to have spekes and the third was to have of godys gyfte three
 mynds. For the firste come to my mynde with devoun my thought
 I hadde grete felinge in the passion of cryste wiche tyme I desirede
 to have more be the grace of god. my thought wolde have bene
 that tyme with mary magdeleyne and with othe that were
 crystes lovers that I myght have seene howe the passion of our
 lord that he suffered for me that I myght have suffered with
 hym as othe did that word for me withstandinge that I had
 hadde alle the payne of cryste as hadde hys seyners & tervys &
 alle the panyngs of crucyfyng that he made be the grace of
 god after the tervynge of hys kysse to the hys of crystes passi-
 on alle farfurthe as man vs wiche maye wiche & wiche
 druge alle this tyme be seene. I desirede abedive speke wiche
 my myght have more knowynge of howe he was of our
 lord and of the compassion of our ladye and of all
 his tyme lovers that were be lewde in payne that tyme
 and othe. For I wolde have seene one of thame and suffered

The incipit of the Short Text of *The Revelations of Divine Love*.
 (British Library Additional MS 37790, f. 97)

The first lines of the text read: Here is a vision shewed by the goodness
 of God to a devout woman and her name is Julian that is recluse at
 Norwich and yet is alive, anno domini 1413. In which vision is full many
 comfortable words and greatly stirring to all they that desire to be Christ's
 lovers.

Sister Benedicta SLG

JULIAN THE SOLITARY



AT THE END of her marvellous novel, *The Man on a Donkey*,
 H.F.M. Prescott describes the sweet fool of the book, Malle,
 returning to the recently dissolved nunnery of Marrick and
 wandering down to the banks of the Swale carrying with her
 various leaves torn from manuscripts which she gathered up in
 the cloister. She laid a stone upon the painted pages lying in a
 bright litter at her feet, and began folding them one by one into
 little boats. On one of these pages were the words

It is true, that sin is the cause of all this pain; but all shall be well,
 and all manner of thing shall be well.

And the poignant conclusion of the scene continues:

When Malle had made all the little ships ready to sail, she set them on
 the water, where it lapped, trembling and bright, close to her feet. They
 bobbed and curtseyed there, loitering a minute till the strength of the
 river caught them. Then they went dipping and dancing away towards
 the sea.¹

It is a fiction, and its main point is in its subtle underlining of
 the loss of the old ways of religion at the dissolution of the
 monasteries, but perhaps it is permissible to give it a shade of
 meaning more closely connected with the text written on those
 paper boats, for when making any comments on the *Revelations
 of Divine Love* it is useful to remember that the original text of
 the *Revelations of Divine Love* is lost.

The Texts

Julian, in the late fourteenth century, wrote two books: the
 'Short Text', the record of the revelation, written shortly after
 1373, and the 'Long Text', her meditation on the revelation
 over the next twenty years which was finished about 1393.
 Both books were copied; her own manuscripts have not so far
 been found. The oldest surviving copy is that of the Short Text

preserved in a collection of devotional works, British Museum Additional MS 37790, where it occupies nineteen pages of a beautifully written fifteenth century manuscript, which was in the possession of a Yorkshire Catholic family and then in the library of Lord Amherst until it was presented to the British Museum in 1909. There are no known copies of the complete Long Text earlier than the mid-seventeenth century; it is known exclusively through three manuscripts now in Paris and London, with some selections in a manuscript at Upholland and one in the Westminster Cathedral Archives. All are in difficult seventeenth century hands, and differ significantly from one another. One of the London manuscripts was perhaps copied out in the mid seventeenth century by Dame Clementina Cary, foundress of the English Benedictine nunnery in Paris. The selections of the Westminster manuscript are associated with the English Benedictine nuns at Cambrai. The first printed edition was made by Dom Serenus Cressy in 1670 for members of this community. Older copies may have survived among the English nuns on the Continent, giving them an interest in Julian, but if so they have disappeared. Cressy's edition was reprinted in 1843 but commentaries on and translations of the Long Text did not appear until thirty years later. It was only at the end of the last century with the burst of enthusiasm for the Middle Ages characterized by the Pre-Raphaelites in literature and devotion as well as in art that the *Revelations* began to be read, studied and translated into a more modern English. The first attempts at the very difficult job of making a critical edition of the Long Text were begun fairly recently, and the process is by no means complete.

The Short Text, unknown until the beginning of this century, was printed two years after its discovery and other modernizations and commentaries have now appeared. Between the writing of the texts and the twentieth century, however, almost no references to the *Revelations* have been discovered in contemporary literature and perhaps none were made. Knowledge of this important work is very rare indeed before this century. Since the autograph by Julian herself is lost and there are so few and such late copies, the fact is, we do not know exactly what she wrote; the text is a difficult one to establish let alone interpret.

The image of bright scraps of parchment on the river is correct.

Monastic Commentators

It will be clear from what I have just said that any attention that was paid to the *Revelations of Divine Love* after the Reformation seems to have come initially from the organized religious orders, whether Benedictine, Dominican or Jesuit. It seems to me also that the fact that Julian was 'discovered' by religious who were interested in her primarily as theologians themselves accounts for a special emphasis on the Long Text which has coloured thinking about the author ever since. It is often asserted as known fact that 'when young she entered a religious house . . . and was still there . . . in her fiftieth year'.² It has been tentatively suggested several times that she might not have spent her life in a convent but usually that has only been proposed in order to be rejected. Every effort has been made to place her in the tradition of theologians, educated writers, and monastic orders. It is now generally assumed that she was a nun, probably at Carrow, before she became a solitary. Her latest editors, the Jesuit Walsh and the Augustinian Colledge go so far as to assert that when she says 'This work was begun by God's grace but it is not yet performed' she 'is obliquely stating her intention to retire from monastic life to the yet more severe rule of solitary enclosure';³ one could hardly get a more blinkered reading of the text. It is concentration on the Long Text by those dedicated to the religious life that has produced this monastic Julian.

For myself, I am interested in the *Revelations* first of all as a historian, and not as a theologian, and it is therefore not the Long Text with all its extraordinary flights of sublime theology that most interests me but the older manuscript of the Short Text. It seems to me that who Julian was can affect the reading of the text, perhaps not in any major way but in some details, and I therefore propose to look again at Julian herself and especially to challenge the assertion that she was at any time in a convent and to suggest a very different background for the author of this priceless text. I do this not only out of historical curiosity, but because a close attention to this work and a study of the tradition of the solitary life has suggested this to me;⁴

also, I find that my reading of the *Revelations* is enhanced by having this idea in mind; she speaks more truly and consistently, and many of the minor difficulties of the text disappear. I do not give this as any more than my opinion; at each stage the evidence I produce can be interpreted differently; but the cumulative effect seems to me convincing. I do this of course in direct opposition to Julian's own preference that no attention should be given to herself but only to her message;⁵ however my excuse is that attention has already been given to her and the picture which is being presented is already proving a block to her message by making it appear to be difficult and complex rather than profound and simple.

The Solitary Tradition

There has always been a tradition in Christian ascetic practice of men and women who become hermits without any previous training in a monastic house. Almost always they have later had contact with a community, and very often this is why details of their lives have been preserved; but it has by no means been the rule at any time that a hermit or anchorite must belong to a community of religious first. In England especially the idea of the individual solitary, this do-it-yourself approach to solitude, seems to have been more than usually popular and never so closely linked with the monasteries as elsewhere.

In the first years of the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons, for instance, there were many solitaries, particularly under the influence of Ireland, who had no training in religious communities at all. The variety of relationship between the different Christian vocations was re-established from the first: there were married men, like Drythelm, who left his wife and children and went to live as a recluse near the monastery of Melrose,⁶ or Columba, a princely solitary and exile, fleeing from the results of his own arrogance to the island of Iona, around whom a group formed.⁷ Aidan combined a life of mission in Northumbria with frequent withdrawals into solitude,⁸ while Cuthbert was a monk of Melrose and Lindisfarne before he went as a solitary to Farne, returning as a bishop for a few years before going back to die in his island hermitage. He seems to have puzzled the monks of Lindisfarne greatly by this, and it took a

man of marvellous and quiet insight, Bede, even to glimpse the meaning of his life.⁹ Guthlac, a kind of Robin Hood in his early life, became a hermit in the fens at Crowland with only fourteen months spent in a monastery in order to learn, it appears, not the monastic but the clerical life, before he went into life-long solitude.¹⁰

The tradition of solitary life seems to have survived the Conquest and both in chronicles of the times and in romances hermits are a familiar part of the landscape, for consultation by kings, knights and travellers.¹¹ The tradition of non-monastic solitaries in England seems to have continued and they became still more popular as a class recognized and valued in themselves. There still continued to be monks and nuns, also, who after monastic training chose the solitary life, but the three best-known solitaries in England between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries had only had a tenuous connection with monasteries and were none of them trained there: Godric of Finchale, that unique individualist, began life as a poor boy, a scavenger, and became a self-made merchant trader who may have married and who left his eminently successful career in middle life to become a self-made solitary at Finchale; it was only after he had lived there for some years that he formed links of friendship with the monastery at Durham.¹² Wulfric of Haselbury, after a dissolute youth, though in priest's orders, was at once enclosed as an anchorite in a cell built against the church in his village of Haselbury when he underwent conversion, and only after his death was he of interest to the monks of Ford and Montacute.¹³ Christina of Markyate, the only English woman to be the subject of hagiography in this period, was a young woman betrothed against her wishes, who fled from her home not into a nunnery, since they would not receive her, but into the woods around St Albans where she lived at first with the anchoress Ailwen and then in a cell adjoining that of Roger, a solitary attached to St Albans; her biography in its present state breaks off when her solitary life ended and she went to a nunnery as abbess.¹⁴ A most revealing account of solitary life, called *The Ancren Wisse*, was written in England in the twelfth century for three lay women who lived as anchoresses, advising them about both the spiritual and practical aspects of their life, which was specifically

to be outside any of the existing monastic rules.¹⁵

In the fourteenth century as in the fourth, Christian life in either monastery or family could equally be a preface to a vocation to solitude. Moreover, the solitary life seems to have been regarded officially as special and different from both lay and monastic life though linked to both; when the *Liber Vitae* of Lindisfarne listed the glorious dead, solitaries were placed in a class alone after the first class of the kings and before the class of bishops and abbots. In the liturgy for All Saints, 'holy hermits' are a separate rank of sanctity. The author of the *Libellus de Diversis Ordinibus* says that he has 'decided to deal with the orders and callings in such a way that the hermits . . . are placed first', and he describes several kinds of solitary life before turning to the monastic orders.¹⁶

The Fourteenth Century

But it seems that in fourteenth century England at least, the gap between the spirituality of the cloister and the hermitage was growing. The desire for intense prayer rarely led people into the cloistered life; the 'stars' were all outside it or tenuously associated with the newer orders of friars or canons. There were solitaries who had begun as members of religious orders, like John de Lacy, a professed Dominican friar who became a hermit at Newcastle-under-Lyme,¹⁷ or Bartholomew, who was a monk, albeit a marginal one, at Durham before he became a solitary on Farne.¹⁸ But real spiritual vigour was beginning to be manifested in movements of lay piety rather than in the religious orders: the *Imitation of Christ* after all, came from Thomas à Kempis and belonged more to the *devotio moderna* than to the religious orders.¹⁹ In England the individual independent strain that was always present, deepened, and the works of the English mystics of the fourteenth century were associated not with the religious orders but with solitaries.

The first in time and the best known in his own time, Richard Rolle, simply sent himself down from Oxford and made himself into a solitary, wearing a dress belonging to his sister; far from being a monk he was critical of monasticism and even insisted that it was impossible for monks in monasteries to undertake contemplation at all.²⁰ It was not monks but laymen

following the solitary life who were the recipients of advice about prayer, whether from Richard Methley, the Carthusian,²¹ Walter Hilton, the Augustinian, or the unknown author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*; it was not to the cloister but to the hermitage that their counsel was offered.

Moreover, the tradition of non-monastic solitaries was not confined to the 'stars'. Of its nature, the life of a solitary is hidden and unknown, but there are glimpses of other women who became independent solitaries, some of whom had been married. In the fourteenth century Loretta of Hackington, who had been the wife of the Earl of Leicester became at his death an anchoress at St Stephen's Church, Hackington; Joan, the widow of Sir William Clapton, was enclosed in the church of Lower Quinton in Gloucestershire; Katherine of Ledbury who had been the wife of Robert Fitz Parnell, Baron Dudley, became a recluse in 1323, having reared two sons and a daughter after the death of their father in 1299. The mother of the wife of Sir John de Beauchamp was also enclosed as an anchoress.²² The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in England have been called the golden age of the solitary life; these solitaries, I suggest, were as often from ordinary lay life as from the religious orders.

It is in this tradition of the lay solitary following a special vocation, called from the world rather than from the cloister that I would place the author of the *Revelations of Divine Love*. In the light of this I suggest that Julian was not a nun at any time; I go further and say that she may well have been a young widow and also have been a mother before she became an anchoress. I present my reasons for these conclusions under three headings: external evidence; absence of evidence; and internal evidence in the Short Text itself.

The External Evidence

First, what evidence external to the *Revelations* is there about its author? Very little indeed and none which connects Julian with a nunnery. There is the sentence with which the scribe who copied the Short Text introduced the *Revelations*; there is some evidence to be found in certain Norwich wills; and there is the account of a visit paid to Julian by Margery Kempe of Lynn. The scribe who copied the Short Text in the fifteenth

century describes the author as 'a devout woman and her name is Julian that is a recluse at Norwich and she is still living in this year of our Lord 1413'.²³ The Short Text, then, was written during Julian's lifetime, by someone who had either met her or known someone who had. Julian is described as a recluse and a devout woman, but not a nun, which is suggestive. She is referred to as a recluse 'of Norwich', of a town, not of a nunnery; and she is called Julian.

Can anything be made of her name and the dedication of the church to St Julian? 'Julian anchorite at St Julian's in Norwich' is the name given her in one of the wills. It is possibly a coincidence that her name was 'Julian' also, but there are instances of religious people changing their names in accordance with a change in life-style and perhaps she called herself after the patron of the church where she lived. It may be that the dedication to St Julian meant more to her than simply the name of a saint. Seventeen Julian's are listed in the *Acta Sanctorum* and of the seven churches in England known to have been dedicated to St Julian, it is usually Julian the Hospitaller that is meant, a married man said to have been a kind of latter-day Oedipus, who accidentally killed his parents and then as a penitent lived a life of solitude and service to the poor and sick, with his wife alongside him.²⁴ Such a dedication would perhaps attract a lay anchoress in her choice of church, or rather, seem an additional confirmation of a choice made for more practical reasons. There was a tradition of anchoresses there after Julian and often with the same name. The information that she was living beside the church of St Julian is supported by two things: the discovery of the remains of an anchorhold there, and by evidence from wills.

There are many wills of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries leaving money or goods to solitaries as well as to religious, to monks presumably for them to offer masses, to the solitaries for their prayers. A number of wills made in Norfolk in the fourteenth century contain references which seem to be to Julian.²⁵ In 1394 when Julian was fifty-one there was a bequest of two shillings by Roger Reed of Norwich to 'Julian the anchorite', and Thomas Edmund of Aylesham in 1404 left one shilling to 'The anchorite Julian at St Julian's in Norwich'

and some pence to her servant Sara. In 1415 John Plumpton of Norwich left forty pence to 'the anchoress in the church of St Julian at Conisford in Norwich', and twelve pence each to her maid Alice and her previous maid, additions which suggest that John Plumpton had at various times consulted the anchoress and had been received with kindness by her servants. In 1416 Isabel Ufford died and left forty pence to 'Julian a recluse in Norwich',²⁶ but this may have been another Julian by that date. It seems though that the Julian of the first three wills may well have been the 'devout woman' of the Short Text.

What connection is there between Julian, a recluse at Conisford, and the nunnery at Carrow? The convent of St Mary at Carrow was built by two women, Seyna and Lescalina in 1146, on land granted them by King Stephen. It prospered and in 1273 a papal injunction ordered them only to accept the number of nuns that their income could maintain. Thereafter the number of sisters was never above twenty, with adults, not children, as recruits. At the Dissolution, Carrow had eight nuns 'of very good name by repute in the county', with an income under 100 pounds a year; the only complaints the sisters had made to the Commissioners were trivial grumblings about certain sisters who made themselves girdles of silk, about the thinness of the beer provided at table, that some thought the Office was chanted too quickly. In the early fifteenth century, during Julian's lifetime, matters had not run so smoothly at Carrow: in 1396 the prioress, Edith de Wylton, was prosecuted for giving sanctuary to the murderess of William Koe of Trows, and in 1443, the mismanagement of another prioress, Alice Waryn, caused the bishop to intervene and place the affairs of the priory in the hands of a local gentlemen for two years. Carrow seems to have been deeply embedded in the life of the local countryside, a house of no great pretensions to spirituality and certainly with no school, library or concern with education.

As a small house, Carrow priory needed an income and part of this came by holding the advowson and income of certain churches despite the fact that such practices were contrary to canon law. One of these was the church of St Julian at Conisford. The connection was a formal one, the prioress and her administrators appointed the priest who had charge of the

church and would be aware of any anchorite who lived there. Such a link cannot be stretched to mean that the sisters could be hermits there; an anchoress in a parish would be under the authority of the bishop, and not that of a prioress, and there by his blessing. A nun who wanted to be a solitary would be given a place near the convent and would continue to be protected by her community.

Some nuns became solitaries and another 'Julian', Juliana Lampit, may have been one at Carrow. The Norwich wills mention frequent bequests to Dame Julian Lampit, a recluse who lived with her household in the grounds of Carrow priory; earlier writers suspected that she was the Julian who was the author of the *Revelations*, but it seems to be only the coincidence of names that connects her with this text. In the wills Juliana Lampit is consistently referred to as either 'Dame Julian, anchoress at Carrow' or 'the anchoress of Carrow'. In 1466 a payment was made 'to the anchoress at Carrow' on occasion of the funeral of John Paston, which the prioress of Carrow attended with her maid. Juliana Lampit may have been a nun of Carrow before she became an anchoress in the grounds of the priory. Anchoresses were supported either by a religious community or by gifts, while sometimes part of their lands would supply their income. In the case of Juliana Lampit it may have been a mixture of all three. One more inference can be drawn from these wills: bequests to Juliana Lampit are listed along with bequests to the prioress and each of the nuns of the priory; in other words, a nun-recluse was considered legally to remain a member of the community. The wills leaving money to Julian, the anchoress at Conisford, however, are direct bequests, with no mention of the priory at all.

There is one other direct reference to Julian as a respected anchoress living in Norwich and that is in Margery Kempe's account of her visit to Norwich specifically to consult Julian, which is well-attested and of great interest. The married visionary of Lynn consulted William Southfield, a friar of Norwich and afterwards was 'commanded by our Lord' to go and see 'an anchoress in the same city who was called Julian'. This was in 1413 when Julian was in her seventieth year, having completed both versions of her revelations and already become known for

her wise advice in matters concerning the inner life. Perhaps it is significant that it seemed appropriate for Margery to go to consult Julian about her inner experiences at a time when she had borne a child and decided it should be her last; Julian commended her choice of chastity, 'for all chaste liveres are temples of the Holy Ghost' and urged her to have confidence in her own experience of God and not to be swayed by criticism. They seem to have had more than one conversation, in which Julian took seriously Margery's account of her revelations, so different in style from those of Julian herself: 'great was the holy conversation that the anchoress and this creature had through talking of the love of our Lord Jesus Christ for the many days that they were together'.²⁷

Absence of Evidence

Secondly, if Julian had been a nun, what is there that is missing? She is never mentioned in any existing records of Carrow Priory or any other nunnery. She never refers to her sisters or addresses any remarks to or about nuns or monks; all her concern is for 'mine even Christians', the lay folk, the holy people of God. She makes no mention of any monastic practices or formation whatsoever, and her writings bear no marks of the cloister at all. Moreover, is it at all likely that a nunnery with such a member, known in her own time as an outstanding counsellor and visionary, would not have done two things: made a fuss to ensure her burial in their grounds and boasted of it; and made sure of having copies made of her *Revelations* and both keeping them securely, and making them available? The virtual disappearance of her work and the almost total silence about it suggests few copies were ever made; and it follows perhaps that this was because she did not belong inside any settled monastic community with a scriptorium. Her name and where she came from are both entirely unknown; but had she been a nun at Carrow there is one external event which makes it highly unlikely that she would have been able to leave the cloister for the anchorage: in 1369 when Julian was twenty-seven, the plague called the Black Death recurred; of the sixteen nuns then at Carrow four died; hardly a moment for the community to agree to the enclosing of another young nun as an anchoress.

Internal Evidence

Thirdly, what can be learnt from the *Revelations* themselves, especially the Short Text, the surest source for information about the author? Some of the meagre hints can perhaps be fleshed out by reference to the context of her times. First, from her own words it is possible to establish that she was born in 1342 by her reference to her age of thirty and a half in 1373; most probably from her use of English she was born in England though not necessarily in Norwich; Yorkshire has been plausibly suggested from the evidence of the dialect she uses. Thirty and a half is a long time to account for in the life of a medieval woman; what was she doing then? She could have been a nun but I think it most unlikely, not only because of her silence about religious life but because of one very simple fact: she would have been six when there occurred the first onslaught of the plague known as the Black Death (to distinguish it from other plagues and now thought to have been a kind of anthrax affecting people) which eventually destroyed one third of the population of England. The instinctive reaction after great disasters is towards marriage and childbearing. It was in just such a situation that Julian grew up and no one was to know if the plague would return. At marriageable age it is most unlikely that Julian would have remained unmarried and there is no reason to suppose that she herself wished for anything else.

The passages in the *Revelations* which have been alleged to contradict this are, first, her early desire for the three gifts of God, 'mind of His Passion, bodily sickness in youth and to have the three wounds in her life of very contrition, kind compassion and steadfast longing towards God';²⁸ and secondly, by the phrase addressed to her by God, 'I thank thee for thy travail and especially in thy youth'.²⁹ For the first point, the three wishes are exactly in line with devout aspirations of lay people of her times and were not confined to novices. The fact that she then forgot about them suggests that they were certainly not for her a determining factor leading to monastic life; had this been the case, she would have built upon them; had they prefaced a life in the cloister, they are just the kind of thing a devout little novice might remember and live from. But any pious girl might

have thought of just those desires; the piety of her times taught her to do so; but whereas a nunnery would have been a place where they were remembered, marriage, especially a happy marriage, with the responsibility of a household, might well cause anyone to forget such ideas until the coincidence of illness at a significant age (that mysterious thirty that marked the beginning of the public ministry of Christ) reminded her of them. For the second point, 'young' could well refer to Julian at the age she was when the revelations began, since in the fourteenth century up to thirty was counted, in theory at least, as 'youth'. This comment of the Lord could therefore be seen not as saying she had consecrated her childhood (the modern sense of 'youth') to God but as meaning her consecration to him at that moment through suffering. In the next chapter she supports this idea of 'youth' as a theological concept when she says 'every man's age will be known in heaven'.³⁰

Thirty may have been 'youth' to the theologians through a calculation based on biblical numerology; for the realities of life, with fifty as the usual but not invariable limit of life, thirty was middle age, by which time a woman should have been married for at least fifteen years. At thirty Julian fell seriously ill and all she says about her situation fits more easily with the idea of a household than with a nunnery. In her illness her bedside was crowded with friends, not sisters; her mother was also there and they were all prepared to laugh heartily. She sent for 'the parson, my curate', a phrase suggesting either a chaplain to a private household or the parish priest, and he came with a boy and a cross.³¹ Later she mentions a conversation with a cleric at her bedside, again involving laughter. No abbess or infirmarian seems to have come near her. In place of some mention of prayers at her bedside for a dying nun, Julian says she wanted to warn those around her to love God more and leave earthly vanity. At the end of the Short Text it is Julian's even-Christians that still occupy her mind: 'God wants us always to be strong in our love and peaceful and restful as He is towards us, and He wants us to be for ourselves and for our fellow-Christians, what He is for us. Amen.'³² I suggest that Julian wrote those words as a young widow living in her own household with her mother and her servants.

The Long Text is a most carefully wrought piece of theology, and one which retains very little of the personal links of the Short Text with Julian's actual experience of the revelations in her sickness. But it seems to me that there is something to be detected in one of the most striking sections in the Long Text where Julian gives a detailed image comparing the work of Christ to that of a mother. Clearly, this flows naturally from her meditations and is an integral part of her thought. There is no need to suppose she had ever heard of the rare uses of this image by any predecessors; it is there in the Scriptures, if you want a literary source. The beauty of the imagery is clearly her own and belongs naturally to her thinking. But it is one with other intimate images that occur to her about the body and it is an extended image of great detail and tenderness. It always worried me to think that a woman of Julian's maturity still held such memories of her own mother but showed no warmth at all in her solitary mention of her; in fact, her own mother totally misunderstood her, and attempted to close her eyes when all Julian wanted was to have them wide open: 'I did not want to be hindered from seeing because of my love for Him.'³³

If it could be permissible to suppose her to have borne at least one child, as married women should, all the language of motherhood takes on a new and more natural meaning:

the mother's service is nearest, readiest and surest, readiest because it is most loving and surest because it is truest . . . Our bodily bringing to birth is only little, humble and simple . . . still it is He who does it in the creatures by whom it is done . . . A kind, loving mother who knows and sees the need of her child guards it very tenderly as the nature and condition of motherhood will have it. And always as the child grows in stature, she acts differently but she does not change her love; and when it grows older she allows it to be chastised to destroy its faults so as to make the child receive virtues and grace.³⁴

Can one go further and suggest that a child, loved and watched and guarded in this way had died, perhaps in the recurrent onslaughts of plague? In 1361 when Julian would be nineteen a form of plague occurred which was especially fatal to children. The imagery of one passage which occurs soon after her use of the image of motherhood at least suggests a memory of such a thing:

I saw a body lying on the earth which appeared heavy and horrible, and without shape and form, as it were a swollen pit of stinking mud, and suddenly out of this body there sprang a most beautiful creature, a little child, fully shaped and formed swift and lively and whiter than a lily, which quickly glided up to heaven . . . It is more blissful that man be taken from from pain than that pain be taken from man, for if pain be taken from us it may come again.³⁵

Had her young husband died either of plague or in war? So many died of the attacks of plague and many others in the wars of the times; and then perhaps a child died also? No wonder she was most deeply concerned with the problem of pain; no wonder Margery Kempe found a ready listener in Julian when she consulted her as a married woman and a mother.

Literary Sources

The question of Julian's education and what she had read has been one of the chief industries for writers on Julian recently, and is one of the main arguments put forward for her connection with a nunnery. One writer goes so far as to say,

What is . . . beyond any doubt is that when [*sic*] the young Julian had received an exceptionally good grounding in Latin, in Scripture and the liberal arts, and that thereafter she was able and permitted to read widely in Latin and vernacular spiritual classics.³⁶

This would be an exceptional education for anyone, especially all of the liberal arts which as far as I know were unknown in their entirety in medieval Europe. Julian's extensive book-learning is asserted in spite of the fact that there is no evidence in her writing of such extraordinary learning and that what she says herself is that she 'could no letter', meaning of course that she was no scholar in Latin.

I have three points to make in disagreeing with this view of Julian, and the first is this: Why should she have had to have literary sources for her work? There are, in fact, few direct quotations and the ones there are come from either the Bible or popular works easily accessible by eye or ear; beyond that, only parallels can be drawn with other authors. If there is truth, whether in mathematics or in theology, surely it is only sensible to recognize that good thinking can arrive at the same answers independently? There is a kind of presumption in supposing

that she could not possibly have thought for herself, that the little lady would need male instruction and had to have books to read. Why not suppose the simple truth that she thought for years and came up with a startlingly new and immensely cohesive work? There are original thinkers; Anselm of Canterbury was one, Julian was another, and neither gives footnotes.

Secondly, of course Julian could read; 'could no letter' means, as with Teresa of Avila, that she was not a professional scholar. It is clear from the text that she knew the Scriptures well; a good deal she would learn from the liturgy and from preaching, but as a married woman in her own home she would also need to read and write for the management of her household, and it would be no great matter then for her also to read her Bible for herself; there were Bibles already in English and not all of them known as heretical. It was after all a time of lay education, especially among the tradesmen, of whom there were a great many in Norwich, with close contacts through trade with the burgeoning life of the spirit in the Low Countries. Given even an averagely devout husband, there could be far more contact with the world of thought through discussion and table-talk than for any novice in a great abbey with its restricted possibilities for both reading and talk.

Thirdly, the suggestion that she went to school with the nuns at Carrow I think can be discounted entirely; there is no evidence whatever that the sisters ever had a school. For financial reasons they had several people, families or individuals, who lived near the priory as 'borderers' at various times, a few of whom had children with them, but like the other nunneries in England, they had no schools open to outsiders and were constantly being discouraged from taking children into their households like other nobles.³⁷ Since the twelfth century when the Carrow priory was founded, nuns had not accepted children into the cloister as novices, so the need for a school for such had passed; all that was needed was instruction for the novices in singing the Office and other conventual duties. Carrow in particular was always a very small priory, and as I have shown, it was known for other things than education. Like other convents of England after the glorious days of the Anglo-Saxons, the nuns were noted not for their scholarship but for their embroidery.³⁸

The Anchorhold

For all these reasons, then, I suggest that when Julian received the Revelations and wrote her short account of them, she was a young widow living in her own house with her servants and her mother. Were the next years which produced the Long Version of the Revelations passed in her own house so that she became an anchoress only when the second book was finished? Or did she go to her anchorhold at once and produce the Long Text out of the next years of silence and solitude?

I do not think it at all likely that Julian rose from her sick bed and went into her anchorhold. It seems to me probable that the Short Text at least was written in her own household. After all, it would be difficult to dispose of her responsibilities in a flash, with her mother living there, perhaps other children as well, she would hardly be free the moment she recovered from her illness. It may be that after she had completed her Short Text and arranged her responsibilities she went to the anchorhold and by prolonged meditation there wrote the Long Text; indeed the Long version feels like the work of someone with time to concentrate totally on it. That is not, of course, conclusive, and perhaps Julian was not like us; perhaps she did not need a sabbatical in order to think. It is perfectly possible that she wrote the Long Text also in her own home before becoming a solitary; perhaps that is another reason why it took her so long.

In either case, the Long Text of the *Revelations of Divine Love* is remarkable and almost unique among writings that have been produced from within the solitary life. Solitaries have not often been renowned for their literary productions, especially the ones who had no monastic background. Often enough they chose the solitary life partly because they were not interested in reading, writing and arithmetic. With some notable exceptions, like Thomas Merton, what have even the monastic hermits produced in the way of theology or literature of the soul? The works of the hermitage are not often sustained works of such superb theology. In the desert, Evagrius and Cassian were both writing aside from the regular pattern of prayer in the cell; most of the hermits wove mats. Bilfrith, a hermit of Farne, made a jewelled binding for a Gospel book; Cuthbert simply prayed; it

was a solitary who made the first Latin and English grammar; in his hermitage in Newcastle-under-Lyme John de Lacy produced second-rate illuminated manuscripts on request.

There is plenty of writing about solitaries and to solitaries: descriptions of their way of life fill the accounts of visitors to early Egypt; in England the lives of Godric, Wulfric and Christina were written by others. The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* was advising a solitary; so were Aelred of Rievaulx, Walter Hilton, and the author of *The Ancren Wisse*. But what about the solitaries' own inner life, their continuing and deepening knowledge of God? Arsenius turned to pray towards the setting sun and was there to see it rising, but what did he see in the darkness?³⁹ There are hints from some: there are Richard Rolle's lyrics, the meditations of the hermit of Farne, Godric's English songs. Nearly always it is poetry that comes from the hermitage, 'The hint half guessed, the gift half understood'. The solitary has something other to do than the analysis of experience.

A fourteenth century writer described the real work of the solitary like this: 'Nailed and spread fast on the rood in my holy order as Thou wast nailed for me on Thy hard rood.'⁴⁰ In the Eastern Church there is a familiar icon which shows a hermit, wearing the great schema, nailed to a cross, with the words 'I am crucified with Christ' written under it. It seems to me that this is all the hermit life has to say to the world; it is not specifically to do with monastic life or clerical life or analysing or teaching. It is a kind of enlarged version, stripped down to its barest essentials, of what baptismal life is about for every Christian. The hermit is not looking towards the Crucified; there is no other figure on the Cross; he is crucified with Christ. So perhaps Julian, who saw so clearly and wrote so truly about the Crucified, lived for many years afterwards; and in the silence of that anchorhold in Norwich, who knows what prayer and compassion followed on from the *Revelations of Divine Love* that she gave to her even-Christians? If, in fact, Julian wrote about the Revelations of the love of God when she lived in her anchorhold, then they are a rare text which comes directly out of the silence of the cell and has to do with the essence of the solitary life.

With all the saints, it is the day of their death, their entry into heaven that is celebrated each year. With Julian, no one knows when she died but we know exactly when she received the Revelations of love, and it is that date which is celebrated for her, whether it was the VIII or the XIII of May, either the Third Sunday after Easter or a Friday.⁴¹ The truly remarkable thing about Julian is not herself; there are no miracles or cult of Julian, and no Life. It is her message that matters and that is, that the Cross of pain is also the Cross of glory, that the Cross reveals the love of God.

The *Revelations* are not, like every other devotional piece of the time,⁴² a description of the Crucified written to invoke pity and repentance; they are not in the tradition of the *Stabat Mater*; they are serious theology of the love that is God. To Julian the Crucified says not 'Are you sorry your sins crucified me?', but 'Art thou well pleased that I suffered for thee?', and she says simply, 'Yes'.⁴³ For her the Cross is the revelation of the love that is God; and having faced steadily all the implications of this, in the end she can write, 'Love was our Lord's meaning':

He beholds his heavenly treasure with so great love on earth that He will give us more light and solace in heavenly joy, drawing us from the sorrow and darkness we are in. Thanks be to God. Here ends the book of the revelations of Julian the anchorite of Norwich on whose soul may God have mercy. Amen.⁴⁴

DATES PROPOSED FOR JULIAN OF NORWICH

- 1342 Born, probably in England.
 (1348–9 Black Death)
 (1361 Children affected by Black Death)
 (1374 Four out of sixteen nuns at Carrow die of Black Death)
 In this period Julian perhaps married, bore a child/children, one or more of whom died, and was widowed.
- 1373 Illness and Shewings in her own home at 'thirty and a half years old'.
 Dates for Shewings:
 P reads: 'the xiii daie of May'
 SS both read 'viii daie of May'
 May 8th 1373 was after the Feast of St John of Beverley (cf. Ch. 38), also the Third Sunday after Easter, May 13th was a Friday. Time is given as four in the morning; there was a clock that struck the hours on Norwich Cathedral by 1325.
 Julian enclosed as an anchoress at St Julian's in Norwich in this period.
- 1393 Long Text completed.
- 1393 Bequest by Roger Reed of Norwich to the anchoress at Norwich.
- 1404 Bequest of Thomas Edmund: 'Juliane anchorite apud St Juliane in Norwico' with money also to her servant Sarah.
- 1413/6 Visit of Margery Kempe. See *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Ch. 18. Margery lived in Bishop's Lynn (now King's Lynn) 40 miles from Norwich. The *Book* was written in 1436, 'twenty years or more' after Margery's conversion which must therefore be placed about 1416. She visited Norwich soon after the birth of her last child.
- 1413 Short Text reference: 'Here is a vision shewn by the goodness of God to a devout woman whose name is Julyan. She is a recluse at Norwich and is yet alive in this year of Our Lord 1413.'
- 1415 Bequest by John Plumpton of Norwich to the anchoress Julian at Norwich and also to her maid Alice and to her former maid.
- 1416 Bequest by Isabel Ufford of 20s. to 'Julian recluz of Norwich'.
- 1429 Bequest to 'an anchoress in the churchyard of St Julian's.' Therefore perhaps still alive at 87.
- Death date unknown.

Dates for manuscripts and printed texts of her works:

- 1413 Short Text MS British Library Additional MS 37790
- 1500c Selections from Long Text (Westminster Cathedral Archives MS)
- 1640c Selections from Long Text (St Joseph's College, Upholland MS)
- 1650c Long Text (Paris MS Bibliothèque Nationale Fonds anglais 40)
- 1650c Long Text (British Library, Sloane 2499)
- 1700c Long Text (British Library, Sloane 3705)
- 1670 Long Text printed in London from text by Dom Serenus Cressy.
- 1843 Cressy Long Text reprinted.
- 1877 Modernization of Cressy Long Text printed by H. Collins.
- 1901 Grace Warrack's version.
- 1911 Short Text recognized two years after acquired by British Library and printed in a modernized edition by Dundas Hartford.

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1. Thomas Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters*, New York, Delta, 1967, p. 140.
2. Geoffrey Curtis CR, *Two Kinds of Marriage*, MS Julian 600th Anniversary Consultation, Norwich, May 1973.
3. A.M. Ramsey, *Sacred and Secular*, Longmans, 1965, p. 45. Cf. Thomas Merton, *What is Contemplation?* Burns Oates 1980 edn., p. 7, for the same point.
4. Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters*, op. cit., p. 142.
5. J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, London, Penguin Books, 1955, p. 31.
6. William McNamara, *Earthy Mysticism: Contemplation and the Life of Passionate Presence*, New York, Crossroad, 1983, p. ix.
7. Cited in Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution*, Maurice Temple Smith, 1972, p. 104.
8. *The Imitation of Christ*, 3:42.
9. Cited in John D. Godsey, *Preface to Bonhoeffer*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1965, pp. 31–32.
10. Charles Gore, *The Body of Christ*, John Murray, 1901, p. 39.
11. Thomas Merton, *The Geography of Lograire*, cited by Mary Luke Tobin in *National Catholic Reporter*, 18th February 1983, p. 39.
12. Nicholas Berdyaev, *Spirit and Reality*, Bles, 1939, p. 98.
13. E.M. Forster, cited in Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in the 1930s*, Faber, 1979, p. 339.
14. Matthew Fox OP, *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality*, Santa Fe, Bear, 1983, p. 11.
15. Ibid., p. 12. For other writings by Fox, see *A Spirituality Named Compassion: The Healing of the Global Village, Humpty Dumpty and Us*, Minneapolis, Winston Press, 1979; *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality*, New York, Doubleday, 1980; *On Becoming a Musical Mystical Bear*, New York, Paulist Press, 1976; *Whee! We, Wee All the Way Home: A Guide to a Sensual Prophetic Spirituality*, Santa Fe, Bear, 1980.
16. Conrad Noel, *Socialism in Church History*, Frank Palmer, 1910, p. 143.

NOTES TO JULIAN THE SOLITARY

1. H.F.M. Prescott, *The Man on a Donkey*, London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1952, pp. 698–9.
2. Julian of Norwich, *A Book of Shewings to the anchoress Julian of Norwich*, ed. E. Colledge and J. Walsh, Toronto, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1978 (hereafter referred to as Colledge and Walsh), Introduction, Vol. I, p. 43.
3. Ibid. p. 21.
4. I have chosen to use the word 'solitary' throughout rather than either 'hermit' or 'anchorite'; this is because although 'anchor' is in Middle English neuter and therefore appropriate for either man or woman, 'anchor' sounds too much like 'anchor' and at once gives a nautical turn to the subject which I do not intend, although there is precedent for such a fantastic etymology as early as the twelfth century *Ancren Wisse*. 'Hermit' would be another option, or 'ascetic', but both have come to have rather limited meanings, and 'hermit' is used to mean one living alone in a solitary location as distinct from an 'anchorite' whose cell is attached to a building. The term 'anchorite' was much more loosely used in the Middle Ages and the only English word which keeps this wide range of meaning is 'solitary', which I have used to mean one who lives alone for a religious purpose.
5. Short Text of the *Revelations of Divine Love*, Ch. 6. (I will refer to the works of Julian hereafter as 'Short Text' and 'Long Text' giving only the number of the chapters.)
6. Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, Oxford University Press, 1968, Bk. V, Ch. 12.
7. Adomnan, *Life of St Columba*, ed. and trans. A.O. and M.O. Anderson, London, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1961.
8. Bede, op. cit., Bk III, Ch. 16.
9. Bede, *Life of St Cuthbert in Two Lives of St Cuthbert*, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave, Cambridge University Press, 1940.
10. *Felix's Life of St Guthlac*, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave, Cambridge University Press, 1956.
11. E.g. *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, trans. P. Matarasso, Penguin Classics, 1969.
12. Reginald of Durham, *Life of St Godric of Finchale*, ed. J. Stevenson, London, Surtees Society, 1838.

13. John of Ford, *Wulfric of Haslebury*, ed. M. Bell, *Somerset Record Society* XLVII, 1933.
14. *Life of Christina of Markyate*, ed. and trans. C. Talbot, Oxford University Press, 1987.
15. *The Ancren Wisse*, ed. J.R.R. Tolkein, Oxford, Early English Text Society, 1962.
16. *Libellus de Diversis Ordinibus*, ed. and trans. G. Constable, Oxford University Press, 1978.
17. MS 71, St John's College Library, Oxford.
18. *The Monk of Farne*, trans. The Nuns at Stanbrook Abbey, with Introduction by D.H. Farmer, London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1961.
19. Cf. Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price, Penguin Classics, 1972.
20. Cf. Richard Rolle, *The Fire of Love*, trans. Clifton Wolters, Penguin Classics, 1972, Ch. 13, pp. 82–83.
21. Richard Methley, 'Letter to Hugh Hermit', ed. James Hogg, Salzburg, Austria, *Analaecta Carthusiana*, 1978.
22. For further information about English solitaries in the Middle Ages see R.M. Clay, *The Hermits and Anchorites of England*, London, Methuen and Co., 1914, especially Appendix C, pp. 203–283.
23. Preface to the Short Text.
24. For Julian the Hospitaller, cf. B. de Gaiffier, *Analaecta Bollandiana*, XLIII (1945) pp. 144–219.
25. Cf. N.P. Tanner, *Popular Religion in Norfolk with Special Reference to the Evidence of Wills, 1370–1532*, unpublished D. Phil. Thesis, Oxford, 1973.
26. Cf. Introduction to Colledge and Walsh, op. cit., Vol I, p. 34.
27. *The Book of Margery Kempe*, trans. B.A. Windeatt, Penguin Classics, 1985, pp. 76–79.
28. Short Text, Ch. 1.
29. Short Text, Ch. 6.
30. Short Text, Ch. 2.
31. Ibid.
32. Short Text, Ch. 24.
33. Short Text, Ch. 10.
34. Long Text, Ch. 60.
35. Long Text, Ch. 64.
36. Colledge and Walsh, op. cit., Introduction, Vol. 1, p. 44.
37. Walter Rye,

37. Walter Rye, *Carrow Abbey*, Norwich 1889, pp. 48–52.
38. Cf. Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, Cambridge University Press, 1922, Ch. VI, pp. 237–281.
39. *Sayings of the Desert Fathers, The Alphabetical Collection*, trans. Benedicta Ward, London, A.R. Mowbray and Co. Ltd., 1975/83, Arsenius 30, p. 12.
40. *A Talkyng of the Love of God*, ed. M.S. Westra, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1950, p. 58.
41. I prefer the date XIII to VIII since it is easier for the copiest's eye to have mistaken an X for a V than vice versa.
42. For further discussion of this point see S. Bhattacharji's article on Julian of Norwich in *Word and Spirit*, 1989.
43. Short Text, Ch. 12.
44. Long Text, Ch. 86.