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God's meaning is love: The mystical theology of Julian of Norwich

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the 14th-century English visionary mystic and theological writer, Julian of Norwich. It suggests that the key to her mystical theology is that a true "knowledge" of God involves loving engagement with God rather than abstract intellectual enquiry. Julian's reflections on God's nature, in relation both to her visions of the crucified Christ and to God-as-Trinity, include an exploration of the image of God as mother. Most importantly, Julian struggled for many years to understand the ultimate meaning and purpose of her visions and what God revealed to her through them for the sake of all her fellow Christians. After a long period of challenging reflection and constantly questioning God, Julian is finally led to understand that God's relationship with humankind is based on love and, indeed, that God's ultimate meaning is love and only love.

1. INTRODUCTION

In this essay, I will focus on the 14th-century English anchoress, mystic and theologian, Julian of Norwich, and her famous text *Showings* or *A revelation of love*.¹ Her writings arose from a series of 16 visions or "showings" that she, aged roughly 30 years old, experienced



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1 Julian wrote two texts, a Short Text and a Long Text. Chapter references in this article are to the theologically rich Long Text. Quotations are taken from the still popular modern translation by Colledge & Walsh (1978). My preferred edition of Julian of Norwich's writings in Middle English is that of Watson & Jenkins (2006). For an overview of Julian's theology, see Sheldrake (2019).

in May 1373 while seriously ill. She came to understand that what she had been shown was for the sake of all her fellow Christians. In Julian, our “knowledge” about God arises from a journey of loving engagement rather than from purely intellectual enquiry. Mystical “knowing” never loses sight of the essential mystery of God. As a result, it focuses on images of God that are passionate and poetic rather than conceptual. The Long Text of Julian’s *A revelation of love* is particularly rich concerning a theology of God. Julian is profoundly Trinitarian. Her approach to God-as-Trinity explores how the inner life of God is inherently connected with God’s relationship to creation.

2. JULIAN’S PRACTICAL TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

Julian’s mystical experiences and her reflections on them include many questions about God’s nature, about creation and humankind, about sin and salvation, and about the ultimate meaning and fulfilment of all things – that is, eschatology. How does the Trinity relate to creation and human history? How does human salvation arise from God’s inner life? Does the cross of Jesus Christ reveal the inner life of God-as-Trinity?

However, Julian’s “revelations” do not simply reflect her intellectual quest but may be understood as an extended prayer, because all of Julian’s questions are directed at God.² In that sense, Julian’s theology is fundamentally practical and spiritual. Julian seeks to emphasise God’s love in ways that will liberate all her fellow Christians from everything that undermines their spiritual journey. Our ignorance of God’s love imprisons us in sin and despair (Chapter 73). Fundamentally, there is only one “showing” or “revelation” and that is that God’s love is the meaning of everything. As Julian herself states in Chapter 1: “This is a revelation of love which Jesus Christ, our endless bliss, made in sixteen showings.”

Julian’s teachings about God are based on her visions of Christ’s passion provoked by the crucifix placed beside her sick bed. However, in her very first “showing”, she comes to understand that “where Jesus appears the blessed Trinity is understood, as I see it” (Chapter 4). Two things follow from this. First, Julian touches the inner reality of God in a direct way. “And in the same revelation suddenly the Trinity filled my heart full of the greatest joy.” (Chapter 4). Secondly, Jesus’ suffering is revealed as the ground of human hope. Julian experienced a desire to turn her eyes away from the crucified Jesus and to “look up to heaven to his Father”. However, she is led to affirm “No, I cannot, for you are my heaven.”

2 See, for example, Pelphrey (1989:103).

No other heaven was pleasing to me than Jesus, who will be my bliss when I am there. And this has always been a comfort to me, that I chose Jesus by his grace to be my heaven in all this time of suffering and of sorrow. And that has taught me that I should always do so, to choose only Jesus to be my heaven, in well-being and in woe (Chapter 19).

The insights Julian received were not merely for her own sake. She describes herself as a “simple, unlettered creature” (Chapter 2) without teaching authority. However, Julian is clear that she offers a message for all people who seek to love God.

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 (Chapter 8).

Julian’s teaching about God and God’s relationship with humankind is rich and complex. Because the teachings offered in her Long Text are pastoral and spiritual, Julian’s approach to God’s nature is expressed in a variety of images. As noted earlier, at the heart of Julian’s vision of God is the Trinity, expressed most graphically in the figure of a suffering Jesus Christ. It is difficult to be precise about any connection between Julian’s images and a theological background. There is no substantial evidence for Julian’s sources beyond her own visions. She does not explicitly quote other people. Scholars contest the degree to which Julian was aware of theological influences. They do not dispute that Julian’s rich theology develops through reflecting on her visionary experiences rather than by using conventional theological methods.

3. THE PASSION AS THE MEASURE OF GOD’S LOVE

As noted earlier, Julian’s fundamental visions are primarily of Jesus’ passion. Julian recognises that everything she was taught was grounded in the first revelation (Chapters 2-9). Her teaching on God-as-Trinity, on creation and the incarnation are ultimately measured by the standard of the cross. The passion is the supreme revelation of God’s love. Love is God’s nature that outpours into creation and into humankind. All love, whether divine or human, is to be measured by the passion.

Devotion to the passion was widespread in the 14th century and the visionary basis for Julian’s teaching is thus not unusual. However, unlike some of her contemporaries, Julian is not unduly obsessed with the

gruesome details of Jesus' sufferings.³ The Long Text begins with an overwhelming image of self-giving love in the face of the crucified Jesus, including his crown of thorns. The details, while not excessive compared to other contemporary piety, are nonetheless graphic.

I saw his sweet face as it were dry and bloodless with the pallor of dying, and then deadly pale, languishing, and then the pallor turning blue and then blue turning brown, as death took more hold in his flesh (Chapter 16).

The point of the visions was to find in this broken figure the reality of God. Yet, at the same time, to see God only in the flesh of Jesus nevertheless preserves the otherness of God.

I perceived, truly and powerfully, that it was he who just so, both God and man, himself suffered for me, who showed it to me without any intermediary (Chapter 4).

Thus, in Jesus Christ, all creation, humankind, and the eternal future are caught up into the very life of God-as-Trinity.

And in the same revelation, suddenly the Trinity filled my heart full of the greatest joy, and I understood that it will be so in heaven without end to all who will come there. For the Trinity is God, God is the Trinity. The Trinity is our maker, the Trinity is our protector, the Trinity is our everlasting lover, the Trinity is our endless joy and our bliss, by our Lord Jesus Christ and in our Lord Jesus Christ (Chapter 4).

On the cross, the love relationship between God and humankind is shown to be identical with the love relationship within the Trinity – a dynamic and mutual indwelling in which each person of the Godhead is constantly giving to and sharing with the others. This way of being is also revealed as afflicted love – united through suffering to all humanity.

At the same time as I saw this sight of the head bleeding, our good Lord showed a spiritual sight of his familiar [or homely] love. I saw that he is to us everything which is good and comforting for our help. He is 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 (Chapter 5).

From her vision of Jesus on the cross, Julian learned that everything is filled with, and enclosed by God. Through the cross, God offers intimate “familiar love”. Julian does not explicitly suggest that God suffers. However,

3 See Cousins (1987).

there are hints that God is not untouched by our human situation. In the incarnation, God is joined to the human condition and longs for us. Julian mentions carefully that,

in his divinity he [Christ] is supreme bliss, and was from without beginning, and he will be without end, which true everlasting bliss cannot of its nature be increased or diminished (Chapter 31).

Julian regularly uses paradoxical language. As second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ is impassable. Yet, as united to the human condition, Jesus Christ continues to have the thirst and longing that he had upon the cross. This will remain the case “until the time that the last soul which will be saved has come into his bliss”. Julian is even bolder:

For as truly as there is in God a quality of pity and compassion, so truly there is in God a quality of thirst and longing ... And this quality of longing and thirst comes from God’s everlasting goodness (Chapter 31).

Because God dwells within us, God’s thirst provokes our own intense longing. Thus, the longing and yearning we feel is our unsatisfied desire for God.

God’s thirst is to have man, generally, drawn into him, and in that thirst he has drawn his holy souls who are now in bliss. And so, getting his living members, always he draws and drinks, and still he thirsts and he longs. I saw three kinds of longing in God, and all to the same end, and we have the same in us, and from the same power, and for the same end (Chapter 75).

For Julian, the simple fact is that, in her understanding of the passion, the Trinity as a whole participates in all activities relating to salvation, even if only the “virgin’s Son” can be said to suffer.

All the Trinity worked in Christ’s Passion, administering abundant virtues and plentiful grace to us by him; but only the virgin’s Son suffered, in which all the blessed Trinity rejoice (Chapter 23).

The participation of the Trinity in salvation is also strongly implied in Chapter 11 of the Long Text, where Julian, in Middle English, views God “in a pointe”.⁴ In this instance, God is considered to be in all things, doing all things and bringing them to their eternal destiny.

4 Although Colledge & Walsh (1978:197) translate the Middle English “pointe” as “an instant of time”, the chapter overall is more suggestive of a spatial image: “By which vision I saw that he is present in all things.”; “For he is at the centre of everything.”

And therefore the blessed Trinity is always wholly pleased with all its works; and God revealed all this most blessedly, as though to say: See I am God. See, I am in all things. See, I do all things. See, I never remove my hands from my works, nor ever shall without end. See, I guide all things to the end that I ordain them for, before time began, with the same power and wisdom and love with which I made them; how should anything be amiss? (Chapter 11).

The mutual indwelling of the persons of the Trinity one in the other (*perichoresis*) is affirmed at a number of instances, including at the end of Julian's famous parable of a Lord and a servant (Chapter 51).

Now the Son, true God and true man, sits in his city in rest and in peace, which his Father has prepared for him by his endless purpose, and the Father in the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the Father and in the Son.

This "city" is the human soul, redeemed and restored, which is from creation joined to God. Creation and especially human life are God's "native places" where God indwells. The image of the Son's crown, as he now stands "richly clothed" before the Father, is no longer the crown of thorns, the image of suffering. Rather, as Julian has shown, his crown is humankind.

For it was revealed that we are his crown, which crown is the Father's joy, the Son's honour, the Holy Spirit's delight, and endless marvellous bliss to all who are in heaven.

Julian's famous phrase, "all will be well, and all will be well, and every kind of thing will be well" is first introduced in her 13th revelation in the context of the pain that sin brings to humanity (Chapter 27). The promise is made in the passion of Jesus. The mystery of God's desire will ultimately result in a "deed" and the deed that will be done to make all things "well" is an action of God-as-Trinity. The making well of all things relates to salvation and all who are saved "will be saved in the blessed Trinity" (Chapter 31). Julian assures her readers that, on "the last day", the Trinity will perform a deed that will make "all things well". At the same time, God will reveal how this is so. Until then it is concealed (Chapter 32). It is clear that Julian struggles with her sense that "all will be well" may imply universal salvation and with how this fits with the Church's teaching about hell.⁵ The central point, however, is that the ultimate deed is the work of God-as-Trinity. "For just as the blessed Trinity created all things from nothing, just so will the same blessed Trinity make everything well which is not well" (Chapter 32).

5 Of course, it may also be the case that Julian was perfectly clear about the implications of the "showing". The struggle to maintain a balance with the Church's teaching may have been a rhetorical device to avoid accusations of heresy.

4. GRACE AS LOVE

In Christian theology, God's action towards humankind is classically referred to as "grace". In Christian tradition, there have been several approaches. Most importantly, grace is not an abstract "something". Rather, it stands for God's relationship with us and God's work in and for us. This shows itself especially as love and mercy and the giving of gifts.⁶ As Julian mentions in Chapter 59, God affirms that "I am he, the light and the grace which is all blessed love."

Because, in Julian, grace is regularly linked to mercy, it particularly relates to the changeable dimension of human identity that Julian refers to as our "sensuality". This is one dimension of Julian's twofold anthropology of "substance" and "sensuality". For example, Chapter 62 notes that we are bound to God by nature ("kind") in our fundamental "substance" and "we are bound to God by grace" – by implication in our changeable "sensuality". In Chapter 52, Julian describes our human lives as a mixture of well-being and woe. We endeavour to wait for God and to trust that God will give us grace and mercy. In Chapter 57, mercy and grace are explicitly said to bring our changeable "sensuality" to completion.

5. LOVE WAS HIS MEANING

By focusing particularly on Jesus' passion, Julian offers a strong signal that everything she has to say about God is connected to how we understand human life and how God relates to us. Some scholars suggest that Julian concentrates on the "economic" Trinity.⁷ However, in my view, Julian's approach refuses to separate an "economic" from an "immanent" Trinity. For Julian, God does as God is, and vice versa. She is concerned to establish that the ultimate "meaning" of God is love but that this "substantial" (that is, natural) meaning is necessarily related to God's deeds.

Know it well, love was his meaning. Who reveals it to you? Love. What did he reveal to you? Love. Why does he reveal it to you? For love. Remain in this, and you will know more of the same. But you will never know different, without end. So I was taught that love is our Lord's meaning. And I saw very certainly in this and in everything that before God made us he loved us, which love was never abated and never will be, And in this love he has done all his works, and in this love he has made all things profitable to us, and in this love our life is everlasting. In our creation we had beginning, but the love in which he created us was in him from without beginning (Chapter 86).

6 See, for example, Haight (1979).

7 For example, Dreyer (1994:79-93).

Love is not only God's meaning but is also the whole teaching of Julian's book. Everything else (including, for example, God's Lordship) is to be interpreted in the light of love. God may be all-powerful and all-knowing but the deepest truth about God is love. Love unites the Trinity. Love is the inner life of God.

Though the three persons of the blessed Trinity be all alike in the self, the soul received most understanding of love. Yes, and he wants us in all things to have our contemplation and delight in love. And it is about this knowledge that we are most blind, for some of us believe that God is almighty and may do everything, and that he is all wisdom and can do everything, but that he is all love and wishes to do everything, there we fail (Chapter 73).

As an aside, it is important to emphasise that the notion of God's meaning as love is not merely a comfortable and comforting message. First, it runs against the conventional Christian teaching of Julian's day that, in the words of her Chapter 45, "[s]inners sometimes deserve blame and wrath" and that, as she suggests in Chapter 46, human beings may merit pain for the many evil deeds they have done. That there is neither anger nor blame in God also challenges the frequent violent anger of human beings towards other human beings who do evil. However, as created in the image of God-as-love, we human beings are called upon to be agents of love in our own world. This is a deeply uncomfortable message.

6. GOD AS MOTHER

Julian is frequently associated with the image of God as mother. What I have suggested about Julian's approach to God implies that the image of motherhood, while used first in reference to Jesus Christ, is a property of God-as-Trinity. Julian's reference to God's motherhood appears in her Long Text, Chapters 52-63, because it is part of her reflections that follow from an understanding of the parable of a Lord and a servant (Chapter 51), which also appears only in the Long Text.⁸ Julian is not alone among medieval writers in using the imagery of God's motherhood.⁹ However, Julian is unique in her complexity when she relates the image both to the reality of God and to God's relationship with humankind. Julian's thinking about God's motherhood also contrasts to similar imagery in

8 Julian uses the Middle English words "moder" or its associated terms "moderhede" and "moderly" some eighty-three times in the Long Text. Of these, nine refer to Mary and four to "Holy Church". The remainder refer to Jesus Christ, God, or the Trinity. See Heimmel (1982:50-51).

9 See, for example, Bynum (1982: Chapter 4) and the listing of other sources in the critical edition of Colledge & Walsh (1978:151-162).

the 13th-century text *Ancrene Wisse* (or *Ancrene Riwele*) written for female hermits such as Julian.¹⁰ In this instance, the tender mother Jesus stands between us and a stern angry father God.

It is interesting to note that Julian does not suggest that God is like a mother but that God *is* our mother. The choice of metaphor rather than simile is important, because Julian thereby avoids projecting conventional human notions of motherhood onto God. In fact, the motherhood of God is the foundation of true human motherhood:

it is not that God is like a mother, but mothers make visible a function and relationship that is first and foremost in God.¹¹

Thus, Jesus Christ is “where the foundation of motherhood begins” (Chapter 59).

This fair lovely word “mother” is so sweet and so kind in itself that it cannot truly be said of anyone or to anyone except of him [Jesus] and to him who is the true Mother of life and of all things (Chapter 60).

Julian may begin her reflections on motherhood with conventional images such as nurturing and sustaining, but she quickly moves God’s motherhood onto another level. Thus, a human mother feeds her child with breast milk, which, in medieval theory, derived from her blood and was thus regarded as the mother’s life force. This belief reflected various biblical texts such as the Book of Leviticus. Jesus as mother also feeds us with his very life through the Eucharist.

The mother can give her child to suck of her milk but our precious Mother Jesus can feed us with himself, and does, most courteously and most tenderly with the blessed sacrament, which is the precious food of true life (Chapter 60).

In reference to God as mother, Julian highlights the image of giving birth both in our first creation and in the rebirth of salvation.

And our saviour is our true Mother, in whom we are endlessly born and out of whom we shall never come (Chapter 57).

10 See Jantzen (2000:117-118). The original reference is to “Ancrene Wisse” in Savage & Watson (1991: Part IV, 132 and Part VI, 182).

11 Bradley (1992:146).

Julian compares the pain of a human mother giving birth to the suffering and death of our mother Jesus.

We know that all our mothers bear us for pain and for death. O, what is that? But our true Mother Jesus, he alone bears us for joy and for endless life, blessed may he be. So he carries us within him in love and travail, until the full time when he wanted to suffer the sharpest thorns and cruel pains that ever were or will be, and at the last he died (Chapter 60).

Nursing and nurturing are also dimensions of God's loving. However, motherhood is not merely a matter of loving protection. There is also a motherhood of wisdom and knowing. "To the property of motherhood belong nature, love, wisdom and knowledge." (Chapter 60). This guiding role brings the human soul to its proper fulfilment. The mother guards her child tenderly "as the nature and condition of motherhood will have" (Chapter 60). As the child grows up, a mother never changes her love but acts differently. For example, a mother sometimes allows her child to fall and to be upset in various ways "for its own benefit" (Chapter 61), but she never allows any real danger to harm the child. When children are distressed, they run to their mothers for help. Thus, Julian suggests in relation to both human mothers and God as mother is that children should never despair of a mother's love (Chapter 63).

7. LORDSHIP AND FAMILIARITY

The image of the Lordship of God also occurs throughout Julian's writings. Sometimes, the word "lord" refers to God as such; at other times, specifically to Jesus Christ. It seems likely that "lordship" in Julian is not merely a scriptural image, but it reflects the 14th-century experience of feudal relationships, albeit in a paradoxical and challenging way. We might reasonably expect an image of lordship based on the world of feudalism to have produced an understanding of God as dominating and domineering. This is not the case with Julian. Overall, her life-giving experience of God-as-Trinity is attractive and convincing. It challenges both a distant, hierarchical relationship between God and humankind and the classic image of an angry Lord God who encourages our fear of damnation. One aspect of God's teaching that "all shall be well" is shown to Julian as an indication of God's homeliness and humility.

He wants us to know that he takes heed not only of things which are noble and great, but also of those which are little and small, of humble men and simple, of this man and that man (Chapter 32).

Early in her Long Text (Chapter 7), Julian anticipates the parable of a Lord and a servant (Chapter 51). God shows her the example of “a majestic king or a great lord” welcoming a poor servant into his presence with familiarity (another of Julian’s favourite images for God’s way of behaving) and in front of others. Julian contrasts this with merely showering a person with material gifts, while remaining personally distant. Later, Julian is “lifted up into heaven”, where God is portrayed as the lord who entertains all his friends to a great feast (Chapter 14). The language Julian uses is almost lyrical:

I saw him reign in his house as a king and fill it all full of joy and mirth, gladdening and consoling his dear friends with himself, very familiarly and courteously, with wonderful melody in endless love in his own fair blissful countenance, which glorious countenance fills all heaven full of the joy and bliss of the divinity.

The parable of a Lord and a servant in Chapter 51 is central to Julian’s overall teaching. It provides a key to our understanding of the nature of God’s faithful love and of God’s union with humanity through suffering. While the language of the parable reflects the hierarchies of feudalism, the dynamic of the teaching expressed in the story contrasts sharply with the realities of Julian’s society. For one thing, the parable suggests that God is not only the Lord but, counter-intuitively, also the servant who is identified not merely with Adam and humankind, but also with Christ, the second person of the Trinity and equal to God the Father. As noted earlier, the explanation of the parable in Chapters 52-63 is dominated by Julian’s imagery of God as mother. This not only serves to redefine our images of God, but also our understandings of “lordship” and of authority.¹²

The language of “courtesy” is chivalrous and courtly. The humility and reverent fear of “our Lady St Mary” standing before God is commended (Chapter 7). However, “our good Lord, who is so to be revered and feared, is also familiar and courteous”. The image of Jesus Christ as “courteous Lord” is regularly repeated throughout Julian’s Long Text. God’s “royal dominion” is closely linked to his “wonderful courtesy” (for example, in Chapter 48). “Courtesy” was an important value in the society of Julian’s times. It involved polite behaviour in which someone deferred to another person. In other words, a “courteous” person put the convenience or

12 While several scholars noted the connection Julian makes between the lordship image and the motherhood of God, the “feminisation” of lordship and authority does not seem to have been explicitly drawn out. See, for example, Innes-Parker (1997:21).

desires of someone else before his/her own.¹³ In Julian's understanding, God defers to us and finds pleasure especially in giving us pleasure. Courtesy implies familiarity, but it is an unexpected (and unearned) familiarity that involves the crossing of conventional social boundaries.

So, it is with our Lord Jesus and us, for truly it is the greatest possible joy, as I see it, that he who is highest and mightiest, noblest and most honourable, is lowest and humblest, most familiar and courteous (Chapter 7).

8. THE STABILITY OF GOD'S LOVE

In Chapter 5, Julian also describes God's love as "homely".¹⁴ Although the Middle English word "homely" indicates intimacy, it also has linguistic resonances of "at home", "permanent", or "habitual". There is thus an interesting connection between God's "homeliness" and the virtue of "stability". This not only implies a commitment to make one's home permanently in a particular context, but the virtue of persevering with it "for better or for worse". Julian suggests that this is an important quality of God's relationship with us. In the historical context of the late 14th century, the notion of permanence or stability had a particular force and poignancy. Not only was the church and civil society wracked by instability and insecurity, but there was also a widespread failure of trust in the social and religious structures that should have provided an image of stability and faithfulness. In Julian's time, bishops such as Henry Despenser of Norwich spent little time in their dioceses, preferring to be in London and connected to the royal court. Feudal lordship, based originally on a stable relationship both with a specific place and with a defined group of people, was in serious decline. In this context, the "stability" of God's love offered a very different model of true lordship.¹⁵

The stability that Julian described in terms of God's relationship with humankind reflects God's inner life. Her description of God-as-Trinity is in terms of God being supremely active in creation and in human lives. The inner life of God-as-Trinity involves a constant movement of relationships. Yet, according to Julian, the Trinity also dwells in peace and stillness

13 Nuth (1991:74-79) suggests that Julian's usage is closer to texts such as the *Ancrene Riwe* (or *Wisse*) that designate "courtaisy" as a Christian virtue of giving pleasure to others. This is perhaps to miss the point that the conventions of courtly love and of spiritual love were not unconnected!

14 Colledge & Walsh translate this as "familiar".

15 See Pelphey's (1982:106, n. 5) comments.

whether in heaven or in the human soul. “Now the Son, true God and true man, sits in his city in rest and in peace” (Chapter 51).

9. CONCLUSION

In summary, Julian’s theology of God-as-Trinity is fundamentally “practical” as is the whole of her theological teaching. The image of the Trinity in Julian is, as it were, the answer to the question as to whether and how God is engaged with humanity and the world. The God of Julian’s revelations is joyfully and purposefully involved in human history, in the smallest of human events, and in the lives of all of her “fellow Christians”. While God’s inherent freedom demands that this involvement be a matter of God’s own choice, it is nevertheless, for Julian, an aspect of God’s happiness and fulfilment. In that sense, God’s saving action in the world is not only a revelation of God’s inner nature as a community of persons, but also the vehicle for mutual Trinitarian interaction. In this way, Julian draws together the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity. God’s action *is* God’s Trinitarian way of being.

A final question remains. What is the ultimate purpose of Julian’s “showings” or “revelations”? Throughout her writings, Julian emphasises that she is moved by compassion for all her fellow Christians. That is her fundamental motive for writing. Consequently, the effect on Julian of her visions and her resulting theology of God is to empower her with an urgency to pass on those teachings to a wider audience. One implication is that the compassion and love of God for us will lead to our growing compassion and love for others as we are drawn ever more deeply into the life of God-as-Trinity.¹⁶ By implication, it is hoped that the impact on all those touched by Julian’s teachings will be a similar deepening of love and compassion for God’s creation and for fellow human beings within each of whom, without exception, dwells the divine presence.

As Julian emphasises clearly in her final Chapter 86, after many years of struggling to understand the meaning of her visions and the teaching embodied in them, she finally reached a fundamental spiritual understanding that the ultimate meaning of everything is love and only love.

Know it well, love was his meaning. Who reveals it to you? Love. What did he reveal to you? Love. Why does he reveal it to you? For love. Remain in this, and you will know more of the same. But you will never know different, without end. So I was taught that love is our Lord’s meaning.

¹⁶ See Palliser (1992: Chapter 5B).

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