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Comfort and Meaning in the Showings of
Julian of Norwich

Philip V. Hiebert

A Thesis
in
The Department
of
English

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

March 1993

c Philip V. Hiebert, 1993



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ISBN 0-315-90937-4

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Abstract

Comfort and Meaning in the Showings of
Julian of Norwich

Philip V. Hiebert

Composed over a period of at least 20 years, Julian of Norwich's Book of Showings is not an impersonal reflection in a mystical void, but rather functions as a key to interpretation of real experience carried to all levels of significance. Despite the radically private nature of the experiences leading to her "showings", the resolution of Julian's struggle with what for her became the twin problems of suffering and failure takes place within the context of the public resolution of her emotional and intellectual discomfort. To achieve this resolution, Julian develops a multi-layered discourse of often contradictory enunciations from diverse sources. Julian's development of these differing authoritative enunciations in accordance with an Augustinian model of the Trinity, and expanded to the level of religious community through the symbolic imagery of interpersonal relationships, has a dramatic significance for her in the interpretation of her own experience, and ultimately provides the Showings with their structural unity and coherence. The literary significance of the Showings, however, is largely rooted in Julian's handling of the relationship between theological knowledge or insight, and individual affective orientation, as she searches to confirm a message of essential comfort in a world of persistent

limitation. Her achievement in linking together the problems of both knowledge and love as a single concern in all forms of personal difficulty, and demonstrating this relationship through highly developed forms of engagement with her reader, is the central focus of this thesis.

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Introduction

Very little is known of the life of Julian of Norwich. What little information there is, is gathered in the biographical chapter in the introduction to Colledge and Walsh's critical edition, A Book of Showings to the anchoress Julian of Norwich.¹ We know from her own writings that she must have been born about the beginning of 1343 since she puts her age at thirty and a half on May 13, 1373 (2, 285), the day on which she underwent an extraordinary experience which was to be the focus of her literary life. Whatever happened on this date, an event of some intense psychological weight, it occupied her attentions for at least twenty years; for it was not to her mind resolved satisfactorily until February of 1393 (14/51, 520). The preface to her short text begins with her statement that she is still alive in 1413, and living as an anchoress at Norwich, in which capacity she is also the recipient of various bequests recorded in the wills of that time. Although these bequests continue until 1415 or later, there is some indication that Julian may have died soon after the date of the short text's prologue -- at which time another recluse, also taking the name of the Norwich church's patron saint Julian, replaced her.²

¹ Vol. I, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978) 34-38. All citations in my thesis are from this edition.

² Colledge and Walsh, 34.

The event that occurred in Julian's thirty-first year had the force of some considerable distress. She records physical suffering -- she was paralysed from the neck downwards with her eyes fixed straight ahead -- which completely convinced her that she would die on that evening. After receiving last rites, and having a crucifix placed in front of her, she began to experience a series of intellectual and imaginative visions, centred on the image of Christ dying on the cross. In the course of these visions her physical pain left her, although her intense psychological oppression returned at times, both throughout the night and at various periods during the rest of her life. After the visions ended that night -- and she recorded a total of fifteen in all -- she was left in a state of doubt and torment; but this was relieved by an additional and concluding vision on the following night. What occurred next was a prolonged period of reflection in which Julian, as her narrative develops, can be seen to be struggling to arrive at a resolution of the meaning of her visions as they related to her own ongoing experiences and difficulties.

We have her writings in two versions, a short and a long text. The short text came first, and exhibits considerable insight and literary skill; from there she went on to develop theological and rhetorical skills of the highest order by the time she had completed the second and longer edition of her life's work. My thesis will deal almost solely with the long

text considering it to be the most fully developed. Unless otherwise indicated all references are thus to the long version. There are, however, interesting possibilities for exploration to be found by a comparison of the long and short texts, and future researchers of Julian should in no way be discouraged from this form of inquiry.

In a brief prologue (chs. 1-3) to her showings in the long text Julian describes her spiritual quest for three gifts of divine grace: a mental recollection or "mynde" (a word suggestive of both memory and presence in the Middle English literary tradition) of Christ's passion, a bodily sickness, and three wounds, which she delineates as those of compassion, contrition and longing for God. What follows in the vision sequence is then narrated as a fulfillment of these requests.

Of the visions, or "showings" -- sixteen in all -- the first is the most comprehensive; i.e., it contains the sense of the whole and the remainder can be regarded as expanding upon it. In the first showing, moreover, there is given an outline of the doctrinal foundations upon which those later expansions are built. As Julian herself writes in her own summation, "in this was contained and specified the blessed Trinity, with the Incarnation and the union between God and man's soul, with many fair revelations and teachings of endless wisdom and love, in which all the revelations that follow are grounded and connected" (1, 281). Throughout the first vision Julian describes the image of Christ in his

bodily suffering, with blood running down from the thorns on his head to reveal the "plentuous shedyng of his precious blode" (8/1, 317). Christ is portrayed as majestic and courteous, extending to humankind a communication of "marvelous homelynesse" (7/1, 314) despite His noble and exalted state. Also important in this vision are questions about the nature and use of prayer, the purpose of the visions for this life, and the description of three types of showing that Julian experienced: bodily, discursive, and spiritual (1/9, 323).

Structurally, the rest of the Showings' ostensibly conform to the chronological sequence of the showings themselves, followed by a concluding vision on the following night, in which the shape of Julian's own theological position is developed and explained. The chronological sequence, however, is complicated by a growing tension between Julian's own increasing understanding of spiritual matters, attributed to the workings of the "Holy Spirit" within her, and the received doctrines in which she has at some previous time been instructed and which she respects because they have the authority of "Holy Church". These two sources of guidance, held together in a Trinitarian schema in which both "Word" (Holy Church) and "Spirit" appear to her as authentic representations of God's creative principle, come increasingly into conflict in Julian's early visions. Their conflict, however, is ultimately resolved through a parable of a Lord

and his Servant which she includes in Chapter 51 (fourteenth showing). Absent from the short text, this parable, Julian tells us, was only made clear to her understanding twenty years after she received the original visions, though its images and drama were part of the original revelation. It is through this parable, moreover, that much of her understanding of the entire sequence of visions is formed. Although one can only speculate on the mental and psychological processes involved in Julian's "sudden" insight into the meaning of the parable, it would seem likely that it was not an isolated "spontaneous" event, but instead came out of the prolonged period of reflection which the writing of the rest of the vision sequence required. This hypothesis may also apply more generally to Julian: she perhaps arrives at an understanding of as much of her experience as she can comprehend through her literary representation of it, through her attempts to shape her narrative of what she had (hitherto) found incomprehensible.

After the encapsulation that is the first showing, each of the visions develops a particular aspect of Julian's Revelation. In the second showing Julian presents a new image of Christ and an additional "parte of his passion" as his visage discolours and darkens, becoming ever more frightening. Following this is a discussion of the relation between seeking God and seeing God. Here Julian remarks on the necessity to see in order to seek -- on how, in the act of seeking, one

already sees.

The third revelation introduces the question of sin, a question arising from its notable omission from all that Julian is shown. She also here explores the relationship between divine purpose and human actions, something which she takes up in the context of the relation between creation and redemption.

The fourth showing returns to the image of the scourged and bleeding Christ, whose blood Julian now compares to water flowing upwards to heaven and filling with its bounty all that is lacking on earth.

In the fifth showing Julian describes the defeat of the fiend who works to malign and oppress God's creation. This fiend is scorned and despised by "our Lord" (a term that Julian reserves primarily for the Holy Spirit) in "game," much to the delight and laughter of humankind, and he is then overcome by Christ in "earnest" through the acts of His passion and heavy labour.

The sixth showing, focusing on the pain and labour of the servants of the Holy Spirit, offers a vision of heaven in which all who so labour for God are thanked. This thankfulness is made known to all the blessed in heaven, and the joy it brings is everlasting.

The seventh showing returns to Julian's own feelings, beginning with a sense of everlasting relief from all of her pains. But this feeling of comfort lasts only momentarily; it

quickly turns back into one of inner oppression and weariness. As this cycle repeats itself (some twenty times), Julian offers her understanding that the painful feelings do not result from her own sin any more than she can claim responsibility for the sudden feeling of comfort and joy. The overall message she gains is that feelings of pain should not be pursued into sorrow and mourning, but be "suddenly passed over" (15/7, 356), to allow a renewed apprehension of the endless delight of God.

The eighth showing depicts the dying Christ as a discoloured, pitiful and dry figure, losing blood and moisture as He reaches the final stages of His death. This leads to a discussion of thirst, both physical and spiritual, and an affective shift for Julian in which her own pains become less significant to her than the sufferings of Christ in which she shares.

In the ninth showing Julian sees the countenance of Christ suddenly transformed so as to express no longer his manifold sufferings, but instead a joy and bliss in which Julian shares. A reciprocity is established between Julian's satisfaction that her suffering has been overcome and Christ's that He was able to suffer for her. The effect of Christ's transformation from pain helps Julian to shift her attention from the presence or absence of comfort to its meaning, as she comes to understand that a final redemption has already been accomplished, and can be shared by all "those who will be

saved".

In the tenth showing Julian understands more deeply what the nature of Christ's eternal redemptive love is and how it is integrated with her own seeking for the comfort of God's presence, a comfort rooted in the transformation of the hard labour of pain and suffering into endless joy and bliss.

The eleventh showing is a spiritual vision of St. Mary. Julian sees her in terms of Christ's own love for his mother: as a noble, glorious and joyful creature, most pleasing to Him.

The twelfth showing depicts Christ as the essence of all life and final goal of all seeking.

The thirteenth showing focuses on the transformation of our sins from what is perceived as blame in the sight of God, into what is really honour and worship. Sin is "no substance" for Julian, but is known through the pain it causes, and this pain leads to self-knowledge. This theme is fundamental to Julian's conception of knowledge and self-awareness (the subject of my chapters three and four). A tension builds up in this showing over how to reconcile her understanding of sin with the more traditional teachings about it. A partial solution comes with the realisation that there are some "secrets" to the spiritual universe which cannot be known in this life.

In the fourteenth showing Julian focuses on the processes of unitary prayer. In her development of this theme, the

tension between traditional teachings on the nature of sin and her own insights into its necessity and lack of substantial meaning in this life increases to a dramatic and critical aporia (chapters 45-50). This she resolves by recounting a detailed parable of a master/servant relationship (chapter 51). In the chapters following the parable, Julian develops more deeply her Trinitarian notions and expands on the theme of Christ as our Mother.

The fifteenth showing envisions the final transformation of sin into honour, with love and patience having the central role in achieving this goal.

The sixteenth showing comes as a "conclusyon and confirmation to all the xv" (16/66, 632). It presents the fullest expansion in theological language of the insights Julian has reached through the master/servant parable. Ending with the exhortation that "loue is oure lordes menyng" (16/86, 733), it brings together the two streams of affective and intellectual struggle in a unifying image that Julian comments on with passionate eloquence. The final words of her narration, finished more than twenty years after what she thought would be the end of her life, remind us of the eternal nature of a love that can only be considered as a beginning.

One assumption I am making in this thesis, based on the research into Julian's sources by Edmund Colledge and James Walsh in their critical edition, is that Julian was familiar with the theological and rhetorical writings of the Christian

Latin tradition. This may appear to contradict Julian's own demurral at the beginning of the second chapter of the Long Text of her Showings, where she says that "this reuelation was made to a symple creature vnlettyrde . . ." (2, 285; my emphasis). But while some of Julian's commentators accordingly still hold to the myth of a divinely inspired simplicity, her editors have thoroughly and convincingly demonstrated her appropriation of a wide spectrum of the religious traditions of her time. Hence, whatever else she may have meant by the term "unlettered," it cannot probably be construed as a confession of total ignorance of those traditions (knowledge of which, moreover, she may have acquired after having had her several visionary experiences).³ It thus seems likely that she intends to indicate that in her use of traditional sources, she is not out to challenge the role of formal teaching authorities within the church.⁴ On the contrary, she is asserting the priority of a full

³ Colledge and Walsh believe this to be only "modest self-disparagement" ("Introduction", 222) and that she was highly literate in both English and Latin. There is also the suggestion that she is referring only to her abilities in Latin (see Christina Von Nolcken, "Julian of Norwich" in Fourteenth Century English Mystics, ed. Valerie M. Lagorio, 97-108 p.99). My own view is that it was probably a combination of the conventional modesty referred to by Colledge and Walsh and an indication of the long process of rhetorical and theological development Julian had to undertake before being able to adequately inscribe the visions into a coherent and consistent narrative.

⁴ See E.R.Curtius on the denigration of "auctoritas" particularly as it occurred in the Twelfth Century and beyond. European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, trans. W.R. Trask, (Princeton: Princeton U. P.) 55.

hermeneutical endeavour⁵ as a challenge that reaches to all members of a particular tradition, regardless of their level of "literacy" -- their integration within an inherited cultural matrix -- at the time when the call to make a personal response is felt.

In my first chapter I will summarize some of the elements of the modern interpretive or hermeneutical practices which have influenced my reading of Julian. In particular I will outline briefly some elements of the Lonerganian psychology which has influenced my reading of Julian throughout, as well as some of the corresponding tenets of Gadamer's theory on interpretation.

In my second chapter, I will deal with some of the general elements of "mysticism" as I understand them through the writings of Julian of Norwich. Here I will also outline Julian's development, through the course of the Showings, in terms of the tensions between her own insight and the traditional teachings of the Church from which her inquiry originates. In chapters three and four, I will deal with her Trinitarian doctrine as she develops it in relation to both her external world (ch. 3) and her internal universe (ch. 4). (Trinitarian theory will here be summarized in various places as it relates to the development of my discussion.) The fifth

⁵ The "full hermeneutic endeavour", following Gadamer and Lonergan, I would define as the task of researching and interpreting one's tradition at its deepest and most significant levels in conjunction with an attempt to find new solutions to the questions and problems of one's own time.

chapter will look at the overall project of Julian's Showings, in particular as she herself understands it in the fifteenth showing -- i.e., at the end of first night's visions.

Much attention is presently turning to Julian's writings to explore their great theological and literary riches. The specific project I have undertaken is to examine the interrelationship and identity in Julian's work of the concepts of "comfort" and "meaning", focusing on Julian's discovery that only by linking the affective and intellectual processes, and seeing in them the same unified goal, can she resolve the alienation in her own life between her interior and exterior worlds. In this sense what I hope to show is how the "comfort of meaning" is inseparable from the "meaning of comfort": that unobstructed intentionality, or "true seeking", for Julian, is indispensable to well-being in the present.⁶ In addition, the achievements of such seeking must continually be re-formulated into a new, more deeply informed intentionality which will require the expansion not only of one's spiritual understanding, but also of its expression in metaphorical language. It is for this purpose that I examine the Trinitarian theology of Julian, which I find to be

⁶ On the subject of an identity in Julian's Showings between comfort and meaning, little or nothing has been written, and I offer this focus as the contribution of my thesis to Julian scholarship. The originality of this topic can be testified to by a brief consultation with the descriptive bibliographies contained in either the on-line MLA listings, and/or the Wilson CD-Rom for religious studies, to cite but two potential bibliographical sources.

intrinsically linked to her ability to incorporate a continually expanding intentionality within a coherent literary form. The primary elements of this literary form are her metaphorical clusters built upon trinitarian analogies, her ironic strategies to represent opposing aspects of what she envisions as a not-yet-completed "whole", and, of course, her ultimate triumphant achievement of literary expression in a manner which both focuses and opens meaning, in the parable of the Lord and Servant.

I

Elements of
Lonerganian Psychology and Gadamerian Hermeneutics
in Relation to Julian

In Method in Theology,⁷ Bernard Lonergan distinguishes between immediate and mediated operations on the conscious level. Human beings operate immediately with respect to objects which are present and "mediately" with respect to what is represented or signified (28). We are thus capable of participating in a "world mediated by meaning" in which, however, we continue to operate immediately with respect to the "image, word or symbol". Varying degrees of development regarding reflexive techniques (grammar, logic, hermeneutics, philosophy, etc.) that operate on the mediate operations themselves are important to Lonergan as signalling successive historical stages in the differentiation of consciousness

⁷ (New York: Seabury Press, 1972). All citations of Method in Theology are from this edition.

(29). "As [the subject's] apprehension of his world and his conduct in it develop, he begins to move through different patterns of experience" (29). These different patterns of experience facilitate the movement of human consciousness into "biological", "aesthetic", "intellectual" and "dramatic" or other such patterns which abstract from "real" life by objectifying various distinct elements of meaning within it." For Lonergan, the highest level of such consciousness is symbolised by the "mystic" who "withdraws into the ultima solitudo, [where] he drops the constructs of culture and the whole complicated mass of mediating operations to return to a new, mediated immediacy of his subjectivity reaching for God" (29).

On another, but closely related topic, Lonergan analyses the development of feelings (30). Feelings involve intentional responses to objects which can be either on the level of pain vs. pleasure, "the agreeable or the disagreeable", or on the level of "values" (31). While the response to the agreeable or disagreeable is "ambiguous" (inasmuch as pursuit of the true human good may involve various pains and privations), response to value, for Lonergan, "both carries us towards self-transcendence and

⁸ The categories here are from Insight: a Study of Human Understanding. (London: Longmans, Greene and Co., 1957) 181-190. While these specific categories are not repeated in Method, the latter work does contain numerous mention of different "patterns of experience" which occur in varying forms.

selects an object for the sake of whom or of which we transcend ourselves" (31).

Lonergan goes on to distinguish several types of values which are interrelated in the functioning of a community. While "vital" and "social" values are necessary to underpin "cultural" values, they are in turn developed, criticised and improved by the latter (32). Higher still in Lonergan's ascending order are "personal" and "religious" values.

Personal value is the person in his self-transcendence, as loving and being loved, as originator of value in himself and in his milieu, as an inspiration and invitation to others to do likewise. Religious values, finally, are at the heart of the meaning and value of man's living and man's world (32)

Important in respect to this outline is Lonergan's emphasis on value as a "transcendental notion" (34) which is "intended" by "questions for deliberation" just as, for Lonergan, the transcendental notions of the intelligible, and of truth (or being), are intended respectively by "questions for intelligence and reflection". Although such "intending" is not "knowing", the two are related in that by asking the questions, "I am intending what would be known if I knew the answers. . . . So when I ask whether this is truly and not merely apparently good, whether that is or is not worthwhile, I do not yet know value but I am intending value" (34).

It is through such an approach to transcendental notions that Lonergan arrives at a system describing the "dynamism of conscious intentionality" (34). Through the drive of conscious

intentionality human beings achieve a self-transcendence, which, when fully developed, results in one's becoming "a good judge, not on this or that human act, but on the whole range of human goodness" (35).

Corresponding to Lonergan's differentiated levels of experience and consciousness is his system of differentiated realms of meaning by which we mediate and communicate the distant worlds of imagination, language and thought. These are realms which, according to Lonergan, are conditioned by historical developments appropriated by individuals through their involvement in and awareness of "human intersubjectivity", "art", "symbols", "language" and the "incarnate meaning" embodied in personalities or individual characters, whether they be fictional or historical (57). Western culture, Lonergan contends, has developed six distinct realms of meaning, the first four of which are hierarchically ordered. These four begin with the familiar distinction between the realms of common sense and theory: and to these he adds the realms of "interiority and "transcendence". It is through operations in the realm of interiority that one is able to critically differentiate operations of common sense and theory, and construct methods for their integration in cognitional processes. These three realms of operations must finally be related and directed to the subject's need for self-transcendence, so as to operate in a realm in which, "God is known and loved":

"Differentiated consciousness appears when the critical exigence turns upon interiority, when self-appropriation is achieved, when the subject relates his different procedures to the several realms, relates the several realms to one another, and consciously shifts from one realm to another by consciously changing his procedures" (84).

To these four vertical realms of meaning, Lonergan adds, horizontally, the realms of art and scholarship, which he considers to have fully distinguished themselves in our time. "Any realm becomes differentiated from the others when it develops its own language, its own distinct mode of apprehension, and its own cultural, social, or professional group speaking in that fashion and apprehending in that manner" (272).

Religious experience for Lonergan is rooted in the drive for self-transcendence through which the human subject achieves authenticity (104). Such authenticity results in a "being in love with God [which] is the basic fulfilment of our conscious intentionality", and which "bears fruit in a love of one's neighbour that strives mightily to bring about the Kingdom of God on this earth" (105).

The development of religious experience, for Lonergan, moreover, is dialectical. It is, in Lonergan's view, oriented both to transcendent mystery, or the "to-be-known", and to the personal horizon of the individual subject who is seeking such transcendence. Without a proper balance of transcendence and immanence serious problems arise. If transcendence is over-emphasized, "God becomes remote, irrelevant, almost

forgotten" (110). When immanence is over-emphasized, "the loss of reference to the transcendent will rob symbol, ritual, recital of their proper meaning to leave them merely idol and magic and myth" (111).

It is the dialectical nature of religious development that, for Lonergan, distinguishes between authenticity and "unauthenticity". God must be conceived as the "supreme fulfilment" of the transcendental notions -- as "supreme intelligence, truth, reality, righteousness, goodness" (111). "Unless Religion is totally directed to what is good, to genuine love of one's neighbour and to a self-denial that is subordinated to a fuller goodness in oneself, then the cult of a God that is terrifying can slip over in the demonic, into an exultant destructiveness of oneself and of others" (111).

The applicability of Lonergan's thinking to the Showings is a subject that I largely reserve for my next chapter, on Julian's mysticism (though it will also become evident that certain of his concepts inform subsequent chapters as well). If I have nevertheless taken his work on "meaning" up at this point, that is because it builds upon -- and is thus closely related to -- the hermeneutics of H.G.Gadamer, whose relevance to an understanding of Julian I shall presently demonstrate.

One of Gadamer's main contributions to contemporary philosophy and literary theory has been his belief in, and articulation of, the view that there is a special form of

knowledge to be found in the humanities disciplines (Geisteswissenschaften). While such a notion would generally have gone unchallenged through most of the Middle Ages, it has increasingly come into disrepute in our own age through the rise of the empirical sciences. These have roots in the thinking of William of Ockham and other Nominalists of the fourteenth century, precisely the period in which Julian of Norwich is writing.

The philosophical concept of art as knowledge, however, has its basis not in the Middle Ages, but in the 18th and 19th centuries. That, at least, is what Gadamer argues in Truth and Method,⁹ wherein he represents such a view of art as coming out of a convergence of notions about "Bildung", "Sensus Communis", "judgment" and "taste".

"Bildung" for Gadamer is essential if one is to participate in a mediated understanding of culture. It is a process of formation which involves raising one's being to the universal in order to understand the viewpoints of others and make them one's own, "to seek one's own in the alien, to become at home in it"(15).

"Sensus Communis," as Gadamer analyses it, likewise involves what Herder saw as the ideal of "reaching up to Humanity" (10). It is more than the general faculty of sensible perception which it had been for Aristotle, Aquinas

⁹ Trans. and ed. Garret Barden and John Cumming (New York: Crossroads, 1982). All citations from this edition.

and others in the past. Nor is it a "purely subjective determinant," as Kant had asserted. Instead, as the "sense that is acquired through living in the community and . . . by its structures and its aims" (22), it serves as the basis of a substantial form of knowledge.

Gadamer's claims for the epistemological dimension of "sensus communis" are founded on an Aristotelian distinction between two kinds of knowledge: practical (phronesis) and theoretical (sophia). Phronesis "is directed to the concrete situation. Thus it must grasp the 'circumstances' in their infinite variety" (21). This, according to Gadamer, is what separates the Humanities from the Natural Sciences and gives each a different standard of "truth". To seek, in Humanistic realms, a standard based on observed regularities, and to judge knowledge by "an argument based on universals, a reasoned proof, is not sufficient because what is important is the circumstances" (23).

This brings Gadamer to considerations of "judgement" and "taste". In judging the truth of an historical or aesthetic phenomenon, the researcher in the Humanities inevitably makes use of his or her own set of pre-judgements or "fore-conceptions" (Heidegger's term). But if these be held open to the set of judgments found within the text, an interchange conducive to self-awareness occurs. Gadamer refers to this experience as a "fusion of horizons", and sees it operating especially in those aesthetic experiences wherein the audience

is "transformed into structure" (99ff.). From this participation in the work of art there follows a return to oneself, but with a new horizon, the result of having consciously appropriated on a critical level both the horizons of the Other and of one's own past, which one is made aware of in the process.

This hermeneutical process is useful in coming to terms with an author such as Julian of Norwich. Indeed, Gadamer's belief that "Truth occurs as a response to a tradition that addresses us in a language that we can understand"¹⁰ is arguably one that applies not only to us as twentieth-century readers of Julian, but to Julian herself. In her effort to understand her tradition, she starts with a series of images and dramatic sequences that challenge some of the acquired ideas of her upbringing, while positing personal contemplative insights as significant events within that tradition.

Julian's desire to explore the suffering and passion of Christ through a vivid re-presentation of His crucifixion in terms of her own experience enables her to interrogate various dimensions of her other experiences from within the mythological and symbolic framework of the tradition in which they arose. She writes:

Me thought I woulde haue ben that tyme with
Magdaleyne and with other that were Christus
louers, that I might haue seen bodilie the passion
that our lord suffered for me, that I might haue

¹⁰ The quotation is a paraphrase by Joel Weinsheimer, in Gadamer's Hermeneutics (New Haven: Yale U. P., 1986), 258.

suffered with him, as other did that loved him. And therefore I desyred a bodely sight, wher in I might haue more knowledge of the bodily paynes of our sauour, and of the compassion of our lady and of all his true louers that were lyuyng that tyme and saw his paynes; for I would haue be one of them and haue suffered with them. (2/1, 285-6)

Such a desire is not unusual in the medieval tradition. Aelred of Rivaux had instructed anchoresses to make Christ's passion a focal point in their reflections so that its images and associated emotions would become the foundation of their own experiences:

Pondering the life of Jesus was meant to make that life her own, partly in the sense of her entering into past events, but also in the sense of bringing those events into her present context, so that all of life could be lived in the light of Christ.¹¹

A further clarification and explanation of Julian's project may be had by seeing it as an attempt to construct and relate the various centres of meaning that result from her immersion into the symbolism of her religious tradition. Paul Ricoeur has suggested that "meaning does not originate in the conscious, reflecting subject, but comes to it from the outside, from encounter with certain thought-provoking symbols mediated by its culture." "Meaning", for Ricoeur, "is the result, not of a work of constitution, but of an effort of

¹¹ Grace M. Jantzen, commenting upon Aelred's A Rule of Life for a Recluse, in Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987) 57-8.

appropriation".¹² The goal of such a hermeneutics is, in this sense, "a recollection of meaning in its richest, its most elevated, most spiritual diversity".¹³

Julian counsels her readers to a similar appropriation:

I pray yow alle for gods sake, and counceyle yow for yowre awne profyght þat ye leue the beholdyng of a wrech that it was shewde to, and myghtely, wysely and mekely behold in god, that of hys curteyse loue and endlesse goodnesse wold shew it generally in comfort of vs alle. (I/8, 320)

I shall return frequently to the concept of meaning as a form of comfort for Julian, since it constitutes the basic motif of this thesis. For the moment, though, we might observe from the above quoted passage that Julian's appeal to the reader to conceive God as the originator of the text's meaning is at the same time an appeal to conceive a meaning that is even more than what its author (i.e. Julian) consciously understands it to be. This ties in with Gadamer's dialectical account of aesthetic appropriation by virtue of something that Julian asserts -- or reasserts -- at the end of the Showings when she writes in the final chapter that "this boke is begonne by goddys gyfte and his grace, but it is nott yett performyd, as to my syght" (86/16, 731). Julian is thereby exhorting her readers to participate in forming her text, developing her/its

¹² "Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of the Subject" as summarized in G. B. Madison's The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity: Figures and Themes (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana U.P., 1988) 93.

¹³ Ibid. 93-4.

meaning with reference to their lives and thoughts. The book's "performance" will thus involve the thoughts and actions of future readers towards the further elucidation of the comfort and meaning of Julian's visions. Julian's Book of Showings will act as a guide for the construction of such a "text". In this regard, her instructions to receive her words "myghtely", "wysely" and "mekely", while reflective of the traditional virtues associated with the "Father", "Son" and "Holy Spirit"¹⁴ respectively, might be interpreted from a contemporary standpoint as synonyms for "creative", "reflective" and "open to revision".

Julian herself provides the "example" of such a hermeneutics. All of the further insights which motivate her expansion of the short text into the long text not only refer back to her original visionary experiences; they are represented by Julian as interpretive rather than primary inscriptions¹⁵ -- as "mediate" in Lonergan's sense. The Showings thus offers itself as a model for the kind of interpretation that Julian exhorts her readers to undertake.

¹⁴ I am here reading "mekely behold in god" for the interiorly conditioned "love of God" traditionally associated with the Holy Spirit.

¹⁵ See Lynn Staley Johnson, "The Trope of the Scribe and the Question of Literary Authority in the Works of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe" in Speculum, 65 (1990), 820-38. Johnson argues that Julian is attempting to "constitute" the public whom she addresses in the text". For a contemporary statement of this view of "fictionalizing" one's audience, see Walter J. Ong, Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word (London and New York: Methuen, 1982), 102-03.

II

Mysticism and the General Nature of Julian's "Beseeching"

Few of the writers whom traditional academic discourse has come to consider as "mystics" can be easily defined or categorized. Indeed it is well within the range of a mystic's undertaking to restructure what the operative categories of "thinking" are, or could be. In general usage the term "mysticism", while encompassing a wide variety of approaches to thought, language and experience, has always included a sense of exploration, of venturing forth beyond the limits within which philosophic and linguistic practices have constructed their interpretations of human experience. In such a venture, a mystical treatise serves as a kind of "witness" to, or record of, the discoveries which are being offered back to the tradition whose tensions and aporias conditioned such explorations.

To construct a "mystical" narrative, then, is to make public (i.e. to construct as a part of a public whole) the results of an investigation into what the individual writer sees as a significant, but as yet unobjectified pattern of human consciousness. For many spiritual writers in the

Western tradition, particularly in the period of the late Middle Ages, this is a realm of intersubjectivity in which the intended object of one's consciousness is not an "I" but a "we". In this "we" there is recognized both one's immediate, pre-linguistic condition -- prior to the individuation that arises in the act of speaking -- and a later, mediated integration with others which is intended through the (always incomplete) strategies of discourse¹⁶. In this context one can also speak of a form of "mediated immediacy"¹⁷ in which one withdraws from the constructs of language and thought-imagery in order to respond to a divine presence or love, either through a silence in which elusive and mysterious patterns become momentarily perceivable or else through reflection upon previous modes of prayer and spiritual seeking in order to arrive at a new constellation of language and imagery with which to enunciate one's vision of the world. A mystical narrative, then, opens a realm of meaning that attempts to draw closer to the central or underlying core of human existence.

Perhaps the most familiar polarity of early religious

¹⁶ The concepts of "intersubjectivity" and "mediated meaning" here are taken from the chapter entitled "Meaning" in Bernard Lonergan's Method in Theology (New York: The Seabury Press, 1972) 57-99. See esp. 57-61.

¹⁷ See Ibid., pp. 28, 76-7, 273, 340-2. See also Bernard McGinn, "Love, Knowledge and Unio mystica in the Western Christian Tradition," Mystical Union and Monotheistic Faith: An Ecumenical Dialogue, ed. Bernard McGinn and Moshe Idel (New York: Macmillan, 1989) 59 and n.

thought is the one that distinguishes only between immediate and transcendent levels of experience. This contrasts, in Lonergan's view, with the later, fuller, development that considers also the intermediate levels of "theory" and "interiority". In contributing to this later development, mystics such as Julian can be seen as attempting to communicate a map of religious consciousness that lies between the extremes of immediacy and transcendence, and whose meaning can be mediated from the perspective of either. The dialectical tension of this two-directional mediation leads to an ironic form of representation for Julian, encapsulated in her many "double-showings" by which she expresses complex and often opposite meanings simultaneously. The view of the human cosmos as inherently and pervasively ironic figures prominently in her Showings, and must always be considered in interpreting Julian's expressions of "comfort" and "meaning". Such a use of irony bears an affinity to the practice of nineteenth-century European Romantics, for whom the universe is so fully ironic that it can only be understood through the multiple oppositions expressed in the term "irony of ironies".¹⁸

For Julian of Norwich, the primary ingredient for both

¹⁸ For an analysis of irony in nineteenth-century German Romanticism, see Jack Forstman, A Romantic Triangle: Schliermacher and early German romanticism (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press for the American Academy of Religion, 1977)

mediated and immediate approaches to intersubjectivity is an orientation towards "transcendent mystery", understood as the unfolding of "spiritual love" in everyday life as it underlies, informs and directs all activity, including especially the act of discourse itself. Julian's starting point for the exploration of love thus conceived is a study of one of the central images of her religious tradition, the passion of Christ seen through His crucifixion and its fulfillment in His resurrection. This event Julian sees as central both to the interpretive tradition she has inherited and to her own inner cognitional and affective experiences.

In Julian's Showings, as I hope to reveal, the image of the crucified Christ symbolizes the ultimate "intention" of human love -- in Lonergan's meaning of "intention" -- to redeem the world by looking towards a human intercourse free of pain and suffering on the one hand, while on the other accepting the limitations and failures which inevitably accompany such attempts. At the same time, Christ's resurrection and triumph over death symbolize, for Julian, the processes of grace and mercy which transform and complete the intention of human love. This occurs through what Julian views as a "partnership" between divine and human agency.¹⁹ Accordingly, through the practices of the medieval "lectio" and "meditation" built around the narrative of Christ's

¹⁹ The term "partnership" comes from Colledge and Walsh in their summary of the 14th showing in the introduction to the critical edition of Julian's text -- see Showings 114.

passion, Julian is able to engage in a contemplation of the questions of human suffering and limitation and also of the foundations of the possibilities that exist for their envisioned transformation. This occurs as the meaning of human experience is re-interpreted by Julian according to the model of Christ's resurrection and its implications for the redemption of the creative principle within human action. The unfolding of this understanding Julian will represent through a dialogue among the different interpretive positions available to her through certain Church teachings, traditional Christian spirituality, personal experience, and her own private insights from reflection on her learning in these areas. In particular, what Julian constructs as the respective discourses of "Holy Church" and "Holy Spirit" she will bring together and interrelate on a Trinitarian model which will resolve their initial incompatibility as she learns to see her own insights as part of the development or creation of the "new person" or "Adam", represented by Christ. This "New Adam", in Christian theology, redeems the "Old Adam", who is accordingly crucified with Christ, taking with him the sins of "those who will be saved" (Julian's phrase). As well, the crucifixion will ultimately help Julian to handle the Church's judgement on sin by recognizing that the Church, like the image of Christ in this world, lies broken before us, requiring a continual personal devotion to imagine its wholeness and to seek to rediscover the likeness of such

wholeness within the broken, or "earthly", order. This theology, of the loss and rediscovery of the image and likeness of God, which Julian assimilates in her Showings, originally developed somewhat marginally to mainstream Christianity through the Cistercian reformation by writers such as Bernard of Clairvaux and William of St. Thierry.²⁰

A Book of Showings to the anchoress Julian of Norwich begins with an intense struggle on Julian's part to hold her interior and exterior worlds together. This is a struggle which is made more difficult by the rigid distinctions Julian seems to have made between immanent and transcendent meaning, a rigidity that will allow no form of mediation between the two, but rather forces the choice of one over the other. Since her feelings of discomfort result from the incommensurability between her exterior and interior lives, her impulse is to leave behind that which is less important to her in order to focus on the higher level of purely transcendent meaning.

for I would haue no maner of comferte of
fleshly ne erthely life in that sicknes. I desyred

²⁰ A fuller explanation of the image/likeness theme will be considered in later chapters in connection with other elements of Trinitarian theology. One note of orientation is called for here, however: the Augustinian concept of the Trinity views the creation of the world not as a static single event, but as a dynamic process occurring throughout -- as well as at the beginning -- of time, and in that process humanity participates. See Karl Rahner The Trinity, trans. Joseph Donceel (London: Burns and Oates, 1970); and also Peter C. Erb's "Spirituality and Mennonite Life" in Church as Theological Community, ed. Harry Huebner, 275-300 (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1990) 286-9.

to haue all maner of paynes, bodily and ghostly,
 that I should haue if I should haue died
 For I hoped that it might haue ben to my reward
 when I shuld haue died. For I desyred to haue ben
 soone with my god and maker. (287, 2)

That desire changes by the beginning of the first revelation, and in a way which helps to direct her attention, there directed to the image of the crucifix as a symbol of entrance into the transcendent world, back to the earthly life, to re-imbue immanent forms with transcendent meaning.

For in alle thys tyme I wenyd to haue dyed,
 and that was marveyle to me and wonder in perty,
 for my thought this avysion was schewde for them
 that shuld lyue. (8/1, 319)

This is the beginning of Julian's attempt to unite her inner and outer worlds together in the "earthly" life. Where Julian had expected to receive a vision confirming the underlying sinfulness she perceived in the world, what she encounters instead is a revelation of spiritual meaning which interprets the world according to both what it was, in the original form of its creation, and what it will be in the fullness of the final act of redemption. In between is the transformation in understanding and intention that characterizes the human struggle for self-transcendence.

This is also the beginning in Julian's narrative of the movement from an "I" seeking absolute transcendence of all physical and communal identity, to a member of a dynamic community of "Even-Christians" who mediate for each other various forms of self-transcendent love and knowledge. Throughout the remainder of the Showings, Julian asks her

reader to understand that "Alle that I say of me I mene in person of alle my evyn cristen, for I am lernyd in the gostely shewyng of our lord god that he meneth so" (1/8, 319-20).

The concept of "comfort" (1/8, 320) which Julian invokes as the reward which her readers might rightly expect is not only an image of the universal love at which Julian is aiming through the tradition of spirituality. It is also an encapsulation of the message she herself bears to the tradition through which she has been formed. One gathers from reading The Book of Showings that part of Julian's continued inner discomfort stems from an inability to fully integrate within her theological framework the teachings of the church in her time. Two issues in particular seem to cause her trouble: the question of Hell and the fear of a diabolical fiend, both common preaching topoi whose currency may have been pushed further than warranted by the edifying potential of such metaphors. For Julian, ultimately, these metaphors find their greatest significance as an aid to her understanding of the experience of theological dread ("fear of God") and spiritual darkness. Not only will Julian develop a full account of such dread (see 74/16) and make use of many different images to represent and interrogate the problem of perceived spiritual darkness; she also maintains a tension throughout the entire structure of her Showings between the occurrence of two types of feelings and the corresponding revelations of knowledge. One of these is the feeling of

comfort, expressed in the often repeated refrain of a phrase attributed to the Holy Spirit speaking within her. As she records its message: "synne is behouely, but alle shalle be wele, and alle [sic] shalle be wele, and alle maner of thyng shalle be wele" (27/13, 405). The other is a contrary feeling which she evokes with the question: "A, good lorde, how myghte alle be wele for the gret harme that is come by synne to thy creatures?" (29/13, 412) This second feeling comes from the tradition of teaching in which Julian has been raised, although she now uses it to create an ironic distance from the directions and insights into which her faith is leading her. As she recalls the teaching of the Church:

oure feyth is groundyd in goddes worde, and it longyth to oure feyth that we beleue that goddys worde shalle be sau3d in alle thyng. And one poynte of oure feyth is that many creatures shall be dampnyd, as angelis that felle ou₃te of hevyn for pride, whych be now fendys, and meny in erth that dyeth out of the feyth of holy chyrch, that is to sey tho that he hethyn, and also many that heth receyvyd cristondom and lyvyth vncristen lyfe and so dyeth ou₃te of cheryte. All theyse shalle be dampnyd to helle withou₃t ende, as holy chyrch techyth me to beleue. (32/13, 425)

Here Julian has powerfully marshalled the elements of the Church tradition which oppose her own understanding²¹ of the comforting judgement of God's "ryghtfulnes" which casts no blame upon humankind. Of the visions she has imparting to her

²¹ For a detailed analysis of all the points of apparent contradiction between Julian's insights and the Church's teachings in her time, see M.L. del Mastro, "Julian of Norwich: Parable of the Lord and Servant -- Radical Orthodoxy", Mystics Quarterly, 14.2 (June 1988), 84-93.

knowledge of this rightfulness, she writes:

And though theyse were swete and delectable,
 3ytt only in the beholdyng of this I culde nott be
 fulle esyd, and that was for the dome of holy
 chyrch, whych I had before vnderstondyn and was
 contynyually in my syght. And therfore by this
 dome me thought that me behovyth nedys to know my
 selfe a synner. And by the same dome I vnderstode
 that synners be sometyme wurthy blame and wrath,
 and theyse two culde I nott see in god. (45/14,
 487; cf. 50/14, 511)

This problem is soon after resolved in the parable of the Lord and his Servant, which Julian tells us she omitted from her work for twenty years until, perhaps, she fully understood how its symbolic structures could be organized to resolve her problem. During this period it seems she was at work writing the first version of her long text. There she was finally able to include the parable as a resolution to the problem of sin which fully represents the relationship between the two differing judgements: of the Church and of her own inner conviction, this last attributed to the Holy Spirit.

At the end of the fifteen showings of the first night, however, there still remains a further difficulty for Julian to confront concerning her fear of diabolical forces. She writes that she expected to be tormented by demons before she died, and following the completion of the first night's series of visions, this fear is realized. After resisting a further torment by demons on the next night, she receives an additional showing, her sixteenth and last, which "was conclysyon and confirmation to all the xv" (66/16, 632). This

final showing helps her understand how the experience of her visions has led not only to a transformed self, but to a transformation of the mythological cosmos in which she must orient herself. When she then resists the torment of demons on the second night, both Julian and the reader know that she is on her way to integrating her contemplative understanding into the active realms of her life.²² The crisis Julian experiences regarding the appearance of demons is matched in her narrative only by the crisis of the two differing judgements. This crisis also requires an act of integration

²² The most common delineation of active and common lives in the medieval tradition comes from the three divisions of prayer into lectio, oral reading; meditatio, intellectual reflection; and contemplatio; in which the first two divisions become categories of active faith. Within this tradition, learning to read Latin Patristic authors and developing the rhetorical techniques of exposition, as in Julian's carefully balanced colas and evenly-paced gradatios, are considered to be elements of active life which contemplative insights will hopefully arise from and be the vehicle for.

For a summary of other ways of distinguishing action and contemplation in the Middle Ages, including a consideration of the effect of the often confusing influence of the classical distinction between theory and practice, signifying a life devoted to physical needs as distinct from the life of the intellect, see Peter Erb, "Contemplation and Action" 4-6. For Erb, however, any clear distinction between the two realms is already problematic inasmuch as it opens the way "for the mystery of the twofold nature of Christian love to be broken" (5). This twofold nature ideally combines active and contemplative love in one faith, with action enfolded at the center, but with contemplation given the primacy of focus. Erb traces this tradition to the passage in Luke (10:25-42), which was the standard medieval text for explaining the notion of action and contemplation. The concept of the "mixed life", which is also the title of one of Walter Hilton's tracts, was, according to Erb, a late medieval attempt to reintegrate active and contemplative living following the distinction that had split them apart and would eventually lead to the modern tendency to choose the realm of action over and against that of contemplation.

due to the necessity of upholding both levels of judgement:

And therefore my desyer was more than I can or may telle, for the hygher dome god shewed hym selfe in the same tyme, and therefore me behovyd nedys to take it. And the lower dome was lernyd me before tyme in holy chyrche, and therefore I myght nott by no weye leue the lower dome. (45/14, 488)

For Julian, however, it was not sufficient simply to hierarchise the order of judgements, placing her own insights before those of Holy Church. She must also justify them both as judgements of the same creative principle which will ultimately lead to a single unified conclusion, even if this conclusion is not within her present grasp. Her statements regarding the lower and higher judgments end with the observation that by maintaining the paradoxical structure, we become aware of a dimension of grace which takes us beyond our present condition and makes our contrary emotional states ("felynges") known to us.

Then was this my desyr, that I myght se in god in what manner that the dome of holy chyrch here in erth is true in his sight, and howe it longyth to me verely to know it, where by they myght both be savyd, so as it ware wurshypfulle to god and ryght wey to me. And to alle this I nee had no nother answeere but a mervelous example of a lorde and a seruannt, as I shall sey after, and that full mystely shewed. And 3ytt I stode in desyer and wylle in to my lyvys ende that I myght by grace know theyse ij domys as it longyth to me. And the more knowyng and vnderstandyng by the gracious ledyng of the holy gost that we haue of these ij domes, the more we shalle see and know oure felynges. And evyr the more that we see them, the more kyndly by grace we shall long to be fulfyllid of endless joy and blysse, for we be made ther to. And our kyndely substance is now blessydfulle in

god, and hath bene sythen it was made, and shalle
be withoute ende. (45/14, 488-9)

To represent such a fulfillment of our nature through knowledge of (apparently) contrary principles and feelings, Julian will need to develop a fully ironic view of the world that can absorb the paradoxical elements of her experience. While a writer in the philosophical tradition might be concerned to offer a resolution of the two perspectives through some higher standpoint, or else emphasise one position over another, Julian approaches the matter in a thoroughly rhetorical manner by letting the apparent contradictions stand as two poles of a paradoxical issue. The aim of discourse within the classical and medieval rhetorical tradition was to develop the totality of an issue. Where complex issues were found to contain inherent contradictions, these were usually handled through the concept of paradox or mystery as a framework within which perfect logic would not be expected to obtain. The proper use of paradox and mystery, however, was critically important: "as in the case of a faulty reading of a paradox, even so within the Christian tradition problems occur when a choice is made to enunciate one aspect of the mystery over its totality, to teach heresy (from Greek: haeresis for choice) over against the catholic (from Greek: catholice for total or whole) faith".²³

The development of differing and incomplete perspectives

²³ See Peter C. Erb, "Contemplation and Action," The Conrad Grebel Review, 9 (Winter 1991): 3.

in Julian's writing helps to clarify her role as a "mystic" in the wider social and political fabric. In recent times mysticism has undergone a re-examination regarding what was once conceived as its total orientation beyond the present world. This has led to a counter-position that construes the mystic as involved only in present concerns. As Laurie Finke puts it:

Mysticism, as I describe it, is not a manifestation of the individual's internal affective states but a set of cultural and ideological constructs that both share in and subvert orthodox religious institutions. The mystic, writes Jacques Lacan, "is by no means that which is not political. It is something serious, which a few people teach us about, and most often women." ²⁴

For Julian, mysticism is not subversion masquerading as something else. The purpose of the expression of internal affective states is the same as the purpose (always potentially subversive) of bringing into confrontation and apposition both the essential teachings of religious institutions and various privately-constructed antithetical views that expand the context in which such institutions are seen to function. The primary objective of such actions, however, is not to destroy but rather to modify and develop such functioning.

In the application of Trinitarian thinking to the

²⁴ See Laurie Finke, "Mystical Bodies and the Dialogics of Vision" in PhilQ 67 (1988): 439-450, 441. Her quotation of Lacan is from Feminine Sexuality, ed. Jacqueline Rose and Juliet Mitchell (New York: Norton, 1982), 146.

exegesis of the Old Testament, similar confrontations between the prophets and the executors of the Law were explained as acts of constructive interpretation applied to the manifest word of God via the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.²⁵ The relation between internal affective states and cultural constructs is a product of the relation between society and the individual; and thus it is, as Lacan suggests, both "serious" and in some sense "political". But it is not political in the modern sense of the word. For Julian, mystical or spiritual endeavours relate ultimately to the attainment of a self-transcendent love and knowledge which change not only what one believes, values and understands, but what one chooses to do. This has serious political implications, but they arise only on the mystic's own terms, i.e. within a context of both contemplation and action, with contemplation considered as the more critical exercise. Such mysticism aims not only to achieve some human good, but to reconsider and redefine that good through an ever clearer understanding of the whole within which it is conceived. This is where contemporary socio-political practice, conceived as the task of empowering (and thereby preserving) various distinct classes without altering the general framework of the context in which such power obtains, is most clearly a quite different matter. As T.S.Eliot shows in paraphrasing Julian

²⁵ K. Rahner, The Trinity, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: The Seabury P., 1970) 41.

(and thereby bringing her into a decidedly more political context than the one in which she wrote), the question of what to pursue is as important as the struggle itself, from which it is inseparable:

And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
By the purification of the motive
In the ground of our beseeching.²⁶

It is largely in relation to a desire to perfect her motives that Julian tries to recollect, at the beginning of her Showings, the feelings and intentions that surrounded the three prayer requests through which she prepared herself for some form of illumination that would transform her spiritual understanding of the present world. The development of this illumination will come for Julian in progressively more literary and artistic forms throughout her narrative as she moves through a sequence of showings, revolving initially around the crucifix, before expanding to ever more varied images with the greatest level of complexity and focus of meaning occurring in her parable of the Lord and his Servant. Her claim that this parable was omitted for twenty years (until she had worked out the content and organisation of the sixteen showings?) suggests that it is then the last or ultimate piece in the creation of her work. Before we look at it more closely, however, it will be helpful to analyse and

²⁶ From "Little Gidding" in Collected Poems, 1909-1962, (London: Faber and Faber, 1963) 220.

situate her Trinitarian framework, particularly with regard to how it brings together often-divergent traditions: those focusing on the expression of love of God and those centred on the discovery of knowledge of God.

III

Trinitarian Love and Knowledge

Julian's initial focus on the "earthly" world in the first of her revelations also marks the appearance of a sophisticated Trinitarian theology, the "most elegantly presented" example of such that English literature affords.²⁷ This theology is brought increasingly into play by Julian as she moves to contemplate the principle of God's communication of Himself within the processes of creation and redemption, processes effected by the Son and made known by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Julian responds to God's communication in terms of the soul's return to God. In this context, reflected in Julian's frequent assertions regarding the reciprocity of knowledge of self with knowledge of God (chapters 52-63), the concept of comfort is informed by an increasingly widened understanding of the forms of divine presence within the various "showings". And, as a result, it is firmly rooted in the search for a mode of return to essential union with the divine principles which underlie such comfort.

The social and political position of Julian as an anchoress associated with but independent from monastic

²⁷ P. Erb, "Spirituality", 286.

religious institutions -- particularly in terms of theological authority -- provides Julian with the freedom to construct a theologically dynamic narrative capable of integrating the ethical and spiritual achievements of both the cloisters and the schools. The spiritual universe is the starting point in Julian's writing for theological thinking about the human subject. Nevertheless, the primary focus of her writing is clearly on the finite, experiential world; notably, she shies away from abstract questions about the nature of transcendence. Although her Showings is primarily a public, literary and rhetorical, discourse intended to interact with the personal experience of its readers, it also addresses the more private intellectual issues of the mystical tradition. Augustine himself, though trained as a rhetorician, had never shied away from philosophic speculation, albeit his most powerful philosophical arguments were often those made by rhetorical means. Indeed, it is generally true that the two traditions were always distinguished more by their methods than their areas of concern. It is, however, part of the problematic of Christianity following Augustine that its development occurred along two distinct lines: the monastic or "affective" tradition and the "speculative" tradition of the schools (so-called "scholasticism").²⁸ It is my contention that Julian of Norwich provides a valuable model

²⁸ Jean Leclercq, The Love of Learning and the Desire for God, trans. Catharine Misrahi (New York: Fordham U. P., 1961) 124.

for resolving the differences between these two traditions, thereby allowing for the reintegration of emotion and intellection, which (otherwise) fall into their respective domains.

The split between affective and speculative theology in Western religious tradition owes much to the early structures through which Christianity developed. As Jean Leclercq has shown in his book The Love of Learning and the Desire for God, affective theology was the modus vivendi of the monasteries. There a solitary life of reading, prayer and contemplation, nourished by practices culled from the writings of St. Augustine and Gregory the Great, was considered the most effective and rewarding way of integrating the various aspects of earthly living into a spiritual context. The later schools of Peter Abelard, arising at the same time as Bernard of Clairvaux was pushing monastic life to its highest form, emphasised the methods of the quaestio disputandi, and chose debating rather than praying, (I deliberately reverse Bernard's phrase), and logic rather than rhetoric and its various literary amanuenses. Julian makes perhaps her most significant contribution to the affective tradition in going beyond merely affirming a doctrinally-defined triune Godhead, by developing a conception of the Triune interrelationships obtaining in the created order. According to her editors, her contribution to Trinitarian theology is especially original, in situating within this context "her

magisterial teaching on the Motherhood of God, teaching which stands as a unique theological achievement in the Church's spiritual traditions".²⁹

Although the importance of the Trinity is never strongly questioned within orthodox Christianity, the doctrine is often confined to highly theoretical discussions rather than being fully integrated into the construction of Christian spirituality. In the period following Augustine, Trinitarian thinking was usually restricted to the speculative tradition which came out of Augustine's philosophical writings (particularly the last books of the Confessions and On The Trinity). Within this tradition, however, consideration of the Trinity primarily focused on its application to the "economic Godhead", with ad extra workings of the Trinity within the "economy of salvation" brought in mainly as analogies offering clarification. Alternatively, in the affective tradition, excluding that of St. Bernard and the Cistercian reforms, the Trinity was accepted only in principle. The practice of devotion was often directed to a Godhead doctrinally defined as Triune, but in effect understood in a way accordant with undifferentiated monotheism.³⁰ What this means is that, while, (as I hope to

²⁹ Colledge and Walsh, "Introduction", Showings 87.

³⁰ In The Trinity Karl Rahner discusses this neglect of what he terms the "immanent trinity" (trinitarian relations operative within creation) in favour of the "economic Trinity" (relations within the Godhead). He also delineates (9-21) the polarization of writings on the doctrine into various

show in this chapter), Augustine's Trinitarian framework holds together the rhetorical and philosophical traditions, such methodological unity does not become a consistent or common hallmark of the Christian tradition. One of Julian's great achievements will be to make an integrated Trinitarian theology, with all its philosophical underpinnings, part of the English Mystical tradition of the fourteenth century.

Writing on the nature of the Trinity in On The Trinity and elsewhere, Augustine systematically analyses twenty-two analogies of the Trinity, turning its focus effectively towards the created order. In doing so, he seems essentially to be seeking to understand the nature of plurality -- of the bridge between the one and the many -- in a more world-embracing manner than could be obtained through the Manichean dualism that once attracted itself to him. For Augustine, Trinitarian theology solved the problem of the clash between the philosophies of order-and-being, process-and-motion, providing "that for which Classicism had so long vainly sought . . . a metaphysics of ordered process"³¹ Most importantly, perhaps, Trinitarian theology changes the focus of theological discussion from intangible monistic absolutes -- truth, love, infinite goodness, etc. to the relationships among such

speculative camps, where it is analysed as way of defining the transcendant Godhead, as well as the omission of the doctrine from most affective writers. Some notable exceptions to this pattern of Rahner's are William of St. Thierry, Jan Van Ruysbroeck and St. John of the Cross.

³¹ Cochrane, Classical Culture, 437.

entities, relationships which are part of human experience regardless of how the technical terms are applied. As Charles Davis writes:

The persons in the Trinity are distinct, not by any absolute quality, but solely by their relationships. Relationships, therefore, are seen as constitutive of transcendent reality. In contrast, the implications of any monistic worldview is that relationships are not ultimately real. They are then merely aspects of transitoriness and finitude, fugitive combinations of appearances, left behind as we become one with the really real.¹⁷

Hence, Trinitarian theology is inherently accessible to the wide readership of religious literature, as well as being effective for integrating various goals and aims which might otherwise fragment the Christian community.

Julian's Trinitarianism is very deeply rooted. By the same token, an appreciation of her use of it ideally requires a sophisticated understanding of many complex issues that evolved over the ten centuries intervening between Augustine and her. On the other hand, any thorough exploration of the multitudinous debates over the Trinity would take up a tome unto itself -- and hence, even if I dreamt that I were competent to write it, would necessitate that I suspend further consideration of Julian for the next few hundred pages. I shall therefore instead quote at length Peter C. Erb's compressed summary and synthesis of the upshot of those

¹⁷ C. Davis, Body as Spirit: The Nature of Religious Feeling (New York: The Seabury P., 1976) 85.

debates:³³

From all eternity God the Father begets the Son as the perfect Image of God. As Image the Son is distinct from the Father and as an image the Son is bound to the Father by the image's likeness to its original. As perfect Image the likeness is perfect and is therefore the Father while remaining separate as image. The doctrine of homoousia [same substance] is thus supported. One may speak in this sense of the Father's begetting as the central divine act, the act of love, and the son's return to the Father in likeness likewise as an act of love. This mutual act proceeds from both the Father and the Son (filioque) and as such is distinctive from them, hypostatized as a third person, the Holy spirit, bound together with them as one.

God is, thus, love. As love, God begets the divine Image; as begotten love, God reflects perfect likeness in the image; in the mutuality of these loves proceeds the very Spirit of the love itself. The Christian God is not, as a result, a static first mover at the temporal beginning of the world, but a continual pure act, characterized in its dynamism as creative love. As creative love it creates. The universe is created in seven days "at the beginning" and in seven days throughout history. (According to the Augustinian scheme, the sixth day, the day on which the old person was created, begins historically with the birth of the new person, Jesus the Christ.)

The temporal beginning at which the universe was created is the same beginning principle in which it was created. It is in this way that creation and redemption are bound together. The word by, in and through which the original creation took place is the Word which came to its own and redeemed its own. The revelation of God in Christ is a new creation, and when viewed from this redemptive aspect, the first creation can be understood as the first revelation. Just as there is distinction and unity in the Trinity, just as the separate persons coinhere in one another, so do their actions; each is distinct and each is the

³³ The context of this discussion in Erb's article is the nature of Julian's theological method and the way in which this method leads her readers forward into new forms of religious community, rather than backwards in imitation of the conditions of fourteenth century life.

same.

The creative act of God reaches its height in the creation of the human person. Each individual is created "in the image and likeness of God." In the image, I bear a likeness to the Trinitarian God and insofar as I am a likeness I am already returning to my Creator in a parallel fashion to the return of Christ to the Father. In the image the reflection of the likeness back on the original is, in all that it is, the very likeness, that is love. God is, after all, love. In the image of God I am formed as a "little trinity." I have memory by which I continually remember my origin, intellect by which I seek to know it as the highest truth, and will by which I seek to love it as the highest good. As trinity I am the speaker, the word and the power of my word. As trinity I create (and destroy) by my word.

But as image I am already distinct from the Creator; as creature I am already and always fallen. The very creation itself is, in one sense, a going out, a distancing, a disobedience, a felix culpa.³⁴

I shall return in my next chapter to a discussion of particular aspects of this theology as it informs the structure and imagery of Julian's Lord-and-Servant parable. At present I would like to call attention to the ways in which Trinitarian theology permeates Julian's Showings.

In the brief prologue to her visions (chapters 1-3), Julian recalls three gifts that she requested in prayer prior to experience of the revelations: "The first was mynd of the passion. The secund was bodilie sicknes. The thurde was to haue of godes gyfte thre woundys" (2, 285). These requests can be seen as indications of three distinct modes of apprehension bound together by a Trinitarian synthesis of the

³⁴ "Spirituality", 286-88.

affective and speculative traditions, whose divergences within Christianity were often problematic in Julian's day. The first request Julian makes, for a "mynde of the passion" of Christ, appears in an essentially speculative context, or at least one of a primarily intellectual inquiry. "Mynde" in Middle English, as well as having the meaning of memory or recollection, was used to translate the Latin word "Mens", a neoplatonic term which for Augustine signified "the essence of the soul together with all its powers".³⁵ The recollection of Christ's passion is the creative principle of the Showings, both through its value as a universal representation of suffering and as the focus for the Christian tradition in which Julian situates her conflict. To go along with this recollection, Julian seeks a secondary experience, this time of a physical nature: a "bodily sicknes . . . so hard as to the death, that I might in that sicknes haue vndertaken all my rightes of the holie Church, my selfe weenyng that I should haue died, and that all creatures might suppose þe same that saw me" (2, 287). Julian elaborates upon this request by explaining that she had "desyred a bodely sight, wher in I might haue more knowledge of the bodily paynes of our sauour, and of the compassion of our lady" (2, 286; my emphasis). This second request is complementary to the first and manifests its principle: an experience serves to verify speculative

³⁵ See Wolfgang Riehle, The Middle English Mystics, trans. Bernard Standring (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul) 1981, 144.

knowledge and make it more accessible to reflection. As such, the second request can be said to "proceed" from the first in a manner similar to the processions in the Trinity. She likewise unites the two requests by appending the condition that she wants them granted only if it be God's will, for "me thought this was not the commune vse of prayer" (2, 288). Having a background in the affective tradition and perhaps viewing intellectual inquiry with some suspicion, Julian by those strange words may be describing her process of absorbing a new approach to spirituality with which she is not yet completely comfortable. The third request, which she asked for "mightly with out anie condicion", was to receive three wounds, "that is to say, the wound of verie contricion, the wound of kynd compassion and the wound of wilful longing to god" (2, 288). This wish for three wounds, too, proceeds from the connection between the first two requests. Moreover, it involves an apprehension of the unity between mental recollection and physical feeling which, on the affective level, wholly subsumes -- and hypostatizes -- them: "These twayne desyres before sayd passid from my mynd, and the third dwellid contynually" (3, 288).

With the third request we come into the more familiar realm of "compunction", a concept developed within affective theology by Gregory the Great. As Jean Leclercq describes it, compunction was

a "prick" of grace in the soul, a sort of wound by which God makes us realize our wretchedness,

"wakes" us from the sleep of false security, and keeps alive in us an abiding sorrow for sin.³⁶

Much of the content of Julian's Showings can be traced to the theme of compunction. She emphasised this theme in her writings when she claims that sin is nothing but the pain which it causes, "and thys payne is somethyng . . . for it purgyth and makyth vs to know oure selfe and aske mercy" (27/13, 406-7). Moreover, there is an interesting interweaving of two representations of the crucified Christ: one a noble pious figure who inspires Julian to a greater longing for God; the other a weak, pitiable creature whose agony is often frightening to Julian and at one point leads her to reconsider her desire to experience personally the passion of Christ (17/8, 364). The use of contrasting representations of Christ's passion in Julian's Showings bears a similarity to the compunction tradition, and especially to Gregory's practice of using contrasting images to explore the two aspects of compunction: "at one moment fear of sin and of the judge who will punish it (the compunction of pain and sorrow [Julian's "trew drede"]), and at another, love, begetting a confidence based on contempt of self, and a burning desire for heaven."³⁷ While the compunction of love comes only in the highest states of prayer and is related to a "nostalgia" for heaven, it also brings with it a sense of

³⁶ Leclercq, Spirituality in the Middle Ages, 25.

³⁷ Leclercq, Spirituality.

joy regarding the earthly realm. "Here compunction is already contemplation; and at every level it unites the active to the contemplative, is a part of both, and leads from one to the other."³⁸

Christ's body is introduced as an image inspiring compunction -- through both compassion and respect -- in the first revelation. There Julian sees "the reed bloud rynnyng downe from vnder the garlande, hote and freyshely, plentuously and liuely, right as it was in the tyme that the garland of thornes was pressed on his blessed head" (4/1, 294). She then offers an image of St. Mary, beholding "hyr god so gret, so hygh, so myghty and so good," that "this gretness and this nobylnesse of her beholdyng of god fulfyllyd her of reverend drede" (7/1, 310-11). In such passages Julian expressly contrasts Mary (and herself) with Christ, whose heroism is thereby accentuated so that he bears some resemblance to the hero in the medieval epic tradition, exemplifying the values of nobility, wisdom and strength.³⁹ (Such contrasts have a parallel in the theme of the created world appearing as "little" when compared to the greatness of its Creator. Ch. 7) The values of nobility, wisdom and strength were in Julian's day beginning to become associated with the court, a development that Julian anticipates by presenting the parable

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Cf. E.R. Curtius, European Literature, 179-80.

of Lord and Servant in a "tableau form" and having the characters act "according to a strict courtly ritual".⁴⁰ She also insists on the necessity of a courtly as well as homely attitude to God, since God is both homely and courtly himself (77/16, 695).⁴¹ Courtesy in short, is important to the whole of Julian's salvation theology.

In the second revelation we meet with a different construction of Christ's body. Here we find described, in Christ's face, a different aspect of his passion, seen through "dyspyte, spytyng, solewyng and buffetyng, and manie languryng paynes, . . . and often chayngyng of colour" (10/2, 324). Julian finds this vision "so lowe and so little and so symple" (327) that she wonders if it is actually a revelation or not. Seeing this second revelation more clearly at length, she discovers that it contains a central and important image: "It was a fygur and a lyknes of our fowle blacke dede, which that our feyre bryght blessed lord bare for our synne". Here Julian is preparing the groundwork for her later symbolic enactment, in the Lord-Servant parable, of the theology of image and likeness, as well as for the theory of the regio

⁴⁰ Riehle, Middle English Mystics, 78.

⁴¹ "For oure curtesse lorde wylle þat we be as homely with hym as hart may thynge or soule may desyer; but he we ware þat we take not so rechelusly this homelyhed for to leue curtesys. For oure lorde hym selfe is sovereyn homelyhed, and so homely as he is, as curtesse he is; for he is very curteyse. And the blessyd creatures þat shalle by in hevyn with hym with out ende, he wylle haue them lyke vnto hym selfe in alle thyng" (77/16, 694-95; my emphasis)

dissimilitudinis according to which Humanity through sin falls away from the likeness of God, thereby causing Christ to do likewise for the sake of our redemption. Seeing this imitation of our unlikeness represented in Christ is part of our return back to that likeness of ourselves to be found in the image of God by following Christ through to his redemption. It is achieved by the illumination of self-knowledge that we gain through this representation.

The pattern of the two contrasting representations of Christ's passion, the heroic and the suffering, repeats itself in Julian's next representations of Christ; the vivid heroic figure shown again in the fourth revelation, and the discoloured, pale and drying Christ seen again in the eighth. Both these representations are common in medieval tradition. The heroic Christ has historical priority; but that image is gradually replaced -- as early as the eleventh century in England, and later in other parts of Europe -- by the suffering Christ which becomes the dominant image of Him in Renaissance paintings and sculptures.⁴²

⁴² See R.W. Southern, "From Epic to Romance", in The Making of the Middle Ages (London: Hutchinson's U. Library, 1953), 219-57. He writes: "Until this time [late 11th century], the most powerful representations of the Crucifixion in Western Europe had expressed the sense of that remote and majestic act of Divine power which had filled the minds of earlier generations. But a change had been slowly creeping in which led in time to the realization of the extreme limits of human suffering; the dying figure was stripped of its garments, the arms sagged with the weight of the body, the head hung on one side, the eyes were closed, the blood ran down the cross" (237).

In Julian's showings both Christs figure significantly in what becomes an ongoing tension in particular aspects of the human response to suffering. Although the representation of the suffering bloodless Christ chronologically follows the representation of Christ flowing with plenteous blood, and depicts, medically, a later stage in the dying process, the repeated alternation of these images reinforces their opposition and the ironic tension which that creates. This tension is resolved only in the eventual triumphant resurrection of Christ as both heroic and compassionate. Such a resurrection, in which Julian emotionally and intellectually shares, helps to link her inner spiritual striving to her struggle against social and moral limitations as her pains and sufferings are transformed (in the envisioned "heavenly" realm) into "honours" and "worships", adorned by Christ and revealed to all the multitude of heaven (14/6, 352).

The physical imagery of the heroic and suffering Christs preceding this resolution often focuses on the detail of blood, significant to Julian both in its presence and its absence. In the fourth showing the sight of Christ's plenteous blood brings to her mind an image of water, washing away all our sins (12/4, 344). This contrasts with the eighth showing, where Julian sees Christ's "swete face as it were drye and blodeles" (16/8, 357). Considering this the "most peyne and the last of his passion" (Ibid.), she is led to a reflection on the nature of our spiritual thirst (16/8, 359).

It is useful to look in more detail at some of the characteristics which distinguish the rhetorical tradition from the philosophical in order to better understand how Julian links affective and intellectual operations to the process of transformation. While Julian writes primarily within the rhetorical tradition, she has a further goal, stemming from her feelings of discomfort. These prompt her to attempt to find a balance that would reconcile knowledge (intellectus) and the affections (affectus), the relationship between which was continually in flux in the classical and medieval worlds. The key to her achievement here will come through the development of her parable. There we find Julian's strongest movement towards the "poetic" side of the rhetorical tradition through her use of a sustained metaphorical (and ironic) structure. The narrative movement which culminates in the parable points towards an integrated process of coming to knowledge based on Trinitarian principles, which help link the teachings of the Church with Julian's own, often seemingly contradictory, insights and convictions on spiritual matters.

Thinking on the relationship between knowledge and affection begins as a species of the classical distinction, already fully developed in the debates between Plato and the Sophists, between truth (epistemè) and opinion (doxa). Inherent in this distinction is the ongoing debate between philosophy (analytic and dialectic), limited by its invariably

becoming an elitist pursuit of rarefied knowledge, and rhetoric, an art based on faith or persuasion which takes into consideration and makes a point of appealing to the doxa of the people, but with reduced claims upon universality. As rhetoric reaches a fuller development in Cicero as the art of negotium in public and civic affairs, it forms what will be a successful model for the development of Christian apologetics not only to explain Christian mysteries and practices to the larger society,⁴³ but to aid Christians to integrate the experience of divine love with the other dimensions (moral, intellectual, etc.) of their lives.⁴⁴ This development hinges on the New Testament construction of the notion of faith ("pistis") upon the Greek rhetorical notion of persuasion (for which the Greek word was also "pistis"). Following Aristotle, the standard definition of rhetoric as the "art of persuasion" may be something of a modern misnomer inasmuch as the Greek word for "persuasion" ("pistis") resonated with a very different emphasis than our modern English equivalent. In the Greek rhetorical tradition, according to a recent study,⁴⁵ the primary meaning of pistis is "trust" or "assurance" as in the modern sense of the word "persuasion" to mean a commitment of belief (as in "I was of

⁴³ See Barilli, Rhetoric, 38-42.

⁴⁴ Lonergan, Method, 123.

⁴⁵ James L Kinneavy, Greek Rhetorical Origins of Christian Faith (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1987).

the persuasion that . . ."). Moreover, pistis, which is thus linked to doxa and phronesis (practical wisdom), was to be obtained by observing three elements: faith (fiducia), content (notitia), and wilful choice (assensus). In the (Greek) rhetorical tradition, then, it is easy to understand why the primary focus was typically on probability and phronesis rather than certitude and theoria. With all of this in mind, the implications for a spirituality built upon the rhetorical tradition with an emphasis on phronesis become clearer: It will be essential that one construct a mixed life,⁴⁶ of contemplation and action, in order to orient oneself both to the attainment of knowledge and to an awareness of how this knowledge can be taught to society.

Although Cicero is most influential in the way that he appropriates the Greek rhetorical tradition and translates its dynamics into the more pragmatic Latin mindset, it is with Augustine that the practice of rhetoric is taken to some of its greatest heights. In the writings of Augustine we find rhetoric very deeply integrated with theology as the introspective Bishop of Hippo develops arguments to refute the various challenges of other philosophies, in particular, Manicheism, Stoicism, Ciceronianism (this never fully rejected), and Scepticism.⁴⁷ Most important, at least for my purposes, is the way Augustine unifies his interior world

⁴⁶ see footnote above, 37.

⁴⁷ Barilli, Rhetoric 40.

through his development of Trinitarian theology. Of special interest is an analogy in On The Trinity which forms the basis for the Christian understanding of the relationship between the intellect and the affections: mind, knowledge, and love. In Augustine's view, knowledge sheds the independent status it found in Plato. This happens by virtue of a linkage to the nature and processes of the human mind (intellect) resulting from the mind's act of establishing the presence (memoria) of objects, and in part thanks to human intentionality (will/charity).

The conception of knowledge (epistemè) within a Christian Trinitarian context can best be conceived as an "intellectual emanation"⁴⁸ which stands out independently with respect to the mind which conceives it. For Augustine, such consciousness of the intellect is understood through the concept of the "inner teacher" (Christ as the Word operative within us) who guides all acts of understanding. But while Augustine was concerned with this more philosophical issue, at no place in his writings is it ever systematically developed.

It is in the writings of Thomas Aquinas, finally, that the consciousness of the intellect first receives a systematic treatment. The intellectual emanation appears in his terminology as the "inner word" (verbum interius, verbum

⁴⁸ For a detailed account of this term ("emanatio intelligibilis") see Lonergan De Deo Trino (Rome: Apud Aedes Universitatis Gregoriana, 1964) 69-74.

mentis, etc.), which motivates discourse. In this procession, it should be said that the word exists "because" of the mind, but not that the mind "causes" it. Thus mind and word are not dependent, as are cause and effect, but rather stand in the same relation as parent and offspring. Furthermore, the mind ("mens") and the knowledge (intellectus) it conceives are held together by a further emanation, love, ("Amor", the basis of "affectus"), which binds the knowledge to the knower and gives it its force in the knower's life.

The interplay between intellectual and affective faculties becomes even more important in situations where the contents of the mind are not physically present to the senses but instead come from the memory, as one reflects on experiential knowledge acquired in time. The "trinity" of activities involved in this case consists of the memory, the intellect and the will. For Augustine, "these three faculties are mutually contained in each other. . . . [E]ach faculty independently is hence fully equal to the other two, and each as a whole is equal to all three taken together. Thus, . . . the three are one: one life, one soul, one essence".⁴⁹ The difference between these two analogies (mind, knowledge and love; memory, will and intellect), has to do with the active force of the soul which in the latter formulation bears more specifically on concrete circumstances. This it achieves in

⁴⁹ As quoted by Marcia L. Colish in The Mirror of Language: A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge (Lincoln and London: U. of Nebraska P., 1968; rev. ed. 1983) 51.

the interrogation of an event which the memory wilfully makes present for the scrutiny of the intellect. Within this unity, the question becomes that of determining not only the proper objects of love, though this is primary, but also the proper response to one's feelings towards various objects as they arise in one's memory (come to mind). In this sense it is similar both to Lonergan's treatment of "values" as the highest level of meaning (see quote above, p 16), as well as to Gadamer's analysis of formative "horizons" as an historical set of "pre-judgements" which one must critically re-appropriate in further encounters with, and integration within, one's tradition.

In the Middle Ages, intellectus and affectus are conceived as the powers of the soul, which, as it were, root the individual in the historically and communally constituted world.⁵⁰ For this reason in later medieval writing these powers were often indicated by the "feet of the soul", an image widely used for this purpose by Bernard of Clairvaux, for example.

A noteworthy use of this image is found in Dante. Although not close enough in time and place to be directly compared with Julian of Norwich, his Divina Commedia provides an interesting gloss on the Showings of Divine Love in the way that Dante develops the theme of knowledge and affectivity

⁵⁰ See Guiseppe Mazzotta, Dante, Poet of the Desert: History and Allegory in the Divine Comedy (Princeton NJ: Princeton U.P., 1979) 36.

common to both. In the first canto of the Inferno, Dante alludes to the problem of the relation between knowledge and will. In the brief journey before meeting Virgil, the pilgrim is frustrated by a series of beasts because he has no one to guide him through the battles against the three types of sin represented by the Leopard, the Lion and the Wolf. The pilgrim himself is initially described as limping, keeping his firm foot (the left, since all movement in the Middle Ages was considered to have originated from the right side of the body) always below his agile one.⁵¹

Poi ch'èi posato un poco il corpo lasso,
 ripresi via per la spiaggia diserta,
 si che'l piè fermo sempre era 'l più basso
 (Inf.I, 28-30)⁵²

(After I had rested my wearied frame for a little I took my way again over the desert slope, keeping always the firm foot lower.)

Thus handicapped as he tackles the desert slope, the pilgrim symbolises Humankind injured in its will or affective faculties, although the intellect, having gazed upwards at the

⁵¹ See John Freccero, "Dante's Firm Foot on the Journey Without a Guide", Harvard Theological Review, 52 (1959), 245-81, for a full discussion of this canto within the context of intellectus and affectus, as well as a complicated but convincing gloss on the meaning of "firm" foot.

⁵² Quoted from Dante's Inferno, ed. John D. Sinclair (New York: Oxford U. P., 1939)

light atop the mountain,⁵³ is already cured of its wounds and so can perceive, in the clearing apart from the forest, the direction to be travelled. In this metaphor Dante seems to suggest that his pilgrim could limp into Paradise on the strength of his intellect alone, were it not for a complicated moral landscape that requires the intellect and the affections to learn to work together, to which end Dante supplies a guide in the form of a classical humanist poet.⁵⁴

While in medieval theology the intellect suffered the wound of ignorance, this was believed to be more easily cured than the wound of concupiscence that is suffered by the affective faculties.⁵⁵ The cure to the weakening of the will, such that one's heart does not automatically follow one's apprehension of truth, but has to be dragged behind, was considered since ancient times to lie in the realm of rhetoric where opinions (doxa) can be appealed to on the basis of experience -- hence Virgil and the powers of poetry appear in Dante in order to provide the images which motivate private inquiry.

It is interesting to note here that within the Platonic tradition both the malady and the cure were anathema. Not

⁵³ Throughout the neoplatonic tradition a glance away from the material realm, this world, up to the light has been used to symbolize intellectual conversion. See Freccero, 30 and note.

⁵⁴ Freccero, 280.

⁵⁵ Freccero, 279-80

only does Plato continually attack the Sophist tradition of rhetoric (along with poetry); but in the Protagoras (349bff.)⁵⁶ he also argues against the very possibility of there being such a condition as a weakness of the will, or its substantial alienation from knowledge.⁵⁷ It is largely against such a view of knowledge and will as identical that the Voluntaristic tradition developed a strong interest in the mid-fourteenth century for radically separating will from knowledge and emphasising the total independence of the former.⁵⁸

In A Book of Showings, Julian at first similarly conceives of her self in relation to transcendent mystery in terms of an absolute withdrawal from the world mediated by meaning through a death or martyrdom typology. But although

⁵⁶ Collected Dialogues of Plato including the Letters, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, NJ: Princeton U. P., 1961) 341-52.

⁵⁷ For a fuller discussion of this see Freccero, "Dante's Firm Foot", 245-46. Julian in a sense is closer to Plato on the question of the harmony of will and knowledge, even though she would also agree with St. Paul's statement in (Romans 7:18-19) that one cannot always do the good one wills, or avoid the evil one wills against. For Julian, although there is no ultimate human control over the effect of one's actions, nevertheless there is an integral relationship between sin and ignorance. The main difference between Julian and the Neoplatonic tradition is that for Julian a true religious conversion is a conversion towards the values and meanings which obtain within this world: loving the God of this world and loving one's neighbour here and now. For Julian knowledge is also always conditioned by the contingencies that attend to this world.

⁵⁸ See The Crisis of Will in Piers Plowman by John Bowers (Washington, DC: The Catholic U. of America P., 1986) 41-60.

leaning towards this Voluntarist view in her own prologue, she will come to focus on the problem of re-establishing the interrelationship of intellect and will which is broken by the effects of sin. In the course of experiencing the sickness which she believes will lead to her death, she begins to understand an aspect of the orientation to transcendent mystery which speaks to a consciousness involved in the world of mediated meaning. The all-absorbing mystical consciousness arises from a recognition of and surrender to a divine gift of love which has implications beyond every possible response that can be made from within our mortal condition, and which therefore demands (or seems to demand) the surrender of all our mortal resources. Nevertheless, it is also a consciousness arising from within a world mediated by meaning and holding possibilities for further dialogue or response to that world.

A crucial aspect of this orientation can be seen in Julian's focus on the imagery of the crucifix. Christ in this world is, like all humanity, broken. It is only either through contemplation of our own death or by identification with Christ's that we can find a means to live, having accepted our own brokenness and mortality and the need to deal with forms of knowledge that, being limited, only point to something further. This understanding directs a use of images and metaphors which facilitates Julian's full immersion into the tradition of rhetoric and parable. Truth, or at least

true knowledge (epistemè), is something that she discovers not solely in the interior life, but through reflection in conjunction with historical fact and the doxa handed down to her and her potential readers by the Christian tradition.

Both Julian and Dante reject a straightforward flight from earthliness in favour of another: the flight from sin achieved through a Christ-patterned immersion in the brokenness of the present world. For Dante this occurs in the longer, more difficult journey he must make through the realms of human perdition and purgation; Julian seeks a similar pattern in the image of Christ crucified. For both it is an immersion in the world of contingent probabilities where highly abstract speculation must be set aside and relearned through particular situations.

The medieval tradition of posing the problem of spiritual limitations in terms of particular wounds incurred by the intellect and the will is given an interesting and original treatment in Julian's Showings. For her the wounds are (intellectual) blindness, or ignorance, and (affective) sloth, or impatience. Sloth is caused by a lack of the feeling of security and of God's presence. This sloth is both a result and a cause of our blindness. It results from our blindness to God's compassion for us, and also from our sharing at all times in Christ's "nobility", despite our present "unlikeness" to God. Because of the sloth that results from our anxieties, we lose sight of our goal of returning to the likeness of God

and are thus blinded from knowing our own ultimate end and intention.⁵⁹

Still, the interpretive tradition which conceived the journey to God on an analogy of bodily disability has some important parallels in the prologue of Julian's Revelations. Julian, however, casts the activity involved in her project in images powerfully suggestive of the interior life. To the consciousness of the Western mind, it seems that the mythological shape of a quest or a journey, such as the dream visions of Piers Plowman looking for justice and worldly ethics or Dante's pilgrim searching for grace in his tour through an afterlife landscape, is appropriate to the basic heuristic structure of classical and Christian epistemology. Such a journey is, however, more suitable to philosophy as it likens the human struggle to a solitary search for individual truth. Yet this is also to say that it cannot integrate a meaningful affective response as a significant part of the struggle for full human agency. While it is true, and has often been considered unquestionable, that poets such as Dante can appeal to the affections of their readers through the tone and images of their writings, there is no assurance that those readers will be attuned to this dimension -- indeed, the experience of our own age has demonstrated that without intensive cultural practices to support literary

⁵⁹ Grace M. Jantzen, Julian of Norwich, Mystic and Theologian (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987) 206.

understanding, such apprehension is not attainable without a great deal of exclusive and specialized training. A less "pctetically informed" reading can easily concentrate on purely mental matters -- the equivalent of an intellectually top-heavy, and spiritually imbalanced, form of theology.

For Julian's needs, the model of the journey must be replaced by one that is more discursive and Trinitarian, one that accommodates doxa and pistis as well as theoria and epistemè, and prescribes some way of negotiating these pairs that will also allow for the integration of affective and intellectual acts in the understanding of human situations.⁶⁰ This will occur most noticeably when she takes up the problem of sin, whose difficulty for Julian centres upon the opinions commonly held about sin. Julian's task will be not only to discover through her showings what sin is (notitia), but to convince (assensus), -- through imagery and parable -- both her "even-christians" and her own affective tendencies that this notion is adequate to the causes of suffering. Thus the question of fiducia, strictly speaking, relates not to the credibility of Julian, but to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit which has given her this insight. It is a question of faith in God as understood by one's own intellect in contemplation rather than through received teachings. The

⁶⁰ Riehle (67) also comments on the use of the journey motif in the Middle English mystics, noting that with the exception of Halton's Scale, it is entirely absent, replaced, in his view, with the image of mystical "leading", itself common from the ancient mystery cults.

knowledge Julian receives of sin reveals to her its non-existence in the eyes of God, but she is still troubled and bothered by the fear of God's judgment and by her own insecurities in those periods when the sensation of God's presence is missing and she is left to confront all her pain and suffering in a condition of seeming aloneness.

Her solution in part lies with a two-fold concept of the human soul which she elucidates in chapter 58, along with one of her fullest expressions of the workings of the Trinity as "father", "mother" and "lord":

þe hygh myght of the trynyte is oure fader, and the depe wysdom of the trynyte is oure moder, and the grete loue of the trynyte is oure lorde; and alle these haue we in kynde and in oure substanncyall makyng. And ferthere more I saw that the seconde person, whych is oure moder, substanncyally the same derewurthy person, is now become oure moder sensuall, for we be doubell of gods makyng, that is to sey substannciall and sensuall. Oure substannce is þe hyer perty, whych we haue in oure fader god almyghty; and the seconde person of the trynyte is oure moder in kynd in oure substanncyall makyng, in whom we be groundyd and rotyd, and he is oure moder of mercy in oure sensuallite takyng, And thus oure moder is to vs dyverse manner werkyng, in whom oure pertys be kepte vndepertyd. (58/14, 585-6)

Since sin exists only in our sensuality, and not in our substance, we will always remain blameless in the eyes of God. Sin does, however, affect our sensuality, and its effect is that of pulling the two parts of our soul apart. This is where Julian's second Person of the Trinity, "our mother" of the fourteenth revelation, is essential in "nourishing" us as

we attempt to reintegrate our various faculties.⁶¹ Christ our mother, however, in keeping us "vndepertyd", must undergo the loss of his own likeness to God in order to remain with us in our descent into sin, or fragmentation. This is similar to the mother's role of creating a bond of empathy with the child which involves her in the child's realms of meaning.

The effect of fallen sensuality on the substantial divinity of Christ figures in Julian's earlier image of the discoloured Christ, dry, pale, and dying on the cross. The effect of sin is present as well in the "travail" of motherhood which is required to bring about our healing from sin and recuperation to a purpose which intends (has likeness with) God.

Julian's theology of likeness is derived from William of St. Thierry. As summarized by Jean Dechanet:⁶²

In the divine Trinity the Father and the Son see each other mutually and for them to see each other mutually is to be "one". But man finds himself called to see God some day as he is and, seeing him, to become like him. And just as between the Father and the Son there is unity where there is vision, so too between man and God there will be likeness where there is vision. Now the unity of the Father and the Son is the Holy Spirit. It is, therefore, he who is the love and who will be man's

⁶¹ See Christine Allen, "Christ our Mother in Julian of Norwich", Sciences Religieuses/Studies in Religion, 10, (1981): 421-28, for an explication of Julian's use and development of this theme.

⁶² "Introduction", The Works of William of St. Thierry, Vol II: Exposition on the Song of Songs, trans. Mother Columba Hart (Shannon: Irish U. P., 1970) xli.

likeness to God.

Julian will integrate St. Thierry's connection between vision and likeness within her own theology in her discussions of "seeking" and "beholding" (which I shall explicate more fully in the following chapter).

We always maintain God's image within us; and through Christ this image, our substantial being, is maintained in its unity with our sensuality. We therefore have the capacity to regain, or again move towards, God's likeness by reuniting our substance within ourselves.⁶³ Thus for Julian, the primary goal of her narrative is not the completion of a journey through the world to a particular spatial destination, but is instead an exploration of Christ's passion which leads her to knowledge of her own failings and self-fragmentation. This is made possible through Christ's courteous love,⁶⁴ and through His disfiguration and death whose effect is to nourish our affective faculties by giving comfort without assigning blame since he has himself absorbed the consequence of our fragmentation.

From the image of Christ, Who is also substantial and Trinitarian, we can see how our own substance, which exists in

⁶³ See David N. Bell, Image and Likeness: The Theology of William of St. Thierry (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1984).

⁶⁴ Rosemary Woolf, in The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages (Oxford: Clarendon P., 1986) 215, defines courtesy in the Middle Ages as "the bestowing of love with no expectation of something in return."

us in a Trinitarian manner, can be reunited so that our various psychological faculties will function together as a unity, in the manner of the economic Godhead. This, for Julian following the theology of William of St. Thierry, is the return of the (fragmented) image of God within us to the (unified) likeness of God without. It is not, however, a unity based on the obliteration of all forms of difference within us, but one based on grasping our wholeness in three essentially distinct ways, a concept derived from the doctrine of the co-inherence of the Trinity:

And our substannce is in oure fader god almyghty, and oure substannce is in oure moder god all wysdom, and oure substannce is in oure lorde god the holy gost all goodnes, for oure substannce is hole in ech person of the trynyte, whych is one god. And oure sensuallyte is only in the seconde person, Crist Jhesu, in whom is the fader and holy gost; and in hym and be hym we be myghtly takyn out of hell and oute of the wrechydnesse in erth, and wurschypfully brought vp in to hevyn, and blyssydfully onyd to oure substannce, encresyd in rychesse and nobly by all the vertu of Crist and by the grace and werkyng of the holy gost. (59/14, 588,)

What is often thought to be an obfuscating complexity within Trinitarian doctrine is really the difficult attempt to explain in some kind of logical manner the dynamics of a rhetorical conception of wholeness. Although the Trinity ideally functions as a whole, for purposes of analysis it must be looked at in terms of its various components. The totality of the Trinity is thus grasped from the several directions of its various parts, each one leading to the whole

through the development of a tension in which the remaining parts are set up as complementary principles. The passage I have quoted above shows how Julian's use of father/mother figures reaches this eventual synthesis.

IV

Reuniting the Trinity Within

The key for seeking and beholding God in this life, within the Augustinian tradition that Julian shared, lies -- as I argued in detail in my previous chapter -- in an interrelated development of intellectual and affective capacities comprehended on a Trinitarian model that unites each person's exterior struggle against sin and ignorance with the struggles of others -- "with Magdaleyne and with other that were Christus louers" (2,285). But it is the trinitarian set of relationships involved in the interior life that provides the "ground" for all actions of knowing and loving directed to the exterior world. It is primarily in this context, rather than in relation to metaphysical speculation about the nature of God, that differences between various theories of the Trinity become important. For that reason it is necessary to provide a further (brief) orientation to Julian's theory of the Trinity at the outset of this chapter.

In Julian's time, innumerable developments within Trinitarian theology presented a host of difficulties which threatened to undermine the original coherence and

potentiality of Augustine's contribution. Some of these developments posited a distinction between intellect and will, "that as the inner word proceeds from the act of understanding, so within the will some distinct term proceeds from the act of love."⁶⁵ This so-called "parallelism", which Lonergan identifies in the Trinitarian writings of Henry of Ghent and John Duns Scotus, separates knowledge and love at the very moment of their inception by making them part of two different processes. The result of this kind of Trinitarianism -- though it already subverts the unity of such -- was the development of a "Voluntaristic" tradition of affective theology and mysticism. In this Voluntaristic tradition, which comprises a significant part of the theological debate behind the character of Will in Piers Plowman,⁶⁶ the primary concern was to conform one's will to a body of received knowledge of the divine which was accepted through faith -- a faith that often needed to be strengthened from without since it had no foundation in personal experience and understanding -- rather than to enquire into previous formulations of faith in order to arrive at a fuller

⁶⁵ Lonergan, Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas (Notre Dame: U. Notre Dame P., 1967) 100.

⁶⁶ See Bowers, op. Cit.; and also, James Simpson, "From Reason to Affective Knowledge: Modes of thought and Poetic Form in Piers Plowman", Medium Aevum, 55 (1) 1986:1-23, Mary Caruthers, The Search for St. Truth: A Study of Meaning in Piers Plowman, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern U. P., 1973), 68-80; and, on Voluntarism generally, Etienne Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages (New York: Random House, 1955), 463-64.

understanding of its essential paradoxes. In short, where Augustinian theology had linked the processes of enquiry based on principles of faith, to the formation of a will that could anticipate or grasp in advance the most fruitful grounds for such an enquiry, the Voluntaristic tradition tended to accept received doctrines as essentially complete, and focused chiefly on the difficulties involved in setting about their application.

It is important to understand Julian's appropriation of Trinitarian theology in order to fully comprehend her concept of the self and how it is constructed. For Julian, as for Augustine, mind, knowledge, and love are held in an operative unity in which the act of love proceeds from the bond between mind and knowledge, just as in her other trinitarian constructions, the third hypostatisation always proceeds from the union between the first two. A good example is the following passage from the fourteenth showing which Julian's editors point to as an echo of the English Mirror of St. Edmund as well as of passages in Proverbs and the Gospel of John:

Truth seeth god, and wisdom beholdyth god, and of theyse two comyth the thurde, and that is a maruelous delyght in god, whych is loue. Where truth and wysedom is, verely there is loue, verely comyng of them both, and alle are of goddes makying. For god is endlesse souereyne truth, endelesse souereyne wysdom, endelesse souereyne loue vnmade; and a mans soul is a creature in god whych hath the same propertes made. (44/14, 483-4)

This "created" trinity inside us is one of the ad extra workings of the Trinity, but one which, because of sin, needs to be reunited in order for one to orient oneself towards the transcendent mystery of spiritual love, or in more traditional Christian terms, to redeem one's original relationship with God. This goal of reuniting the trinitarian elements within one's self is taken up through spiritual love both in its mediated and immediate forms, and is thus the object of prayer within the contemplative life. As well, reuniting the trinity within is essential to the active life since true compassion for others is not fully possible where there exists a fragmented self.

Within our selves as created trinitaries then, love or will is occasioned by and supports the conditions of the intellect in pursuing its 'intention', an element relating to a teleological drive but often manifested through a particular question or difficulty judged to be of significant meaning. Julian's term for this drive of intentionality is "seeking", while she refers to its fulfillment as "beholding". Seeking is an ongoing striving, or longing for God in love, which Julian likens to the "goostly thyrst of Cryst," that can only be fulfilled when "the last great deed is done" and "we se that syght at domys day. . . . For we be nott now fully as hole in hym as we shalle be than" (13/31, 418). Although this beholding is postponed beyond this life, it becomes temporal as well as eschatological in the Showings in that the activity

of seeking is itself a sure and fruitful substitute in this life for the complete seeing or beholding that will be achieved in the next: "And thus was I lernyd to my vnderstandyng that sekyng is as good as beholdyng for the tyme that he wille suffer the sowle to be in traveyle" (10/2, 323-3). According to Julian, is through this seeking, within which our intellectual and emotional selves are fully absorbed, that God is able to present Himself to us of His own grace. Moreover, our "seeking" for God is already the work and sign of God's likeness within us, and thus its manifestation represents the start of our journey back to God. Beyond such seeking, however, human will has no role. Nor does it need one, for at this point the human requirements are entirely fulfilled and await only the full understanding of their meaning on a spiritual level -- an understanding which, though beyond the reach of rational process, Julian holds to be accessible: "It is gods will that we seke into the beholdyng of hym, for by that shall he shew vs hym self of his speciall grace when he will" (ibid.).

At risk of becoming repetitive, it is important, I think, to stress that for Julian of Norwich the "special grace" of the level of understanding she is here describing extends potentially to all "seekers" rather than being confined to an elite of spiritually endowed authorities.

And whan we see owght of hym graciously, then are we steryd by the same grace to seke with great desyer to see hym more blessedfully. And thus I saw him and sought him, and I had hym and wantyd

hym; and this is and should be our comyn workyng in
this life, as to my syght. (2,10, 325-6)

The reference to "comyn workyng" is indicative of Julian's universalism. Although in the long text she does not reveal the nature of the particular limitations which she had to overcome in her own life, she does here call upon everybody to rise above their own situations in order to participate in a fully developed spiritual life.

One of the most consistent patterns in Julian's writing is her use of familiar images of Trinitarian relationships in articulating the content of her "beholding" in these visions - - a content which usually bears upon the processes of integration within the social and natural orders as well as upon the workings of "comfort" in this world. Because grace and salvation are theological areas of considerable discussion and pronouncement by the Church, the first important element to understand in Julian's Trinitarian theory -- also for the purpose of "locating" her project as a whole -- is her distinction between Word and Spirit, which she relates primarily to "Holy Church" and "Holy Ghost", respectively. Separating these two allows Julian some initial freedom for discussion, and if she were to confine herself to the realm of Spirit, with some minor demurrals towards the authority of the contemporary Church, the division could be seen as merely a political expedient. But the visions fully take up both sides of these two hypostatisations of God, and Julian's purpose

throughout is to link them as entities within a triune structure so as to be able to go beyond the paradoxically distinct nature of these two locutions and envision a single unified goal. To uphold this latter aspect of the Trinitarian mystery, Julian must find some way to interrogate her spiritual understanding as a whole, thus transcending any particular contradictions between the teachings of the Church and her own insights. In her attempt, Julian will discover that simple descriptive language cannot suffice. She therefore resorts, in her remarkable parable in Chapter 51, to an extended allegorical structure, which allows her to represent fully the often ironic nature of her Trinitarian constructions.

Julian comprehends almost all of her showings in three distinct manners. These all relate to a Triune schema consisting of the created world, the redemptive word within that world, and the spiritual grace and promptings which are received inwardly. "All this was shewde by thre partes," writes Julian at the end of the first vision, "by bodyly syght, and by worde formyde in my vnderstonding, and by goostly syght" (9/1, 323). The first two manners of revelation relate to ordinary and mythological contexts. The spiritual visions, however, have a "menynge" (a word denoting both "purpose" and "utterance") connected to an "intended" world that demands the transformation of both our active living and our spiritual formulations of self-knowledge (i.e.,

both interpretation and intentionality). It is these visions, therefore, which are the most difficult to communicate; and in her effort to do so Julian draws the reader, too, into the cooperative grace of the Holy Spirit. In her own words:

But the goostely syght I can nott ne may shew it as openly ne as fully as I would. But I trust in our lord god almightie that he shall of his godnes and for iour loue make yow to take it more ghostely and more sweetly than I can or may tell it. (9/1, 323)

The meaning which Julian is attempting to communicate in these visions regards both sides of the communicative act, and thus incorporates God's meaning or words for us ("utterance"), as well as our meaning or intention (seeking) to find and behold him.

Other fundamental structures of Julian's visions are likewise often based on Trinitarian workings. Indeed, the generation of imaginative constructions produced by her Trinitarian thinking is a powerful example of the efficacy of the literary / rhetorical method. Most of Julian's images fall into line around the extension of the Trinity in the analogical terms of a family and other social relationships. The first person of the Trinity is variously God, father, might, truth, maker, natural reason, nobility, heaven, intent, substance, and our "being". The second person of the Trinity becomes Son, wisdom, keeper, mother, brother, earth, saviour, friend, servant, Holy Church, mercy, pity, assent, sensuality, and our "increasing". Finally, to the Third Person are given the images of Holy Ghost, lover, (royal) lordship, grace,

soul, accord, high goodness, rewarding, courtesy, fulfilment, and our "working".⁶⁷ These images allow Julian to inscribe the reciprocal relations of creative and redemptive forces in a coherent whole, thus enabling her to form a comprehensive and significant account of her inmost affective states.

This Trinitarian schematizing stands in especially sharp contrast with the narrative found in The Book of Margery Kempe.⁶⁸ The latter continually moves from one emotion to another without ever exhausting the source from which they arise or achieving any theological principle of organisation that can allow Margery to gain of control of and transform herself in accordance with the meaning of her experiences. Throughout her book Margery is continually up against the same problem of falling into temptation (i.e., away from some inner voice of direction) and needing some external "miracle" to keep her purpose within reach. Thus her husband's need to have some debts paid off helps her to gain her goal of abstinence; the accident of a falling rock provides her with an element of respect in her religious community; and she must rely first on her confessor to act as her scribe, and then on a friend of the first writer in order to decipher and revise the original account. The linear structure of Margery Kempe's

⁶⁷ In the fourteenth showing, passim.

⁶⁸ The Book of Margery Kempe, eds. S. B. Meech and H. E. Allen, published for The Early English Text Society, no. 212. London: Oxford U. P., 1940.

narrative leads to a sense of tragedy on the worldly level which the reader can only escape by accepting fully in its place the interpretation of transcendent meaning which is pointed to by Margery's witness to spiritual experiences. In contrast, the sequence of events in Julian's Showings is often simultaneous and/or cyclical, containing many "double" structures, whereby, for example, the "Old Adam" becomes the "New Adam" (Christ). It thus permits an ironic interpretation which ultimately converts what Julian calls "worships", suffered through the earthly condition of sin, into "honours" in the sight of God. In other words it is a perspective which reinterprets worldly experience while still remaining within it: By insisting on "double meanings", Julian maintains the unity of her imagery and its relevance to both "earthly" and "heavenly" realms.

Of further interest in a literary context is Julian's refusal to rely on logical definitions whose meaning is controlled by the kind of deductivist system that many of the Scholastics preferred. Chaucer seems to take that deductive approach seriously in representing the debates between realism and nominalism in Troilus and Criseyde and The Canterbury Tales, and it appears especially problematised in the Tales he gives to the Miller, the Wife of Bath and the Pardoner.⁶⁹ Julian, however, always prefers to handle each problem she

⁶⁹ Cf. David Williams, The Canterbury Tales: A Literary Pilgrimage (Boston: Twayne, 1987), 16ff.

tackles by developing an appropriate set of metaphorical relationships which encapsulate her overall ironic structure, and then proceeding to shape it within the larger schemas of the Trinity, the two natures of Christ, or the relationship between creation and redemption.

The same applies to the often deep influence in Julian's work of the triune schema in the Pseudo-Dionysian writings (especially the Celestial and Earthly Hierarchies): of "purgation", "illumination" and "unity". Conventionally the basis of a distinction between active and contemplative living,⁷⁰ that schema is instead synthesized in the Showings. Absorbed into the strategies of Julian's narrative, it informs descriptions of purgative experience with the insights of illuminating reflection on that experience, and affords her work the unity which the images, analogies and dramatic organisation of a set of visions can provide. In the first showing, this is particularly evident throughout Julian's recollection of her initial desires for her experience of "Christ's passion" and of how they came to her as a form of purgation from the earthly world. When Julian in this same showing finally understands her "avysion was schewde for them that shuld lyue" (1,8, 319), she is at the beginning of the illumination process which will lead her towards unity by helping her to understand the nature of sin (which itself becomes known to Julian as a moving outwards which is also

⁷⁰ See Erb, "Contemplation and Action", 4-6.

already a movement towards unity). And eventually, through the parable of the Lord and the Servant, she is able to re-unite her illuminated understanding with the teaching of the Church in a Trinitarian concept of divine presence available to us through prayer.

To come to a full awareness of the meaning of experience, as Julian does in her discussion of unitive prayer (Chapter 14), requires the active integration of the three components: memory, will, and understanding. Here the emphasis for Julian as she recalls her series of showings is on memory. But it is memory with a view to a reformed course of action (active will) and modified intention (active understanding). This trinitarian basis permeates as well her understanding of literary process. In shaping the development of her Showings towards the social and active life of the individual, Julian focuses on pain and suffering and the effects these have on our inward state. Although she eventually witnesses, through her identification with Christ, the transformation of suffering into joy and bliss in a resurrected state, her concern is not to get rid of painful experiences, but to receive them as part of God's meaning ("utterances"), to be understood and acted upon.

To illustrate this, Julian describes a twofold polarity of suffering and joy. The essential moment for this polarity is in the brief, but typologically central, seventh showing (and in Ch 52). Following the sixth revelation, showing God's

thankfulness which rewards service and labour on His behalf in one's youth, Julian experiences a deep sense of comfort:

And after thys he shewde a sovereyne gostely lykyng in my soule. In thys lykyng I was fulfyllde of the evyrlastyng suernesse, myghtely fastnyd without any paynfulle drede. This felyng was so glad and so goostely that I was all in peese, in eese and in rest, that ther was nothyng in erth that shulde haue grevyd me. (15/7, 354)

But almost immediately upon receiving this comfort, Julian feels it quickly depart again, leaving her feeling so much "hevynes and werynes of my life and irkenes of my selfe, that vnneth I could haue pacience to lyue" (*Ibid.*). She continues to experience an oscillation of pain and joy within herself, feeling "now that oonn and now that other, dyuerse tymes, I suppose about twenty tymes." The importance of this showing for Julian is that both pain and comfort have a usefulness for us, for:

it is spedfulle to some soules to feele on thys wyse, some tyme to be in comfort, and some tyme for to fayle and to be lefte to them selfe. God wylle that we know that he kepyth vs evyr in lyke suer, in wo and in wele; and for profy₃te of mans soule a man is somtyme left to hymselfe, all thogh hys synne is nott evyr the cause. (15/7, 355-6; my emphasis)

Julian repeatedly places importance on her alternating states of emotion. These make for a polarity constituting the central motif of her experience of comfort. That comfort, however, is not based on some stable principle of faith or ethics, but instead comes out of an ironic comprehension, of

both the transcendent and the various levels of the finite, holding together the heavenly with the earthly or ethical. This ironic ground of comfort means that both "well" and "woe", peace and oppression, are simultaneous aspects of God's presence. Julian is not thereby seeking to transcend human emotions or the vicissitudes of fortune through a rejection of the meaning of earthly experience. On the contrary, she will accept more fully the broken condition of this world as she comes to understand and affirm the deeper meaning of earthly experiences, and to build on this affirmation in the act of interpreting further experience.

This is a different type of transcendence from that which seeks to confirm a particular interpretation of reality by projecting its most easily mediated meanings beyond the dimensions of all earthly human experience as such. For Julian, transcendence is possible only insofar as one is able to understand the dialectic between pain and suffering on the one hand, and joy and bliss on the other, and to grasp the space in which this tension is played out. By understanding the scope or "limits" of this polarity, in other words -- by knowing the sequence of emotional changes as, in fact, a sequence -- one can establish a perspective beyond it (as Julian understands the Holy Spirit to say: "I am ground of thy besekyng": 14/41, 461).

The importance of such a perspective extends in two directions. It provides the "ground" for this kind of

substantial understanding of experience from which one's transformed self can be derived and by which it can be oriented. And in moving towards this "ground", the pain and suffering of earthly experience can be understood to be leading to a form of resolution which, for Julian, turns all our labours into "honours and worships". Pain and suffering are thus the contraries, and therefore also part of the condition, conducive to triumph in Julian's ironic universe. Only through our pain do we achieve what from a heavenly perspective will be a triumphant defeat of evil and a creation of some new honour and worthiness. Knowing what these oscillations lead to, then, and having a confident hope, or fiducia, in their providential resolution regarding the whole of our desire, is a source of security and comfort against the pain that we feel:

. . . for blysse is lastyng withou₃t ende, and payne is passyng, and shall be brought to nowght to them that shall be savyd. Therefore it is not goddes wylle that we folow the felyng of paynes in sorow and mowrnyng for them, but sodaynly passe ovyr and holde vs in the endless lykyng that is god. (15/7, 356)

This pain we are exhorted to pass over is the natural result both of our incompleteness in a finite world and of the further self-limitation we bring about through sin. On another level, this "pain" also symptomatises the aspect of doubt which can never be completely removed from faith in any image structure. Hence, along with the comfort produced by

understanding and self-transformation in accordance with experience, one must also accept a certain ongoing "discomfort". Accordingly, one must be content for a time to rely on that faith which can relativise such discomfort within a general pattern of meaning whereby specific problems may linger before being finally resolved through an achievement in perception and self-transformation at another level. This is precisely what occurs for Julian with respect to the Lord-and-Servant parable which it takes her twenty years to deal with: once accommodated to her showings, that parable resolves the tensions that have escalated as she develops a stronger sense of her private insights in relation to her inherited tradition.

The central conflict arises when Julian attempts to handle two differing judgments about the ultimate effect of sin. From an earthly view, Holy Church has judged sinners to be "worthy of blame and wrath"(45/14, 487), while a heavenly perspective includes the promise that in God's judgement humankind incurs "no more blame than if we were as clean and as holy as the angels in heaven". It is the latter judgement she has been hearing whenever the Holy Spirit tells her, "And all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well". Julian attempts to resolve this conflict several times -- in terms, e.g., of "love-game"⁷¹ expression of hide and seek in the 7th showing, and in her concluding vision's discursive

⁷¹ Riehle, Middle English Mystics, 40.

metaphysical summation of all that has been shown. But her most aesthetically and satisfying solution is to be found in the parable which she omitted from her showings for almost twenty years because she either did not fully comprehend it or did not see its full possibilities as a literary/allegorical model.

Julian had been concerned all along with the question of the presence and absence of God. Through the parable, she approaches this theme indirectly in terms of an allegory about the soul's going away from and returning to God -- about its journey from image to likeness; about the process of reuniting its own inner trinity in seeking the Triune God without. The parable begins with a scene of a Lord and his Servant. The Servant stands before his Lord, ready to do his will, then quickly runs off to carry out his master's bidding. On his way he stumbles and falls into a dell which is so deep he cannot see his master even though the master is standing very near. Julian enumerates seven pains that cause him to suffer and to lose sight of the loving presence of his Lord who, however, does not consider him any the less "obedient", but rather more deserving of help for all the pain he has endured).

And of all this the most myschefe that I say hym in was feylyng of comfort, for he culde nott turne his face to loke vppe on his lovyng lorde, whych was to hym full nere, in whom is full comfort; but as a man that was full febyll and vnwyse for the tyme, he entendyd to his feylyng and enduryng in woo, in whych woo he sufferyd vij grett paynes. (51/14, 515)

Significantly, given Julian's difficulties with sin and the blame accorded to it, the Servant in her parable illustrates that even the "going out" -- the movement away from God that necessitates the incarnation of Christ to redeem humanity -- is part of the intention and movement towards unity with God. "The rushing out is the incarnation and redemption, but in it the fall is enacted. . . . In the old servant I fall; in the new servant I am raised up".⁷² The only way for the Servant to achieve a "likeness" of the restfulness and unicity of God, is to do that which will cause his fall or individuation from those qualities -- namely, actively working towards the completion of God's creation:

The lorde syttyth solempnely in rest and in pees. The servannt stondyth before his lorde, reverently redy to do his lordes wylle. The lorde lokyth vppon his servannt full louely and swetly and mekely. He sendyth hym in to a certeyne place to do his wyll. The servannt nott onely he goyth, but sodenly he stertyth and rynnyth in grett hast for loue to do his lordes wylle. And anon he fallyth in a slade, and takyth ful grett sorow; and than he gronyth and monyth and wallowyth and wryeth, but he may nott ryse nor helpe hym selfe by no manner of weye. (51/14, 514-5)

Following the Servant's fall, the created trinity within him, which had united his memory, intellect and will around the intention of his Lord, is fragmented. Julian notes this as the most central of the Servant's seven great pains: "The iiiij was that he was blyndyd in his reson and stonyd in his

⁷² Erb, "Spirituality", 288.

mynde so ferforth that allmost he had forgeten his owne loue" (51/14, 515-6). The Servant's greatest problem in his fall is that he has had to come to worry about himself, that his own difficulties and sufferings overwhelm his affections. Hindered in his reason, he can neither discern the most significant meaning of his fall nor remember its origin in an intention to do his master's will. Absorbed in his own pain, he loses sight of the help that his Lord would be able to offer.

Having delineated this central problematic, Julian goes on, in chapter 51, to conceive the spiritual world more clearly: as a relating to herself (and all humankind) in a way that is capable of focusing meaningful responses to human knowledge and affections. This includes an awareness of important modes of communication which Julian now illustrates through a detailed description of the Servant standing before his Lord. This scene encapsulates for Julian Humankind's relationship to God: illuminating the perspectives of both, it also indicates the necessity of knowing both. Julian manages the scene with all the rhetorical skill of a tradition whose acquirements in the forensic realm included the ability to imaginatively envision scenes from the past in such a manner that the image as a whole could stand up to an interrogation based on (medieval) categories of law and classifications of motive.⁷³ Julian, furthermore, employing

⁷³ See Barilli, Rhetoric, 13, 20 and passim.

her knowledge of affective and psychological states also interrogates her own descriptions of the expansive details concerning the clothing, complexion and posture of the Lord and the Servant. This is the method which, Julian writes, she had been instructed in by an inward showing whose direction she understood thus: "It longyth to the to take hede to alle þe propertes and the condescions that were shewed in the example, though þe thyngke that it be mysty and indefferent to thy syght" (51/14, 520-1). By attending to the showing in this manner, Julian is able to reveal the modal changes which the relationship between Man and God undergoes during a perceived absence of God resulting from human sin. Hers is partly a confessional approach, testifying to the beauty, benevolence and love of God versus the lowliness of Humankind. But she intends also to convey hope and comfort through knowledge of universally accessible spiritual processes and their possibilities for the generation of new meanings.

One of the interesting aspects of how the parable works within the structure of Julian's Showings is noticeable in the discussion of unitive prayer which begins the fourteenth revelation. Her first chapter's summary of the sixteen revelations mentions only the showing of prayer, not the parable. Colledge and Walsh take this omission as proof that the summary was from an earlier version. But it may also be regarded as emphasising the importance that Julian in this

seminal chapter wishes to give to the topic of prayer. At the same time, it reinforces a three-fold parallelism among Julian's experiences: her receiving of the showings, her later coming to terms with the parable, and the similar progress toward understanding on the part of the Servant within the parable itself.

Julian's showings occur following a petitionary prayer to be fully united with her God. Thereafter she gives us visions of her own bodily sickness, her sudden recovery from this sickness and the series of showings which illuminate for her how union with God is to be attained by the reuniting of the trinity within our souls. The fourteenth revelation begins with a discourse on the nature of prayer (chapters 41-50), reaches an almost terminal aporia over the question of sin when Julian feels that her private insights leave no room for the Church's teaching, but then resolves that issue with the sudden illumination as to the meaning of the Lord-and-Servant parable (chapter 51). The revelation concludes with a full development (chapters 52-63) of the Trinitarian theme with regard to the image of Christ as our "mother" who keeps our sensual and substantial nature together by helping and nourishing us as in the struggle to reunite and direct the trinitarian aspects of our substance back towards the likeness of God.

Analogous to this is the progress towards understanding of the Servant within the parable. That sequence begins with

his standing before his Lord, studying his Lord's intention, and then going out to fulfil it, whereupon he falls into the "slade" (ditch), He needs to understand that despite his suffering and his inability to see his Lord, he is still in his Lord's presence and that his "fallen" condition is indispensable to his performing his original intention towards his Lord. Julian makes this clear by finally taking up the parable's allegorical level. Here the Lord is the Father, the Servant is Christ, and Christ's fall into humanity and his resurrection are related to the fall of humanity such that the fall is at the same time, the redemption:

The syttyng of the fader betokynnyth the godhede, that is to sey for shewing of rest and pees, for in the godhede may be no traveyle; and that he shewyth hym selfe as lorde betokynnyth to oure manhod. The standyn of the servant betokynnyth traveyle, and on the lufte syde betokynnyth that he was nott alle wurthy to stonde evyn ryght before þe lorde. His stertyng was þe godhed, and the rennyng was þe manhed, for the godhed sterte fro þe fader in to þe maydyns wombe, fallyng in to the takyng of oure kynde, and in this fallyng he toke grete soore. The soore that he toke was oure flessch, in whych as sone he had felyng of dedely paynes. (51/14, 539-40)

Since in Christ's falling, he was also "takyng of our kynde", our fall is a "felix culpa" it helps to bring about our salvation. This is a belief that Julian subscribes to, to the point of positing an inseparable bond between human sin and the revelation of the love of Christ.

The image of "traveyle", which falls to humankind (since "in the godhede may be [none]"), emphasises that creation is

a continuing partnership with God; indeed, our falling is, ironically, an essential part of that creation. Julian often uses "traveyle" in its double sense --as signifying work in general, but also the labour of childbirth -- and she makes child-bearing a metaphor for the process of enduring our pains for the sake of the honour and worthiness that will eventually come of them. Throughout her revelations, in fact, "traveyle" names what we must endure in following the passion of Christ so as to reach the "honours" and "worshyppes" available to us through His resurrection.

In the allegorical conclusion to the parable we should also notice how elegantly Julian treats the theme of sin and the question of our shame concerning it:

By that he stode dredfully before the lorde and nott evyn ry³te betokynnyth that his clothing was not honest to stonde evyn ryght before þe lorde, nor that myght nott nor shulde nott be hys offyce whyle he was a laborer; nor also he myght nott sytt with þe lord in rest and pees tyll he had wonne his peece ryghtfully with hys hard traveyle; and by the leftte syde, that the fader leftte his owne son wylfully in the manhed to suffer all mans payne without sparyng of hym. (51/14, 540-1)

That the Son "myght nott nor shuld nott" be able to stand honestly on the right side of the Father while he is a labourer -- i.e., on this earth -- signifies a very different sense of humanity's relationship to God from that found in Julian's opening petition. At that point she intended her prayer primarily as an escape from the world of sin. Here,

instead, the understanding is that only within the sinful world, and in the imitation and following of Christ,⁷⁴ can one work to achieve the divine will, through the patient endurance of human failure whereby earthly intentions are gradually but surely transformed into eternal realities.

The transformation of Julian's original petition, to transcend her mortal life, into an intention to transcend only the shame of sin and failure -- in order to transform the created realm back towards the likeness of its creator -- should not be isolated from what else is going on in her Showings. Rather, it constitutes only one moment of a transformational process that Julian sees developing through the integration of her heart, mind and body in the new understanding and intention she has achieved. This trinitarian dynamic, moreover, is inherently creative, opening out endlessly on further images which the redemptive principle of the Word cooperating with reflection, brings back towards God's likeness. It is therefore appropriate that Julian ends her fourteenth vision with a pronouncement on the creative vision of earthly life. As quoted here, Julian expands the image of family beyond its traditional import of a sexual

⁷⁴ "The imitative life of Christ involves both God's activity, through the Spirit, in conforming man to His image in Christ (conformitas), and man's focusing of his moral and spiritual attention on the exemplar, Christ (imitatio)." As Quoted by P. Erb in "Spirituality", 289n, taken from E.J. Tinsely, "Some Principles for Reconstructing a Doctrine of the Imitation of Christ," Scottish Journal of Theology 25 (February 1972): 47.

union or a parent/child relationship. Whereas those are essentially dyadic, with one component relating to God and another to us, Julian's images require us to locate our identity within the interrelationships of spiritual mother and child, father and son, father and mother, etc.:

Alle shalle be welle, and thou shalt see it thy selfe, that alle manner thyng shall be welle. And than shalle þe blysse of oure moderheed in Crist be new to begynne in the joyes of oure fader god, whych new begynnyng shall last, without end new begynnyng. (618, 63/14)

Comfort and Meaning:
The Unity of Vision and Transformation

One of the great difficulties attending Julian's original petition is that she must pray to God without any "means" -- i.e., intermediary. With this problem in view, she writes in the first revelation that she was simultaneously given two conceptions of the "custome of oure praier". The first is that:

we vse for vnknowing of loue to make menie meanes. Then saw I verily that it is more worshipp to god and more verie delite that we feaithfully praie to him selfe of his goodnes, and cleue ther to by his grace, with true vnderstanding and stedfast beleue, then if we made all the meanes that hart maie thinke. For if we make all these meanes, it is to litle and not ful worshippe to god; but in his goodnes is all the hole, and ther fayleth right nought. (6/1, 304)

But another position, to which Julian accords equal emphasis, suggests that since all the means customary in prayer are "of his goodnes", they are ordained by God for our help and relate ultimately to our redemption and salvation. "Wher for it pleaseth him that we seke him and worshippe him by meanes, vnderstanding and knowing that he is the goodnes of all"

(1/prologue, 305-06).

What Julian comes to understand through her revelations is that God can only be received through the world and not apart from it. To bring this understanding in line with her original intentions, she will need to learn to work through means in a different way. To do this she will, in the manner of Augustine, reach back through the means to their origins in God to find the inspiring stillness of unbroken majesty which all created forms, in some measure, communicate. It is an anticipation of this thinking which Julian is outlining already in the first vision as she sets up an opposition between the littleness of creation and the greatness of God which contains all the intermediaries in itself.

Because of its character as an overview of the entire set of showings, the first account of Julian's affective and intentional states must come from an act of interpretation worked out after the fact of the experiences themselves. It is the issue, or problem, implicit in this spiritual starting point of hers that Julian returns to in her fifteenth vision, which is essentially the end of the sequence. In that vision, Julian represents her initial desire to have "been delivered of this world" through a death that would defeat her own personal limitations. Colledge and Walsh have shown how Julian's words in the passages where she speaks of the opposition between our physical suffering in this world and a comfort based on our affective orientation to a future

heavenly world reflect the spiritual traditions of the twelfth century.⁷⁵ While in the first vision Julian frames this conceit in the terms of her personal affective orientation, by now she can single out what has become the important insight for her, one which centres on the question of presence as she has redefined this through the understanding of the parable (for which, see my previous chapter).

Afore this tyme I had grete longyng and desyer of goddys gyfte to be delyuerde of this world and of this lyfe. For oft tymes I behelde þe woo that is here and þe wele and the blessyd beyng that is there; and yf there had no payne ben in this lyfe but the absens of oure lorde, me thought some tyme þat it was more than I myght bere, and this made me to morne and besely to longe, and also of my owne wretchydnesse, slowth and werynesse, þat my lykyd not to lyue and to traveyle as me felle to do. (64/15, 619-20,)

In this, the final revelation of the first night's visions, Julian arrives at the ultimate question on which all of her showings of love hinge: the question of comfort. It is the painful feeling of the instability of comfort which leads Julian initially to long for and seek a more secure existence, and it is through the showings that she discovers an image of release from suffering through conversance with a courteous, patient Lord whose loving intentions towards us bring the

⁷⁵ Colledge and Walsh, "Introduction" in Showings. According to the editors a "key text" for interpreting the 12th Century tradition "is a passage from Caesarius of Arles: 'our saviour has gone up to heaven; therefore let us not be troubled upon earth; let our minds be there, and here let there be rest. Meanwhile let us go up with Christ in our hearts; and when the promised day will come, our bodies too will follow him'" (96).

deepest comfort Julian has ever imagined:

And to all this oure curteyse lorde answeryd for comfort and pacynes, and seyde these wordes: Sodynly thou shalte be taken from all thy payne, from alle thy sycknesse, from alle thy dyseses and fro all thy woo. And thou shalte come vp abone [sic], and thou schalt haue me to thy mede, and thou shalte be fulfylllyd of joye and blysse. . . . (64/15, 620-1,)

The comfort described here is the radical comfort of complete release from physical and worldly suffering. Yet it is contingent upon "patience" for its realisation: "I saw that god rewardyd man of the pacience that he hath in abydyng goddys wylle and of hys tyme, and that man lengyth his pacyence ovyr þe tyme of his lyvyng for unknowyng of hys tyme of passyng" (64/15, 621-22).

The strengthening of patience, for Julian, is a direct result of hope found in a received presence of God. But she will need also a trust and faith that can persist when this presence is not readily perceivable. It is for this reason that Julian, in seeking some new understanding that will mediate the alternating affective states that lead her to love her God, must nevertheless also experience fear and discomfort because of the frustrations that accrue to loving within a world of mortal contingency.

Julian represents the process of a person learning to overcome suffering with the image of child-bearing, through which image there is an overall transformation of the dying into the living:

And in thys tyme I sawe a body lyeng on þe erth, whych body shewde heuy and feerfulle and with oute shape and forme, as it were a swylge stynkyng myrre; and sodeynly out of this body sprong a fulle feyer creature, a lyttlyle chyld, full shapyn and formyd, swyft and lyfly and whytter then the lylve, whych sharpely glydyd uppe in to hevyn. (64/15, 622-3,)

The separation of the two bodies, which are derived from the same consciousness, creates a tension which Julian uses to circumscribe the ironic nature of the relationship between identity and intention that allows the latter to correct the former while remaining free of its problems and limitations:

The swylge of the body betokenyth grette wretchydnesse of oure dedely flessch; and the lyttlynes of the chyld betokenyth the clenness and the puernesse of oure soule. And I thought: with thys body blyueth no feyernesse of thys chyld, ne of this chyld dwellyth no foulnes of the body. (64/15, 623)

It is only because Julian maintains an absolute distinction between the old, which has died, and the new, which is created in its place, that the solution here offers a real comfort, one that can endure through more difficult times:

It is fulle blesfulle man to be taken fro payne, more than payne to be taken fro man; for if payne be taken from us, it may come agayne. Therefore this is a souereyne comfort and a blesful beholdyng in a longyng soule, that we shall be taken fro payne. (64/15, 624)

This taking of "man from pain" parallels Julian's earlier desire for death. Here, however, it is achieved through a transformation that includes a symbolic death and a symbolic rebirth into the present world.

Julian, using Dionysian language,⁷⁶ then compares our intention to a "point" which is set up ahead of us -- through the understanding gained in contemplation -- but which helps us maintain the same course during periods when insight is lacking and the pains of the earthly realm have stirred us to look to our immediate sufferings and difficulties rather than at the whole context in which our new identity is being formed:

And whan we falle agayne to oure selfe by hevynes
and gostely blynesse and felynge of paynes gostely
and bodely by oure fragylyte, it is goddys wylle
that we know that he hath nott forgett vs. (625,
64/15)

The fall into self, which causes the feeling of loss of presence and comfort, is not the same for Julian as a falling out of grace (which the teachings of the Church in her time concerning sin might have led her to fear). She is at pains throughout the revelations to show that man's falling and the feeling of God's absence accompanying it are beyond human control.

Julian has in the past been criticised in certain quarters for her interpretation of sin.⁷⁷ Those criticisms, however, mainly serve to underscore the imperative of

⁷⁶ Colledge and Walsh (623-25n) cite The Cloud of Unknowing, chs. 24 and 25, and claim that Julian's "understanding of contemplative prayer and effort is broader" than the Cloud author's.

⁷⁷ See D.F. Vandenbroucke, "The English Mystics", The Spirituality of the Middle Ages, ed. Leclercq et al., (London: Burns & Oates, 1961) 425-26.

appreciating the traditions that she is working in and with; for only thus can she be properly understood and her many unique insights in the Showings properly located. For Julian the problem of sin becomes the twin problems of ignorance and sloth, the "wounds" suffered by the intellect and the affections. The hindrances ("dyssesys") which befall us on account of these wounds -- whether they be in us or in others whom our lives are touched by makes little difference: either way God does not blame any of us -- are best not dwelt upon if we hope to achieve self-understanding and comfort for our undertakings:

It is goddys wylle that we take his behestes and his comfortyng as largely and as myghtly as we may take them; and also he wylle that we take oure abydynges and oure dyssesys as lyghtely as we may take them, and sett them at nought. For the lyghtlyer that we take them, and þe lesse pryce that we sett at them for loue, lesse payne shalle we haue in þe feelyng of them, and the more thanke and mede shalle we haue for them. (64/15, 626)

The patterning into large/small dichotomies addresses itself to an important technique of perspective in Julian's discourse. This she deals with according to her understanding of the spiritual nature of the universe, using this vision to guide her energies on an intellectual and affective level.

and therefore though we ben in so much payne, woo and dysese that vs thynkith we can thinke ryght nought but that we are in, or that we feele; as soone as we may, passe we lightly over, and sett we it at nought. And whi? For god will be knowen. For if we know him and loue him and reverently drede him, we shall haue patience, and be in great

rest. And it shuld bin great likyng to vs, all þat he doth ; and this shewid our lord in these wordes: What shuld it than agrieue thee to suffre a while, seeing it is my will and my worshiþe? (65/15, 631)

By suffering thus, we come ultimately to self-knowledge, which is also knowledge of God. This is both knowledge of love and knowledge which is love. It is the solution which Julian arrives at in her theological conclusion -- one which parallels the aesthetic resolution obtained in the parable of Lord and Servant.

At the end of her narration -- at the close of the sixteenth and final revelation of the series Julian writes:

Thus was I lernyd, þat loue is oure lordes menyng. And I sawe fulle surely in this and in alle that ere god made vs he lovyd vs, whych loue was nevyr slekyd ne nevyr shalle. And in this loue he hath done alle his werkes, and in this loue he hath made alle thynges profytable to vs, and in this loue oure lyfe is evyr lastyng. In oure makyng we had begynnyng, but the loue wher in he made vs was in hym fro with out begynnyng. In whych loue we haue oure begynnyng, and alle this shalle we see in god with outyn ende. (86/16, 733-4)

In this final passage, the sense of love and meaning as both our origin and our end is similar to Paul Ricoeur's sense of the "pro-ject"⁷⁸ (throwing forth) of discourse: it outlines a new way of "being in the world", suggesting both a new type of world and a transformed subject living within it. It is a transformation that includes a hopeful anticipation,

⁷⁸ Commenting on Heidegger's analysis of Verstehen in Being and Time in Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning (Fort Worth: Texas U.P., 1976) 37.

constituted in part by an "overpassing", which takes us "from the pain that we feel in to the bliss that we trust" (81/16, 716). In this bliss is a love beyond anything we may know while living within the contrary nature and mediated meaning of our earthly world. But it is also a love which, Julian wishes us to believe, will one day completely transform pain and suffering by the last great deed which will bring the presence of an immediate comfort. This is the meaning that Julian learns from the inward teaching of the Holy Spirit while reflecting on the received knowledge of the Christian tradition. It is a meaning that comforts while providing hope for a still deeper comfort. But most importantly, it is a meaning inscribed in the Showings, that intends that all our comfort as it is now mediated by contingency will be transformed by and into the highest levels of meaning unfolded in the actions motivated by spiritual thirst: knowing and loving in this world.

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