"All Shall Be Well":  
Julian of Norwich and her Times  

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THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY was an age of transition and turmoil in Europe. Political and religious authority were under attack, and the general population suffered from plague, war and revolution. It seemed to many an era of helplessness and despair. In the midst of this confusion lived an English woman who offered a different perspective—one of hope and confidence. It is her life and writings which will be our starting point for the exploration of the turbulent fourteenth century.

About the woman herself, we know only what she has chosen to reveal through the writings she left behind—two texts entitled *Revelations of God's Love*. These two texts (one long and one short) were written in Middle English about the same time as Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (ca. 1390s) and are the earliest examples we have of written English by a woman. This "first English Woman of Letters"¹ was a mystic; that is, she had "an immediate knowledge of God attained in this present life through personal religious experience."² When she was near death on the 8th and 9th of May, 1373,³ a priest held a crucifix before her and she experienced fifteen divine apparitions over a period of hours and a sixteenth the
following day. Of the sixteen showings, five were centered on the passion and suffering of Christ, four on God (All-Sovereign, Creator), and two on the Blessed Trinity. The first chapter of the long text lists the revelations:

The first is about the precious crowning of thorns . . . the second . . . about the discoloration of his fair face . . . the third . . . that our Lord God almighty, all wisdom and all love . . . the fourth . . . the scourging of his tender body . . . the fifth . . . the fiend is overcome by the precious Passion of Christ . . . the sixth . . . the honorable thanks with which our Lord God rewards all his blessed servants . . . the seventh . . . the frequent experiences of well-being and of woe . . . the eighth . . . Christ's last sufferings and of his cruel death . . . the ninth . . . the delight which the blessed Trinity has in the cruel Passion of Christ . . . the tenth . . . Jesus displays his heart split in two for love . . . the eleventh . . . his dear mother . . . the twelfth . . . our Lord is all sovereign life . . . the thirteenth . . . the excellence of man's creation . . . the fourteenth . . . our Lord God is the foundation of our beseeching . . . the fifteenth . . . suddenly we shall be taken from all our pain and from all our woe . . . the sixteenth . . . the blessed Trinity our Creator dwells eternally in our soul in Christ Jesus.⁴

Upon recovering, Julian, aged thirty and a half, recorded her experiences (the short text), pondered them for the next twenty years, and then composed a lengthier account of both the revelations themselves and the significance she found in them (the long text). Thus, both texts refer to the same occasion but the longer version is enriched by twenty years of growth and meditation.

The woman is known as Julian of Norwich, but it is doubtful that Julian was her name. More likely, it derives from her attachment to St. Julian's Church in the prosperous medieval trading city of Norwich, England. Literally attached to the church, Julian lived as an anchoress or recluse in a small cell (called an anchorhold) adjoining the church's south wall—south so that the sun never reached inside it.

It is not known which St. Julian was the patron of the church—St. Julian the Hospitaller or St. Julian of Le Mans—but it is known that the small church was under the control of the Benedictine abbess of nearby Carrow. Because of the strong Benedictine influence in Norwich, some scholars think that Julian might have been a Benedictine nun before she became a recluse. The Benedictine story is told in a modern stained glass window in the Bauchun Chapel of Norwich Cathedral; the first scene depicts Benedict praying alone near a cave and the last portrays Julian at prayer before a
crucifix in her anchorhold.

The word anchorite is derived from the Greek anachorein meaning to withdraw and in early Christian times was synonymous with hermit, as can be seen in St. Benedict's Rule which labels the second kind of monks as "anchorites or hermits."5 (The eremetic tradition is not just a medieval phenomenon.) By the late Middle Ages, a distinction arose: anchorites lived in enclosed cells while hermits retained freedom of movement. The fourteenth-century poem of social protest, Piers Plowman, used both anchorites and hermits as examples of virtue—particularly when they stayed in their cells. As the poem begins the author is clad as a hermit in sheepskin wandering over the countryside.6

An anchoress (anchorite is the masculine) was not, in England, associated directly with any religious community but lived alone in simplicity and was generally dependent upon alms for food and clothing.7 On the continent, however, anchorites were "more likely to live in groups with some formal organization."8 During the Middle Ages, these solitaries were held in high regard by other Christians for they lived what everyone thought was the best life. Thus, it was considered a point of pride for a community to have a recluse in their midst.9

Anchorholds were widely distributed throughout England.10 In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, they existed in rural areas but by the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries they were generally located in towns, villages, or cities (such as London or York). In Norwich there were over forty anchorholds (as well as forty to sixty churches and over two hundred pubs).11 And at St. Julian's, there are records of other occupants of the anchorhold both before and after the woman we call Julian. Records of other anchorholds in the Norfolk area include, for example, an anchorite contemporary with Julian attached to a Dominican church in King's Lynn (called Bishop's Lynn in the fourteenth century). Even today there are at least two recluses in Norfolk—one living on or near the grounds of the shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham and the other living in the countryside.

Since Julian revealed nothing about her everyday existence, knowledge of her life as an anchoress comes from reading the Ancren Riule, a popular guide for anchoresses written in the early thirteenth century. Life in an anchorhold centered on prayer but was also concerned with the outside world. It was not in order to escape from the trials and tribulations of the period that certain people retreated to one place for the rest of their lives, but, rather, it was a response to a calling to live more closely with God. English anchorites were under episcopal control and were questioned by the local bishop before entering their solitary life to ascertain if their call derived from their relationship with God. We do not know when Julian became an anchoress but it may have been shortly after her visions. If so,
she lived in her anchorhold for over forty years. Although we are unsure of her date of death, four wills in 1394, 1404, 1415, and 1416 leave various amounts of money for the maintenance of Julian and her servants. "An anchoress at St. Julian's" is also mentioned in a 1429 will but this anchoress may or may not be our Julian.\(^{12}\) Presumably she was buried in the churchyard, though no trace remains.

In Norwich, a 1952 reconstruction of the anchorhold, built of flint (the common building material of Norfolk), lies against the south wall of the rebuilt church. A window in the wall (called a squint) allowed the anchoress to see the sanctuary and to assist at the sacrifice of Holy Mass.\(^{13}\) In addition, there are two other openings in this cell—one looking out on the street and one opening into a room where her servant lived. The outside window now overlooks a peaceful garden. In the time of Julian the garden would probably have been a noisy, smelly pathway or thoroughfare for the busy merchants of the area since St. Julian's lies close to the river where trading (wood and cloth) and fishing ships docked and where herring and hides from a nearby tannery were dried.

The street access—covered with two curtains, a black one with a cut-out cross over a white one—allowed people to visit but not see the anchoress. Interactions with passers-by were a vital part of the social role a recluse played in a community because she would listen to problems and offer advice. Julian, according to a fifteenth-century contemporary, had a reputation for "good advice."\(^{14}\) Thus, a recluse was a forerunner of modern day psychologists or spiritual directors or ombudspersons.

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**Figure 1.** Drawing of St. Julian's Church, Norwich. The anchorhold is the A-frame structure with the window.
Julian’s daily life included prayer, study, and some type of manual labor (e.g., sewing and mending church vestments or poor people’s clothes). She wore plain but warm clothing—probably of coarse canvas. Except on Fridays and during penitential seasons, she ate two vegetarian meals a day and drank beer. (The brewery was close to the church, and water was unsafe to drink.) Consistent with medieval medical practice, she was bled periodically—four times a year—to maintain health. A servant (two wills give the names of Julian’s helpers as Sara and Alice) provided for her needs and discouraged frequent interruptions of her mistress’ life of prayer and penance. Sara later became a recluse herself—attached to the Church of St. Giles in Norwich. Since the Ancren Riwele allowed a cat to live with an anchoress, pictures and stained glass windows of Julian (e.g., in the St. Savior Chapel of Norwich Cathedral) often include a feline companion. The cat would have served a useful purpose in reducing the number of rats which lived near the river.

Julian referred to herself as a “simple, unlettered creature.” This epithet has various interpretations: either she was illiterate or she did not know Latin. It was unlikely that Julian had been highly educated since the Church had control of education and its purpose was to prepare men for ordination—an event proscribed for women. But it is likely that she had some education from the Benedictine nuns of Carrow. Some scholars explain Julian’s self-description as a rhetorical device which downplayed her writing ability and indicated that at the time of the revelations she was unskilled in writing. Where and how she learned to read and write in the vernacular is unknown as is whether she wrote the texts in her own hand or dictated them.

Life during the time of Julian was anything but easy. Politics, religion and society were in turmoil. Chronic, prolonged hardships included insufficient harvest and famines, piracy from Scotland and the Low Countries (hence the twenty foot high wall around Norwich which was completed in 1342, the year of Julian’s birth) and the Hundred Years’ War (1337-1453) between England and France. (Troops from Norwich participated in the famous battle of Agincourt in 1415.) The English won many engagements but were eventually defeated by the French troops led by the Maid of Orleans, Joan of Arc (1429-31). The war left England on the brink of bankruptcy and France with a ravaged countryside.

The bubonic plague or Black Death struck Europe in the fourteenth century and hit Norwich three times in the space of two decades (1349, 1361-62, 1369)—resulting in the loss of between one-third and one-half of the population. The clergy who attended and brought the sacraments to the sick and dying sustained an even higher loss. The results were fewer clergy available to work among Christians and a lessening of dependence on the Church for salvation. The psychological effect of these recurring epidemics
Figure 2. Window in St. Saviour Chapel, Norwich Cathedral. Note the cat.
was panic and fear because no one knew how they were caused or how they spread. (In one German town, a rumor blamed Jews for importing the disease; the result was a massacre of all Jews in the area.) The specter of death, pain and suffering also spawned the paradox of either greater religiosity or an “eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die” attitude.

During the fourteenth century, social unrest among the peasants led to open rebellion. Increasingly aware of their underprivileged position and low wages, peasants revolted in Flanders in 1323-1328 and in France in 1358. In England in early summer 1381, peasant rebellion erupted in Essex and Kent, and the rebels, who included artisans and city dwellers, marched on London in mid-June. Leaders (such as Wat Tyler, “a tiler of houses,” and John Ball, “a foolish priest”18) threatened the social and political order. They demanded of the teenaged King Richard II redress to such economic and social grievances as the stringent Statutes of Laborers of 1351, the heavy taxes which financed the Hundred Years’ War, serfdom, and the unequal distribution of land and goods.19 Similarly in June, “a great number of men rose in Norfolk and did great harm throughout the countryside.”20 They entered Norwich, murdered the Flemish weavers and burned the court rolls which had the entries of forced labor required of peasants. Disturbances lasted about two weeks in East Anglia. The warrior bishop of Norwich, Henry Despenser (1370-1406), repressed the rebellion. “He attacked the rebels ... he captured many of them ... made them confess and then had them beheaded for their evil deeds.”21 A contemporary account commends the bishop’s actions:

Because they [rebellious peasants] had come to destroy the church and churchmen I dare to say that they deserved to perish at the hands of an ecclesiastic. For the bishop gladly stretched his avenging hand over them and did not scruple to give them final absolution for their sins with his sword.22

Part of the fabric of medieval life was religion. And yet the Roman Catholic Church of the fourteenth century was not a model of virtue and rectitude. On the international scene, the Babylonian Captivity of the Roman Catholic Church (also called the Avignon Papacy, 1309-1376, because the Pope and his court lived in southern France rather than in Rome and were viewed as being puppets of the French king) was followed by the Great Schism (1378-1415) in which two and then three popes simultaneously claimed to be the legitimate successors of St. Peter. On the local scene, bishops were appointed by the king and were more the king’s servants that the Gospel’s. Bishop Despenser, for example, was a military leader—ruthless and aristocratic—who was not well-liked by the monks of his cathedral chapter. In his entertaining descriptions of a corrupt friar and a worldly nun, Chaucer pointed out some of the abuses in the Church.
Cries for Church reform arose in England. The leader was an Oxford scholar, John Wyclif (ca. 1329-1384), whose followers attempted to reform a Church which wanted no reform. Called Lollards from the Dutch word meaning “mumbler of prayers” as well as from a pun on the English word for loafer, these merchants and ordinary people wanted a simple spirituality based on the New Testament, recently translated into English. Lollards championed clerical poverty and supported the English Peasants’ Revolt (1381), thus combining social and religious protest. They risked persecution because dissent from the religion of the realm implied dissent from the political order and was seen as subversive. In 1401, Parliament passed a law, “The Statute on the Burning of Heretics,” which made Lollardy a capital offense. A Lollard’s pit in Norwich was built outside the walls to enforce this law against heretics.

Julian’s response to this age of violence, riots, Black Death, insecurity, multiple popes, and confused lines of authority was to concentrate on the positive power of God’s love which created and sustained all things. In Chapter IV (short text), Julian provides a homely picture of an ordinary object which led her to a deeper understanding of reality:

He [God] showed me something small, no bigger than a hazelnut, lying in the palm of my hand, . . . round as any ball. I looked at it and thought: What can this be? And I was given this general answer: It is everything which is made. I was amazed that it could last, for I thought that it was so little that it could suddenly fall into nothing. And I was answered in my understanding: It lasts and always will, because God loves it; and thus everything has being through the love of God.

In this little thing I saw three properties. The first is that God made it, the second is that he loves it, and third is that God preserves it . . . God is the Creator and the lover and the protector.

This vision of a hazelnut (or a filbert) indicates Julian’s attitude toward the created world—an attitude of respect. This positive stance toward the material is an important theme in her writings. Julian does not deny matter to get to the spirit but rather has an earthy approach to spirituality. Thus, she writes that body and soul are equally good because they are “clad and enclosed in the goodness of God,” and refers to human nature as that “blessed nature which he [Jesus Christ] took of the virgin.” But Julian cautions humans not to set their hearts on created reality because the totality of creation is as small as a nut. It is the Creator who invests created beings with goodness, and it is the Creator in whom hearts will find rest. Matter will not suffice. She says in another chapter: “I wished them [the people at her bedside during her illness] to love God more and to set less store by worldly vanity.”
The image of God revealing his love through the hazelnut demonstrates the close relationship Julian had with God. Her direct knowledge of and communication with the divine is the essence of mysticism and the reason Julian qualifies for the title mystic. Over and over, Julian refers to God's revelations to her. In another passage, Jesus tells her that he alone is all that is necessary:

Again and again our Lord said; I am he, I am he, I am he who is highest. I am he whom you love, I am he in whom you delight. I am he whom you serve. I am he for whom you long. I am he whom you desire. I am he whom you intend. I am he who is all. I am he whom Holy Church preaches and teaches to you. I am he who showed himself before to you.\(^{27}\)

Thus, Julian's perception of reality prevents her from being troubled by the world situation. She was certain of what was truly important: "Our natural will is to have God, and God's good will is to have us."\(^{28}\) Further, Julian was reassured by God that "All will be well."\(^{29}\) Nearly six hundred years later, the twentieth-century poet, T. S. Eliot, used this comforting assurance in his *Four Quartets*.

Julian's emphasis on the positive love of God does not mean that she ignored pain or loss. She saw and felt the pain of Jesus' agony but also knew that the passion was the overcoming of the "fiend" (devil). She vividly described her anguish at experiencing the Passion of Christ in her mystical visions—she saw blood running down Christ's face.\(^{30}\) "My spirit was greatly distressed as I contemplated it [second revelation], mourning, fearing, longing."\(^{31}\) Not morbid interest but intense desire to understand led Julian to pause over the revelations and to describe in minute detail what she saw and to relate what she saw to her experiences. She almost relished the bleeding of Jesus:

The copiousness resembles the drops of water which fall from the eaves of a house after a great shower of rain, falling so thick that no human ingenuity can count them. And in their roundness as they spread over the forehead they were like a herring's scales.\(^{32}\)

Her use of earthy metaphors (rain, herring) led her to understand the abundance and sufficiency of Christ's atonement for sin.

She was not afraid of emotions and was simple and affective. She experienced and expressed negative as well as positive emotions. "This revelation of Christ's pains filled me full of pains . . . caused me great sorrow and fear."\(^{33}\) And, "God gave me again comfort and rest for my soul, delight and security."\(^{34}\)
Figure 3. Detail of Despenser altarpiece.  
Photo courtesy of Conway Library, Courtauld Institute of Art.
This vivid expression of intense emotion is characteristic of the change of values and attitudes during the fourteenth century from the symbolic to the realistic, from the God-centered medieval world to the human-centered Renaissance world. The artwork of the period illustrates this point in the simple and emotional appeal to viewers. Individuals with their emotions were depicted partly, at least, as a "reaction against excessive intellectualism."35 New imagery of the fainting Virgin and the crowd at the Crucifixion supplants the earlier hierarchic and unapproachable imagery of Christ in Majesty or the Last Judgment. The swooning Virgin (figure 3) was frowned on by the Church because of the undue display of emotion by the Mother of God. (Of course, this realism is only a step away from hyper-realism or the depiction of extreme emotion through distortion and exaggeration which appears in the fifteenth century.) Besides the non-Biblical images (e.g., the Pietà), both plague imagery (e.g., the Dance of Death) and changes in tomb sculpture (e.g., dead and decaying effigies) demonstrate the impact of change and emotion in the fourteenth century. Many images derived from mystical literature (e.g., from the Revelations of the mystic Bridget of Sweden, 1303-1373). These images, called Andachtsbilder, were designed as vehicles for private meditation and contemplation.

In Norwich Cathedral stands a reredos of five panels believed by some to have been donated by Bishop Despenser as a thanksgiving offering for the "successful" end of the 1381 Peasants' Rebellion (figure 4). The Despenser altarpiece was discovered only in 1847 though it dates back to the late fourteenth century. Little is known of its earlier history, but it survived destruction by the iconoclastic Puritans in the seventeenth century because it had been used as a tabletop. Due to damage over the centuries, the upper parts were restored in 1958.

The scenes (Flagellation, Carrying the Cross, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension) are traditional, but Mary at the foot of the Cross overcomes with suffering at the sight of her executed son as well as the pre-Crucifixion suffering of Christ are especially typical of late medieval concerns. These images inspire an emotional reaction on the part of the viewer just as Julian's visions (e.g., of the blood running down the face of Jesus) offer a means for the viewer to enter the scene for contemplation.

The emergence of the importance of the individual is another characteristic of the transitional fourteenth century and is seen in the very existence of Julian as a mystic. The direct apprehension of God was a personal experience and one that did not rely on the institution of the Church. Julian wrote that the visions were shown her "without any intermediary" and that there was "no created thing between my God and me."36 She recognized that this direct relationship with God was a gift and that not everyone would receive this oneness with a "familiar" and "courteous" God. During this century of Church troubles, mysticism flourished. On the
Figure 4. Despencer altarpiece.

Photo courtesy of Conway Library, Courtauld Institute of Art.
continent, there were Meister Eckhart, Johannes Tauler, Henry Suso, John Ruysbroeck, and Catherine of Siena, and in England Richard Rolle (a hermit), Walter Hilton, and the unknown author of *Cloud of Unknowing*. In fact, mysticism was the "most pronounced 'new' development of the fourteenth century."37 Because of the human weakness of the Church, the intermediary role of the Church was replaced by a direct approach between God and individual.

This direct apprehension of God brought suspicion of heresy on the individual. Such suspicion might account for Julian's insistence on being a faithful daughter of Holy Church. She wrote: "In everything I believe as Holy Church preaches and teaches."38 However, Julian seems to be aware of the problems of the institutional Church when she refers to general problems rather than to specific ones. "Holy Church will be shaken in sorrow and anguish and tribulation in this world as men shake a cloth in the wind."39 Her protestation of faithfulness to the Church should be noted in the light of the prevalence of Lollards in Norfolk. Lollardy was a capital crime and a dangerous corrupting influence; convicted individuals were burned in the Norwich pit. Julian's contemporary, Margery Kempe, was often suspected of Lollardy. It behooved Julian to assert her orthodoxy especially since she downplayed the importance of material goods and thus resembled Lollards who criticized the materialistic, wealthy fourteenth century Church. Julian never disassociated herself from the Church nor did she openly criticize or rebuke it for its abuses. She simply communicated directly with God rather than through an intermediary. Yet, she was puzzled about the difference between the Church's judgment of sinners which at times was "hard and painful" and God's judgment which was always "good and lenient."40 She did not dwell on this discrepancy but rather concentrated on the everlasting love of God and the comfort offered by this understanding. "So I was taught that love is our Lord's meaning... In our creation we had beginning, but the love in which he created us was in him from without beginning."41

Julian's puzzlement over the possible discrepancy between God's judgment and the Church's is reminiscent of comments by Joan of Arc who, in her trial, confounded the inquisitor by her profession of loyalty to God.

Interrog: Do you submit to the judgment of the Church?
Joan: I submit to Our Lord, who sent me on my mission; to Our Lady, to all the blessed saints and the holy ones of Paradise.
Interrog: Then you do not submit to the Church?
Joan: As I see it, Our Lord and His Church are one, so there will be no difficulty there.
Similarly, Julian wrote: "I assented to all that our Lord had revealed to me on that same day, and to all the faith of Holy Church, for I consider them both to be one."\textsuperscript{42} Two women separated by the English Channel and by about thirty years profess their allegiance to God and by inference to the Church because they insist that God and the Church are one. Neither woman was naive or blind to the abuses of the human institution and yet they kept their eyes focused on God. Each remains true to her experience of God and acknowledges that ideally the Church reflects God's life and love. Neither condemns the Church; both recognize a commitment to a loving God.

This emphasis on individual piety indicates another change during the fourteenth century—namely, the dissolution of the perception of a single Christian society. The ideal of a Christian commonwealth was replaced by individual, territorial states with individual church structures. Loyalty to France or to England, for example, was taking priority over the lofty ideal of a single Christendom promoted by the earlier Carolingians.

Julian's intended audience also reveals something about her era. She explained in Chapter Eight (long text):

\begin{quote}
In all this I was greatly moved in love towards my fellow Christians, that they might all see and know the same as I saw, for I wished it to be a comfort to them, for all this vision was shown for all men. . . . Everything that I say about me I mean to apply to all my fellow Christians, for I am taught that this is what our Lord intends in this spiritual revelation . . . that mightily, wisely and meekly you [might] contemplate upon God, who out of his courteous love and his endless goodness was willing to show it generally, to the comfort of us all.\textsuperscript{43}
\end{quote}

Her addressing the work to ordinary Christians ("even Christians") and not to church people or recluses is significant because women were forbidden to teach publicly by word or by writing and because the existence of a receptive audience is presumed. Although she would deny that she was teaching, her writing certainly does teach a way of looking at God.

As for a receptive audience, the fourteenth century saw the increase of lay (that is, those who were not clergy) piety. A devout and literate laity resulted in part from the program of religious instruction of some reforming bishops of the thirteenth century, in part from St. Francis of Assisi and his conception of the apostolic life, in part from the appeal of religion to those who suffered from the continual disasters of the fourteenth century, and in part from the diminishing number of clergy. Devotional and mystical literature as well as art was widely produced for this audience. Among the best known is Thomas à Kempis' \textit{Imitation of Christ} which was written ca.
1427 under the auspices of the "devotio moderna," a lay spirituality movement in the Netherlands. Such literature and Julian's writings encouraged laity to practice contemplative prayer and taught indirectly that the Church alone was not the only way to attain salvation. Further, contemplation was not the preserve of clergy and nuns but was open to all.

Some of the most beautiful chapters in Julian's *Revelations* are those which discuss the image of a feminine God (chapters 58-63 of the long text). Perhaps her tender picture of a loving, nourishing God was one way for her to cope with the myriad of societal, political, economic, and religious problems. It was certainly a change from the image of a stern, punishing, damning God of thirteenth-century women mystics and previous traditional artistic and literary imagery.44

Julian is not the first to discuss Jesus as Mother or the Motherhood of God, but she certainly does so eloquently. This image can be found in the Old Testament: God "speaks of himself as mother, bearing Israelites in his bosom, conceiving them in his womb (e.g., Isa. 49:1, 49:15, and 66:11-13."45 The same image is found in the patristic period (second through fifth centuries) and then again in the twelfth century as a minor theme in such writers as Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153), Aelred of Rievaulx (d. 1167), and Anselm of Canterbury (d. 1109).

Julian's discussion is intrinsically involved with her understanding of the Trinity which is present throughout her writings. She wrote: "And so in our making, God almighty is our loving Father, and God all wisdom is our loving Mother, with the love and goodness of the Holy Spirit, which is all one God, one Lord." And, "As truly as God is our Father, so truly is God our Mother. Our Father wills, our Mother works, our good Lord the Holy Spirit confirms."46 This maternal imagery is indicative of the rise of affective spirituality and of the image of a God both loving and accessible to all.47

Julian used other images which were not specifically related to a motherly God but which reflected a feminine orientation. For example, she spoke of God as being "our clothing, who wraps and enfolds us for love, embraces us and shelters us, surrounds us for his love, which is so tender that he may never desert us." And, "We, soul and body, [are] clad and enclosed in the goodness of God."48 Julian also spoke of the soul being "knitted to our body" and that God "first knitted us and joined us to himself."49 This clothing imagery was more likely to come from a woman than from a man because during the Middle Ages it was the woman's task to clothe her family. It is likely that Julian knew how to spin and perhaps did so in her anchorhold. An ordinary occupation for Julian provided access to a deeper reality.

Julian and her age of transition and turmoil and epidemics can provide twentieth-century readers with insight into how to cope with our own anxious age. Julian brought hope to her era by being a listener at her anchorhold window and by recording her reflections over a twenty-year
period. She did not offer instant knowledge or understanding but only patient compassion and love. This remarkable woman was not overcome by incessant calamities but drew comfort from the recognition of God’s endless love and promise, “All things shall be well.”

Figure 5. Lower right corner of the Benedictine window. Bauchun Chapel, Norwich Cathedral (1964). Note St. Julian’s Church in upper right background.
Notes


3 Since no original of Julian’s writings exists, it is an educated guess whether the viii of May was a xiii originally. Both are found in existing manuscripts. I use the 8th because that is the date ascribed by the Anglican Church for this saint and because it is the date used at St. Julian’s in Norwich.


6 William Langland, Piers Plowman, ed. Derek Pearsall (London: Edward Arnold, 1978), I:30; III:140. Stability was a test for distinguishing between true and false hermits.


9 The peak period of the English recluse lasted from 1225 to 1400, but recluses continued to exist until the English Reformation of the sixteenth century. Reynolds, p. xliii.

10 In Chester-le-Street, seven miles from Durham in Northern England, there still exists an unoccupied anchorhold of four rooms attached to the Church of St. Mary and St. Cuthbert which was completed in 1409. St. James’ Church, Shere, in Surry, was mentioned in the Domesday Book and had an anchorhold attached to it in which Christine Carpenter, “the anchoress of Shere,” was enclosed for the first time in 1329 and re-enclosed in 1332. The squint is still visible.

11 An old saying is that Norwich had a church for every week of the year and a pub for every day.

The Ancren Riwle recommended that anchoresses receive Holy Communion only fifteen times a year. The reasoning rests on "absence makes the heart grow fonder" (i.e., too frequent reception might lessen the appreciation for the sacrament). Morton, p. 312.


Morton, p. 317.
Colledge and Walsh, p. 177.
Ibid., pp. 19-20.
This peasant rebellion of 1381 was in part the result of the decrease of population from the Black Death and the accompanying shortage of labor which raised wages—a fact that Parliament attempted to counter by strict regulations about labor. It is interesting to note that during the London insurrection, Richard II visited and confessed to an anchorite before meeting with the rebels at Smithfield (where Wat Tyler was killed). Anonimalle Chronicle in Dobson, p. 163.
Ibid., p. 236.
Ibid., p. 237.
Chronicon Henrici Knighton, in Dobson, p. 238.
"The word lollard probably derived from the Middle Dutch lollaerd, mumbler (of prayers) which had already been applied to the followers of certain religious movements; it was deliberately confused with the Middle English loller, a loafer, and, by way of a pun, with the Latin lolita, tares." May McKisack, The Fourteenth Century: 1307-1399 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), fn. 3, p. 517. By the sixteenth century, possession of a Bible in the vernacular was grounds for suspicion of heresy. Using such a Bible was seen as doubting that the Church was the interpreter of the Word of God. In part, this was an accurate deduction because both Martin Luther and John Calvin taught that individuals could interpret the Bible and encouraged reading the Bible in the everyday language of the people.
Colledge and Walsh, pp. 130-31. This vision of a hazelnut was cited by Elizabeth Goudge in Gentian Hill.
Ibid., pp. 185-86.
Ibid., p. 136.
27 Ibid., p. 223.
28 Ibid., p. 186.
29 Ibid., pp. 151-53, 149, 225, 229, 231.
30 Ibid., p. 129.
31 Ibid., p. 194.
32 Ibid., p. 188.
33 Ibid., pp. 208-09.
34 Ibid., p. 205.
36 Colledge and Walsh, pp. 181, 182.
38 Colledge and Walsh, p. 192. See also pp. 135, 148, 163, 233, 234, 235-36, 301, 316, 343.
39 Ibid., p. 226.
40 Ibid., pp. 256-57.
41 Ibid., pp. 342-43.
42 Ibid., p. 163.
43 Ibid., pp. 190-91.
44 Caroline Walker Bynum studied the nuns of Helfta and discusses their view of God in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).
46 Colledge and Walsh, pp. 295-96.
47 For me the image of God as Mother is particularly appealing because I first became acquainted with this mystic shortly after the death of my mother.
48 Colledge and Walsh, pp. 183, 186.