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Visionary Didacticism in Julian of Norwich's *Showings*

by

Kevin James Magill

A thesis submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts

Department of Theology and Religious Studies
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May 2002

79,403 words

This thesis examines the visions of the fourteenth-century anchoress Julian of Norwich as a means of teaching. The teaching in the visions is presented in divine and human modes. Julian learns from the visions under a divine didactic initiative, as well as acting as a guide through the visionary sequence for a Christian audience. It is the contention of this thesis that Julian became progressively aware of the diverse learning capacity of the Christian community in which she lived and, in turn, developed an account of her visionary experience to fit a variety of pedagogic and pastoral needs. The late Middle Ages was a deeply visual culture, and visually more diverse than society today. Images did not distance the viewer and were designed, instead, for participation, rumination and crucially, for this thesis, instruction. At a time of her life when she was probably living as a church anchoress, Julian chose to address the Christian community in the language and imagery of a visionary experience. The means, methods and precedent for this form of didactic exchange will be the focus of this thesis.

Acknowledgements

I would like to start by thanking the AHRB, The Swansea Further Education Trust Fund, The Saint Luke's College Foundation and the University of Bristol Alumni Foundation for the financial support that has made this project possible.

I would also like to thank the staff and students of the Theology and Religious Studies Department at the University of Bristol. The students I have taught over the past three years and more have contributed enormously to the development of the ideas in this thesis. The department's academic and office staff provided a friendly and cooperative environment in which it was a pleasure to study.

Friends and fellow postgraduates that have generously offered me their advice and time are too many to mention by name. I must reserve special thanks for Demelza Curnow who studiously read and corrected a draft of the thesis. I would also like to thank my first Religious Studies teacher Mr Robert Newsome. Rob was not only the teacher whose talent inspired my interest in the subject of religion, he taught me the invaluable lesson of self-respect. For that lesson alone, I will always be in his debt. I would also like to thank Lucy Pearce. Without her support, humour and ability to put my selfishness above her own needs, I would never have attended University. Lucy, I hope you continue to be the happiest person that I know.

I would also like to thank my supervisor Dr Carolyn Muessig. Her enthusiasm for this project has enabled me to overcome frequent bouts of self-doubt, and her erudition has saved my blushes on more than one occasion. The completion of this project is largely due to Carolyn's insightful supervision and her insistence that there is always a danger of taking oneself too seriously. My most sincere thanks Carolyn, I feel fortunate to have met you.

Finally, my deepest and warmest thanks go to all my family. Their mild amusement over the thought of me studying 'mystics' frequently stopped me retreating to an ivory tower of my own making. On those occasions when I was in residence of the said tower, their peeling laughter quickly forced me out again. I only hope, as a proud son, brother and uncle, that your love, care and guidance reflects, in some way, in this work.

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol. The work was original except where indicated by special reference in the text and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other degree.

Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University of Bristol.

The dissertation has not been presented to any other University for examination either in the United Kingdom or overseas.

SIGNED:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. H. Agill'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R' and a long horizontal stroke at the bottom.

DATE: 22.7.2002.

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Introduction

There is very little that can be said with confidence about the identity of Julian of Norwich. Julian is believed to be a woman who experienced a series of visions whilst either a layperson or a church anchoress. It is thought that her enclosed life was spent at St Julian's church in Norwich, from which she takes her name. It was whilst living as an enclosed anchoress that Julian is believed to have meditated on the visions she received and produced a written account of them in what we now know of as *Showings*.

There is both a Short and a Long Text that is attributed to Julian's hand. The scribal introduction to the shorter account identifies a vision shown to a devout woman named Julian who was a recluse at Norwich and still alive in 1413.¹ The longer version records sixteen 'showings' revealed to a 'simple, unlettered creature' on the 13 May 1373.² Both short and long versions refer to Julian being thirty and a half years old when she received the visions, an age that places her birth date around December 1342. Remaining evidence for Julian's identity comes in the form of bequests naming a 'Julian' as an anchorite and resident at St Julian's church in Norwich. The first such bequest of two shillings was made by Roger Reed the rector of St Coslany, Norwich dated 20 March 1393/4 to 'Julian ankorite'.³ In Thomas Edmund's will of 1404 a bequest of one shilling was made to the anchorite Julian, at St Julian's church in Norwich. John Plumpton, a Norwich citizen, made his will on 24 November 1415 bequeathing forty pence to 'le ankeres in ecclesia sancti Juliani de Conesford in Norwice', and twelve pence to both the current serving maid and Alice a former maid.

¹ In this thesis I will be using a translated edition of the Middle English Short and Long Text of *Showings*. For all future references to the text in footnotes, I will use the book title '*Showings*' followed by a page number. In the main body of the text I will reference chapter numbers and indicate whether the passage being used is from the Short or Long Text. For the Short Text scribal introduction see *Showings*, p. 125.

² *Showings*, p. 177.

³ For details of all the bequests see *A Book of Showings to the anchoress Julian of Norwich*, ed. by Edmund Colledge O.S.A., and James Walsh, S.J., part 1 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978), p. 33; Norman Tanner, *Popular Religion in Norwich with Special Reference to the Evidence of Wills, 1370-1532* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), p. 200, fn. 29; *A Revelation of Love*, ed. by Marion Glasscoe, rev. ed. (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1986), p. vii.

The Countess of Suffolk, Isabel Ufforde left a bequest of twenty shillings to Julian ‘a recluse at Norwich’ in 1416. The latest bequest was made in 1429 by Robert Baxster who left three shillings and four pence to the anchorite in the churchyard of St Julian’s church in Conisford.

The popularity of Julian of Norwich as a figure of scholarly debate and contemporary devotion begins its modern life with Grace Warrack’s critical edition of a version of the Long Text in 1901.⁴ Warrack’s publication, allied to a growing interest in Christian medieval literature at the turn of the twentieth century, brought Julian’s profound spiritual insight to the notice of many theologians, literature specialists and lay worshippers alike. The Long Text is generically referred to by its editorial title *Revelation(s) of Divine Love*, a shortening of the title given to the text by the Benedictine Serenus Cressy who published the first printed edition of the longer version in 1670.⁵ The title *Showings*, the title to be used in this thesis, usually identifies both the short and long versions of the text.⁶ The use of the title *Showings* to designate texts attributed to Julian is due, in large part, to the publication of Colledge and Walsh’s critical edition of the Short Text and a version of the Long Text in 1978.⁷ Since the important contribution of Colledge and Walsh, Julian has remained a compelling figure for scholars of various disciplines who are attracted by the image of a solitary female composing vernacular theological works of great depth and innovation. However, it is not clear and never has been clear who Julian of Norwich was and why she wrote the texts attributed to her.

In recent times, Julian has become a victim of her own success. Suppositions concerning Julian’s identity, her literary skill and purpose for writing have taken on the

⁴ *The Revelations of Divine Love/recorded by Julian anchoress at Norwich*, ed. by Grace Warrack (London: Methuen, 1901).

⁵ The full title to Serenus Cressy’s edition is *XVI Revelations of Divine Love, Shewed to a Devout Servant of God, called Mother Julian* (S.I., London, 1670).

⁶ Scholars did not receive Colledge and Walsh’s edition uncritically. For a review of *A Book of Showings* see Marion Glasscoe, ‘Review’, *Medium Ævum*, 50 (1981), 170-3.

⁷ Julian of Norwich, *A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich*, ed. by Edmund Colledge O.S.A., and James Walsh, S.J., 2 parts (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978).

appearance of facts.⁸ Therefore, although evidence for levels of literacy, availability of writing materials and the political climate count against the possibility of a lone woman writing, it is rarely questioned whether Julian wrote her text in a short or long version.⁹ However, there is no extant text that can be directly attributed to Julian's hand. The surviving eight manuscripts of *Showings* are all scribal productions, the earliest, the Short Text, dating from approximately 1435-36 to the latest versions of the Long Text copied between 1650-1670.¹⁰ I am not suggesting that Julian definitely did not write an exemplar text that was later transcribed. Rather, I am suggesting that studies of Julian that proceed without examining the possibility, nature and purpose of composition simply beg the authorship and identity question. Scholarship must be careful not to graft contemporary assumptions concerning the centrality of the author and the originality of the text onto a medieval figure like Julian. Julian's theology addresses a community of Christians, all perceived as one in God's love. Her theological work, whether written or orally transmitted and then written down, is an expression of this love that extends outside any individual identity.

⁸ See Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, 'Editing Julian of Norwich's Revelations: A Progress Report', *Mediaeval Studies*, 38 (1976), 404-27. Colledge and Walsh not only argue that Julian wrote her text but that her writing exhibits signs of rhetorical training and extensive knowledge of the Vulgate.

⁹ For a comprehensive account of the cultural and political difficulties that would have faced Julian's writing project and the reception of any text that she produced see Nicholas Watson, 'Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitution of 1409', *Speculum*, 70 (1995), 822-64. In his paper, Watson gives a compelling account of the restrictions placed upon vernacular theologians following Arundel's attempt in 1409 to censure theological writing in English. For a further discussion of the difficulties that would have faced Julian 'the author' see Chapter 3, Section 1.

¹⁰ There are eight extant manuscripts in the Julian corpus. The oldest manuscript is the Short Text British Library, Additional, Amherst Manuscript, no. 33790 c.1435-36. The second oldest is the Westminster Cathedral Treasury 4 Manuscript. Although the opening folio of manuscript displays the date 1368, scholars have dated the work to c.1500. The oldest Long Text manuscript, Paris, Bibliothèque National, Fonds Anglais, no. 40 bears watermarks from a region near Antwerp, dating the writing to about 1580. Two further versions of the longer version British Library Sloane 2499, 3705 and an exemplar text of Stowe 42 have composition dates between 1650 and the end of the seventeenth century. Upholland and Gascoigne are both seventeenth-century fragments copied from the Sloane and Stowe versions. For detailed studies of the Julian corpus see Alexandra Barratt, 'How Many Children Had Julian of Norwich? Editions, Translations and Versions of Her Revelations', in *Vox Mystica: Essays on Medieval Mysticism in Honour of Professor Valerie M. Lagorio*, ed. by Ann Clark Bartlett and others (Cambridge: Brewer, 1995), pp. 27-39; Marion Glasscoe, 'Visions and Revisions: A Further Look at the Manuscripts of Julian of Norwich', *Studies in Bibliography*, 42 (1989), 103-120. For speculation on the dating of the Short and Long Text see Nicholas Watson, 'The Composition of Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Love*', *Speculum*, 68 (1993), 637-83.

The divergence in the dating of the extant manuscripts creates problems when selecting a suitable modern edition of *Showings* for any sustained study of Julian of Norwich. In this thesis, I will use a translated version in an attempt to move away from conjecture about which edition of *Showings* best preserves Julian's message.¹¹ I find such conjecture problematic for two reasons. First, further research on Julian's writing cannot proceed with the assumption that the Middle English texts that can now be read in modern translations are attributable to Julian's hand. All the extant manuscripts are scribal productions the earliest of which, the Amherst Short Text, is dated to some thirty or forty years after Julian's death. Second, there is no path back to Julian's authorship that is unaffected by scribal omissions, corrections and editorial choices both medieval and modern. Further textual work on Julian must take account of the passage of two hundred years between the early short version of *Showings*, including the early Westminster manuscript, and the much later longer versions. Being neither a Middle English grammarian nor a textual scholar, in this thesis I will examine the conceptual basis of *Showings* in translation and argue for the didactic significance of Julian's visions for a Christian audience of mixed learning ability.

Until recently a critical edition of the extant Middle English manuscripts of *Showings* by a single set of editors was unavailable. In 2001, however, this lack was rectified by the lifelong work of Anna Maria Reynolds and Julia Bolton Holloway.¹² Reynolds and Holloway have produced the first and much needed collection of the Julian manuscripts. Unlike previous critical editions of the Middle English *Showings* that have selected either the Short Text or a version of the Long Text or both, Reynolds and Holloway have edited all the full manuscripts in recognition of their hybrid nature and complex relationships. In addition to her editorial work, Holloway has begun to detail the transmission of the *Showings* manuscripts in exiled Benedictine and

¹¹ *Showings*, trans. by Edmund Colledge O.S.A., and James Walsh, S.J. (New York: Paulist Press, 1978). For a discussion of the shortcomings of the certain Middle English editions of *Showings* see Ritamary Bradley, 'Julian of Norwich: Everyone's Mystic' in *Mysticism and Spirituality in Medieval England*, ed. by William F. Pollard and Robert Boenig (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997), pp. 139-58 (pp. 139-42).

¹² See *Showing of Love: Extant Texts and Translation*, ed. by Sister Anna Maria Reynolds and Julia Bolton Holloway (Tavarnuzze, Firenze: Sismel, 2001).

Brigittine communities.¹³ Holloway's research in this area reflects the need for the textual study of *Showings* to be accompanied by a firm historical context that takes account of the manuscript transmission and the potential audience for such writing. Such a need is supported by the findings of Hugh Kempster.¹⁴ Kempster offers some insight into the possible audience for the Westminster manuscript of *Showings* and the choices made by the medieval editor of the text. Significantly for this thesis, Kempster draws attention to the editor's policy of omitting the words 'revelation' and 'vision' entirely, whilst only using the Middle English 'shewing' five times compared to the ninety-two instances found in the Sloane 2499 Long Text. Kempster argues that such omissions highlight a deliberate editorial policy to produce a 'purely didactic text', simplified for a lay audience.¹⁵ Kempster's thesis is also supported by the trend towards conservatism in vernacular writing of the early fifteenth-century following Arundel's Constitutions of 1409.¹⁶ The work of Reynolds, Holloway and Kempster demonstrates that if textual work on *Showings* is to be fruitful, then efforts must be made to evaluate all the manuscript sources set in their historical context. Unfortunately, a copy of Reynolds's and Holloway's authoritative edition was received too late for use in this thesis. Further textual research on the Julian manuscripts must, however, start with the comprehensive edition produced by Reynolds and Holloway.

The observations made above lead to a crucial question for this thesis 'Why is the visionary didacticism of Julian's *Showings* a legitimate area of study?' The answer to this question falls into three interrelated parts. First, by approaching Julian's visions as a didactic medium, it is possible to enter the ongoing debate regarding definitions of mysticism and Julian's identification as a mystic. Second, understanding Julian's visions as having a pedagogic purpose offers a full reading of the intricate theology in *Showings*. Third, understanding visionary experience as a means of teaching and being

¹³ Julia Bolton Holloway, 'Julian of Norwich's *Showings* in a Nutshell: Her Manuscripts and their Cultural Contexts', *Birgittiana*, 4 (1997), 129-51.

¹⁴ Hugh Kempster, 'A Question of Audience: The Westminster Text and the Fifteenth-Century Reception of Julian of Norwich' in *Julian of Norwich: A Book of Essays*, ed. by Sandra J. McEntire (New York: Garland, 1998), pp. 257-89.

¹⁵ Kempster, 'A Question of Audience', p. 270.

¹⁶ See Introduction, fn. 9.

taught creates new insight concerning Julian's spiritual life and practice. In the remainder of the introduction, I will demonstrate how these three points can be developed in the form of a critical response to scholarly debate in the area of mystical writing generally and Julian in particular.

In studies of mystical writing two questions appear crucial 'What is mysticism?' and 'What is a mystical experience?'. These two questions have exercised scholars of the subject area since the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁷ However, it seems that there has been great scholarly difficulty in trying to distinguish the particular claims each question has to make. As a consequence, attempts to explain what mysticism is have often relied upon identifying and categorizing a particular type of experience.¹⁸ Likewise, where a particular type of experience is identified and categorized by

¹⁷ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study In Human Nature*, ed. by Martin E. Marty, repr. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985). The suppositions in James's analysis and definition of mysticism have influenced accounts such as Robert C. Zaehner, *Mysticism Sacred and Profane: An Enquiry into Some Varieties of Praeter-Natural Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957); Walter T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1961); Ninian Smart, 'Interpretation and Mystical Experience', *Religious Studies*, 1 (1965), 75-87; Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1960). More recently the debate has centred on editorial contributions from Steven T. Katz, *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (London: Sheldon Press, 1978); *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, ed. by Steven T. Katz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); *Mysticism and Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). For criticism of Katz and his contributors see Robert K.C. Forman, *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) and *Mysticism, Mind, Consciousness* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999).

¹⁸ It should be noted that although the classic studies of mysticism by William James, Robert C. Zaehner, Walter T. Stace and, more recently, Steven T. Katz focus attention on mystical experiences, each writer also recognizes the broader implications of the 'mystic' or 'saint' as a spiritual teacher or moral exemplar. James, for instance, argues that the qualities of the saint or 'spiritual hero' are indispensable to the world's welfare. The truth the saint sees, what James refers to as 'mysticism', offers a non-resistance to an aggressive society. Ultimately, James argues, this aggression can consume the saint, as in the case of the beheaded St Paul, but without the qualities of saintliness the inner friction caused by such aggression would result in society destroying itself. See James, *Varieties*, pp. 374-8. According to Zaehner, the characteristic that distinguishes the monistic from the theistic mystic is the latter's belief that perfection can only be sought in loving relatedness not isolation. Zaehner comments that the Christian mystic must experience in her soul what Christ made manifest in his body through his life, death and resurrection. See Zaehner, *Mysticism Sacred and Profane*, pp. 205-7. Taking his lead from Zaehner, Stace too argues that, generally, moral force and social activities are more pronounced in Christian mystics than the more speculative mystics of the East. Stace argues that Christian mysticism tends towards the moral life, the social life and altruistic action. See Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, pp. 333-41. According to Katz, on theoretical grounds, the mystic and her religious community cannot be separated. He argues that, mystical experience is shaped by the religious practices, texts and images with which the mystic engages. Katz argues cogently that far from being a maverick that challenges the established religious order, a mystic is a 'conservative' influence, an interpreter of religious problems *par excellence* from whom the whole religious community can benefit. See Katz's article, 'The "Conservative" Character of Mystical Experience' in *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, ed. by Steven T. Katz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 3-60.

scholars as 'mystical', it tends to follow that only those individuals describing such an experience can be called mystics.

There are several problems with this experiential approach for Julian scholarship. To begin with, there is a consensus amongst scholars of mysticism that Julian *should* be included in the pantheon of mystics.¹⁹ One needs to ask, however, what definition of mysticism is being used when making this identification. On the surface, Julian does not fit the experiential requirements. Her experiences are visual, bodily and colourful, not the imageless, incorporeal, 'pure' experiences befitting a mystic.²⁰ Nevertheless, the temptation amongst scholars to retain the identification of Julian as a mystic is great. A result of this temptation is a particular reading of *Showings* that supports the placing of Julian in a tradition of so-called mystical writers.²¹ Attempts to squeeze Julian into the category of mystic have resulted in the partial reading of her text to reveal and highlight those features of her visionary experience that are regarded as typically mystical.²² These attempts show little critical awareness for the provenance of the concepts 'experience' and 'mysticism' being used.²³ Therefore, even if

¹⁹ For examples of standard collections of mystical writers that include Julian of Norwich see William R. Inge, *Christian Mysticism* (London: Methuen, 1899); David Knowles, *The English Mystics* (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1927); Marion Glasscoe, *English Medieval Mystics: Games of Faith* (London: Longman, 1993); Barry A. Windeatt, *English Mystics of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

²⁰ William James coined the classic definition of mysticism as an 'experience' that has four features: *Ineffability*, an experience that defies expression; *Noetic quality*, an experience that produces states of insight or knowledge; *Transiency*, an experience that passes; and *Passivity*, an experience that is received involuntarily. For critical analysis of James's mystical categories see Grace Jantzen, 'Mysticism and Experience', *Religious Studies*, 25 (1989), 295-315. Jantzen argues that James's concentration on acute psychic experience misrepresents a broader understanding of religious experience as a life permeated by God's closeness.

²¹ Julian's editors Colledge and Walsh, for example, insist that Julian was deeply influenced by thinkers such as Augustine, Gregory the Great and William of St. Thierry. See Colledge and Walsh, *A Book of Showings*, part 1, pp. 43-59.

²² For examples of identifying Julian with a metaphysical tradition of mysticism that negates imagery see, Vincent Gillespie and Maggie Ross, 'The Apophatic Image: The Poetics of Effacement in Julian of Norwich', in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*, ed. by Marion Glasscoe (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1992), pp. 53-77. See also, Cynthea Masson, 'The Point of Coincidence: Rhetoric and the Apophatic in Julian of Norwich's *Showings*', in *Julian of Norwich: A Book of Essays*, pp. 153-81. For an attempt to rediscover the visual significance of Julian's theology see Roland Maisonneuve, 'The Visionary Universe of Julian of Norwich: Problems and Methods' in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*, ed. by Marion Glasscoe (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1980), pp. 86-98, and the published version of his doctoral thesis, *L'Univers Visionnaire de Julian of Norwich* (Paris: O.E.I.L., 1987).

²³ For an excellent survey of the history of the term see Louis Bouyer, 'Mysticism: An Essay in the Meaning of the Word', in *Understanding Mysticism*, ed. by Richard Woods (London: Athlone, 1981), pp. 42-55.

'mystical' elements can be located in Julian's account of her experiences, there is no reason to accept the definitions in use uncritically. Indeed, this thesis will attempt to show that there are good reasons for rejecting certain claims made in those accounts that identify Julian as a mystic.

Recently, three scholars of the mystical tradition have critically addressed some of the issues discussed above. Their works have made a significant impact on the field of mysticism in general. At this stage, it will be instructive to outline the three contributions. I will begin by presenting a brief synopsis of each approach. Having done so, I will assess how the general argument of each approach fits in with the aims of this thesis. The scholars I will consider are Denys Turner, Grace Jantzen and Nicholas Watson.²⁴

Denys Turner's contribution begins with an important observation. Turner notes that the practice of mystical writing, or more precisely the dialectic apparatus of its medieval neo-Platonic form, has been turned on its head in modern times.²⁵ Whereas mystical theology once operated as a critical tool for restraining individuality in the pursuit of God, Turner argues that a modern understanding of 'the mystical' has reintroduced individualism in a novel way. This reintroduction has been made possible by the centrality of the experiencing subject in modern thinking. Therefore, where mystical theologians once spoke about overcoming selfhood and the denial of describable experiences, modern interpreters have introduced the category 'mysticism' to identify selfless, indescribable experiences. In modern usage, what designates mysticism and/or a mystic is *mystical experience*. In response to the turn to the experiencing subject, Turner states:

²⁴ Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Grace Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Nicholas Watson, 'The Middle English Mystics' in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature* ed. by David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 539-65.

²⁵ Turner admits that the story of medieval neo-Platonic writing is both long and complex. His story begins with the meeting of Greek and Hebraic cultures in Plato's allegory of the cave and the Exodus account of Moses ascending Mount Sinai. See Turner, *The Darkness of God*, pp. 11-18.

I have drawn the conclusion from my study that in so far as the word 'mysticism' has a contemporary meaning; and that in so far as that contemporary meaning links 'mysticism' to the cultivation of certain kinds of experience - of 'inwardness', 'ascent' and 'union' - then the medieval 'mystic' offers an *anti-mysticism*.²⁶

For Turner, it is important to recognize that even if it were possible to isolate a mystical experience, whatever that is, this would tell us nothing about the writers he wants to consider. Turner is quite explicit when he argues that cultivating certain types of experience was not something that medieval mystical theologians were concerned about.

In his studies of individual mystical theologians, Turner intends to demonstrate the anti-mystical tendencies of Denys the Areopagite, Augustine, Bonaventure, Eckhart, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Denys the Carthusian and John of the Cross. Turner also makes several asides to Julian of Norwich, without examining her theological project as a single area of study. In certain respects, Turner exemplifies the tradition of scholars who have tried to validate Julian's inclusion in a predefined group of mystical writers. The problem with Turner's comparison of Julian and those writers he readily classifies as mystical theologians is that no account of the historical and cultural background is given to accompany his comparison. Turner simply does not consider questions concerning Julian's potential audience, the use of vernacular English in *Showings* and the purpose of its composition.²⁷ Rather, Turner uses excerpts from *Showings* to demonstrate the compatibility of Julian's theology and the neo-Platonic version of mystical theology that he favours. Although Turner's critique of the turn to the experiencing subject is applicable to Julian in many ways, it is not applicable solely on the basis of her compatibility with a predefined tradition of mystical theology.

²⁶ Turner, *The Darkness of God*, p. 4.

²⁷ For a general discussion of the audience for medieval 'mystical' writing see S.S. Hussey, 'The Audience for Middle English Mystics' in *De Cella in Seculum: Religious and Secular Life and Devotion in Late Medieval England*, ed. by Michael G. Sargent (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1988), pp. 109-22.

Turner regards the inclusion of Julian in his survey as a first step towards grasping the real purpose of her mystical writing. According to Turner, whether the approach to God is undertaken in a superabundant affirmation of language and imagery or a denial of all imagery and language, the differences are only qualitative. Turner argues that lying beneath these apparent differences is the assumption common to all mystical writers that God is unknowable. The lack of contextual justification in Turner's thesis leaves him vulnerable to the accusation that he wants to set Julian in a tradition in which she did not participate. Indeed, Turner's only justification for Julian's inclusion in the mystical tradition he identifies is that her writing, though affirmative and imagistic, is founded upon the premise that God is unknowable. However, for Julian it is important that God is known and wants to be known in certain ways. Julian's knowledge of God extends to all Christians living a life of faith and is set in the context of salvation and redemption, not an epistemological context. What is important for Julian and her fellow Christians to 'know' is encountered in the spectacle of the loving act of Christ's Passion, and it is in this act that God wants to be known. What is unknowable about God is certainly not something that lies beneath or beyond what is revealed to Julian as a revelation of love. What is outside the revelation and, therefore, outside salvation and redemption is a private matter for God, not an epistemic impasse for Julian.

Reading Turner's seminal study it becomes clear that he is not always talking about individual mystical writers as such, but a particular neo-Platonic tradition in mystical theology. Although it remains understated most of the time, Turner wants to represent the neo-Platonic tradition of mystical writing as normative. The writers he considers base their theological schemes on the premise that God is beyond all human knowing, experiencing and language. Whilst this is certainly an accurate description of the theologians Turner selects for his study, it is not clear that the theological content of *Showings* can be approached in the same way.

In the final quarter of his book, Turner describes a shift in the last half of the fourteenth century in which theologians stop being included in the list of mystics, and

mystics stop making any serious contribution to theology. Presumably, given the definitions Turner employs to identify mystics, this period marks a point at which a neo-Platonic form of mystical writing is less prevalent. Rather than account for a shift or development in mystical writing, Turner prefers to dismiss later mystical variants as theologically inconsequential. He does not ask what this new mystical writing was contributing towards, and why mystical works continued to be produced that were, in his estimation, of little theological value. Although Turner decides not to address these questions, they are significant and implicate Julian directly.

Grace Jantzen, the second scholar of the mystical tradition I want to consider, works with a critical model that sets mystical writing in an identifiable political and cultural context. Jantzen both asks and seeks to answer the type of question that Turner does not ask. Indeed, Jantzen challenges any monolithic conception of mysticism. In the first chapter to her study, she states ‘There is no one thing in the history of Christianity that can be defined as the ‘essence’ of mysticism, or what ‘mysticism is really about.’²⁸ Unlike Turner who offers little historical background for his central claims, Jantzen asserts that urgent scholarly work is needed to reset the Christian spiritual writing of the Middle Ages in its active social and political environment. According to Jantzen, such scholarly work is hindered by a failure to recognize that ‘mysticism’ is not a trans-historical phenomenon but a socially constructed concept. Thus, identifying something as mysticism or someone as a mystic is never free from political and personal interests relating to power and control. In the Middle Ages, mystical writers who claimed direct contact with God were in a position to challenge the ecclesiastical authority structures of the day. Those in positions of power sought to control any challenge to their authority by constructing definitions of true and false mysticism. True mystics, by definition, did not challenge or could not challenge authority, and false mystics who continued to threaten authority, often identified as women, faced the gravest consequences.

²⁸ Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, p. 24.

In many ways, Jantzen's approach is the reverse of Turner's. Jantzen has greater interest in those features of mystical writing that may exclude an author from 'mystical' status, or include certain writers whilst ensuring that political control is unchallenged. It may come as little surprise to Jantzen that by the late fourteenth century, particularly in England, theologians representing the interests of the Church define a form of mystical writing that has no serious theological value. Cultural shifts in the period including increased lay devotion, vernacular writing and Lollardy were a serious challenge to Church authority.²⁹ Julian, herself, would seem a little conspicuous as a woman who addressed Christians in the vernacular, and based her teaching on a visionary experience from God.

Jantzen observes that definitions of late medieval 'mysticism' that include visions and others bodily experiences - phenomena that Turner's study does not investigate - are associated more and more with women's religiosity.³⁰ Unlike Turner, Jantzen is aware that any fissure between the interests of theology and the interests of mysticism deserves investigation. In particular, attention needs to be paid to the interests of those with the authority to uphold definitions of what is 'orthodox' or 'unorthodox'. Associating religious women with esoteric 'mystical' experiences that challenged orthodoxy was a particularly effective way of dismissing any serious theological contribution they could make, whilst ensuring the control and domestication of any woman who claimed a direct experience of God. In her searching study of the origins of mysticism, its manifestation in medieval religiosity and its reappearance in modern philosophical categories, Jantzen presents a detailed critique of many of the assumptions that have hindered the progress of scholarship in this area. It is clear from Jantzen's hypothesis that mystical texts cannot be read in a vacuum. What a modern reader has inherited as an idea of a 'mystic' or 'mysticism' is not independent of the dictates of authority and the interests of those in positions of power.

²⁹ See Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: Hambleton Press, 1984)

³⁰ Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, pp. 242-6.

The third scholar I want to consider, Nicholas Watson, offers a useful summary of the concerns raised by Turner and Jantzen, and adds further insight regarding the direction of the study of Middle English mystics. Watson does not attempt an exhaustive account of medieval men and women who have been identified as mystics. Instead, he focuses on the English mystical tradition of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century. In his article, Watson looks at the writings or dictated accounts of Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton, the *Cloud* author, Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe. Watson's approach centres on main two issues. First, he argues that the academic study of mysticism has never adequately distinguished itself from religious practice. Second, he contends that the study of 'mystics' is a modern not a medieval reality.

Regarding the first issue, Watson argues that due to a decline in organized religion at the turn of the last century, a greater emphasis was placed on the role of 'spiritual experience' in religious practice. According to Watson by 1900 'the whole Western world was awash with experience-orientated religious movements'.³¹ A result of the growth in experience-orientated religion was a renewed scholarly interest in medieval mystical texts. However, the renewed interest of scholars for texts long neglected was not independent of institutions goals. Thus Watson notes that French and English Catholic scholars tried to impose inflexible identifications and definitions of an 'authentic' mystical tradition onto a variegated body of medieval spiritual writing. Watson argues, it is this modern concern to safeguard Catholic orthodoxy and authenticity from the competing claims of other spiritual traditions and the ravages of time that has complicated distinctions between the interests of practitioners and the interests of academics. Watson notes that the controlling interests of Catholic conservatives at the beginning of the twentieth century had much in common with the concerns for orthodoxy and authenticity in the medieval Church. Thus, questions over who counts as a mystic and what defines 'authentic' mysticism in the medieval

³¹ Watson, 'The Middle English Mystics', p. 540. It is unhelpful that Watson does not give specific examples of what he means by experience-orientated religious movements.

practice of ‘discerning spirits’, has continued, in a modified form, to exert an influence over the contemporary study of spiritual writing. Watson does not want to dispute the important contribution of practitioners to our modern understanding of the mystics. Rather, he wants to establish the heterogeneity of medieval spiritual writing in English. For Watson, the purpose of these English spiritual texts is misconstrued where they are approached from the desire, in the contemporary Church, to establish a medieval origin for categories of orthodoxy and authenticity.

Reflecting on the purpose of late medieval spiritual writing in English, leads Watson to his second issue. Watson wants to question the identity of a group of authors termed the ‘Middle English mystics’. Thus, Watson states:

Hilton, Rolle and the *Cloud*-author did form part of a group of ‘canonical’ authors on the spiritual or ‘contemplative’ life. But the group also included a variety of ascetic, pastoral and other kinds of writers, and excluded Kempe and Julian, who were not widely known in their times.³²

Watson’s observation that this grouping is applied anachronistically to a variegated medieval spirituality highlights the possibility of limiting the scope of Julian’s theology. If Julian is to be included in any serious study of ‘the mystics’, then her theology must conform to expectations that have been formulated according to a modern estimation of ‘authenticity’.

Instead of trying to group together the likes of Hilton, Rolle, the *Cloud* author, Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe according to definitions of a ‘mystic’, Watson sets their texts within a cultural experiment he calls ‘vernacular theology’.³³ Watson pictures these vernacular theologians experimenting with language and the possibilities for expressing theological concepts in English as well as the ecclesiastical language Latin. The use of the vernacular raises the question of textual authority for Watson, a concern he sees the vernacular theologians sharing with socially and politically

³² Watson, ‘The Middle English Mystics’, pp. 543-4.

³³ Watson, ‘The Middle English Mystics’, p. 544.

motivated users of English like their contemporaries Chaucer, Langland and the Lollards. By linking the vernacular theologians with the political and social discourse of their day, Watson seriously questions the identification of the ‘mystics’ as representatives of trans-historical orthodoxy. Indeed, Watson favours the removal of the protective term ‘mystic’ altogether, to enable the fruitful study of the politics of writing in medieval England.

One example of the impact of the vernacular theologians, outside the rubric ‘mystic’, is their concern to spiritually educate their audience. A feature of their educational project is a renewed vigour for making texts and teaching accessible to a wider audience. Archbishop Pecham’s ‘Ignorantia Sacerdotum’ in 1281, which outlined the minimum theological requirements for the laity and preaching clergy, invigorated the demand for spiritual guidance. To facilitate the need for guidance on spiritual matters, Watson argues that the ‘writers’ he considers constructed works in the indigenous language of the audience being addressed. Taking Richard Rolle as an example, Watson contends that his vernacular teaching was pastoral in intention. He defines Rolle’s spiritual sensations of *fervor*, *dulcor* and *canor* as communal expressions of the life of faith, not deeply subjective and indescribable experiences. According to Watson, Rolle’s spiritual writing is something that is *communicable* and participatory. In the context of religious participation, the spiritual sensations do not isolate the individual. Rather, the spiritual sensations are an expression of the praise offered by all Christians as an articulation of a community’s worship.

Julian scholarship can gain a great deal from a close look at the three scholars I have been considering. All three take issue with definitions of mysticism and mystical experience that have dominated scholarly studies since the turn of the twentieth century. Following on from their arguments, it is possible to restate the importance of Julian’s visionary experience as a communal expression of love and not a private ‘experience’. Julian scholarship cannot continue to peel back the imagery, colour and tactility in her visions, in an attempt to uncover an underlying ‘mystical’ core, or an ‘authentic’ expression of mysticism. Julian, as Turner argues in his notion *anti-*

mysticism, was not interested in the cultivation of private religious ‘experiences’. Following Jantzen and Watson, Julian scholarship can begin to assign a purpose to Julian’s visionary language. To insist that Julian is a mystic, with its assumptions concerning indescribable and imageless mystical experiences, risks domesticating the visual richness of her theology. Turning to Watson, it is possible to locate Julian’s visionary theology in a pastoral and pedagogic environment. As Watson argues, the ‘vernacular theologians’ formulated theological works to educate all Christians. Therefore, it is plausible to suggest that Julian played an active part in her religious community, and deliberately addressed a wide audience in vernacular English and the language of a vision.

In the further study of Julian of Norwich, notice must be taken of Watson’s recommendation that the protective enclosure of the term ‘mystic’ should be removed. If Julian is no longer considered a mystic, the study of her visions can be set in the context of the political and social concerns that are ignored where visionary experience is considered something to be transcended in accordance with conservative definitions of who counts as a mystic. Furthermore, if Julian is not considered a mystic, her visions offer new possibilities upon reassessment. In this thesis, I will argue that much more can be gained from Julian’s spiritual life and text, if instead of using the term ‘mystic’ further research begins to refer to Julian in language that can be used with some confidence. This thesis will assess Julian and *Showings* in the context of the life of an anchoress, and the interaction between an anchoress and the religious life of the community in which she participated

At first sight it appears that the removal of the terms ‘mystic’ and ‘mysticism’ deprives a rich and inventive theology of something important. This worry is evidence of how persuasive the idea of ‘mysticism’ has become. Persuasiveness, however, does not exempt these terms from critical assessment. Indeed, critical assessment may reveal a more fitting use for them, free from a restrictive agenda. This thesis offers just such a critical assessment of Julian as an anchoress and visionary theologian. A

relative freedom from limiting definitions allows this thesis to present a fuller reading of *Showings*, whilst offering new insight into Julian's teaching and spiritual practice.

In view of this new departure, I will now discuss the structure of the thesis. The thesis will be presented in four chapters divided into sections, with Chapters 1 and 2 each containing three subsections. Each chapter will include an opening synopsis and summary conclusion. Chapters are organized thematically to provide a rationale for the research materials selected. Chapter I will consider a conceptual setting for the idea of visionary didacticism. In this chapter, I have selected Plato, Aristotle and St Augustine, as thinkers that shaped the medieval understanding of 'vision'. I will set their ideas about vision alongside Julian to explain the idea of 'educating the senses'. Chapter II examines the communal significance of a church anchoress. In this chapter, I have chosen close readings of texts written for an anchoritic audience, to compare and contrast with *Showings*. The texts I will consider are: Aelred of Rievaulx's *De Institutione Inclusarum*, the anonymous *Ancrene Wisse*, *St Katherine* and *The Myroure of Recluses*, Richard Rolle's *Form of Living* and Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*.³⁴ Chapter III attempts to develop the theme of visionary didacticism directly. The method of studying the relationship between visionary texts and visionary experiences is understudied at present. Two notable exceptions that have proved useful in the construction of this chapter are, Sixten Ringbom's *Icon to Narrative* and Jeffrey Hamburger's, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany*.³⁵ Chapter IV considers the role of the body in Julian's theology of redemption. This chapter will work on new readings of *Showings* according to a visionary didactic method. Central images and theological motifs from *Showings* are examined in this chapter, including the example of a lord and a servant and the motherhood of Christ.

³⁴ For full biographical details see Chapter II, fn. 2.

³⁵ Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-Up in Fifteenth-Century Devotional Painting*, 2nd ed. (Doornspijk: Davaco, 1984); Jeffrey Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998).

Having set out the thesis thematically, I will say a little more about the content of each chapter. Chapter I will begin with a discussion of the education of the senses. In Section 1, I follow the hypothesis that since antiquity metaphysical speculation has resulted in a general mistrust of the bodily senses. This thesis begins as an attempt to reposition the bodily senses, especially vision, in the world and its surroundings. Thus, I will introduce Julian's description of the onset of her visions as a didactic means of engaging her audience visually. I will continue the theme of educating the senses in three subsections, the first on Plato, the second on Aristotle and the third on Augustine. Having argued that Plato's cave simile in *Republic* is not so much a downgrading of the senses as a call for their education, I will offer a reading of *Phaedrus* as a visual exchange between the lover and beloved that carries with it ideas of moral reform. Moving on, I will consider Aristotle's *De Anima*. Aristotle too presents an understanding of sensory awareness that implicates the moral disposition of the individual. Turning to Augustine's 'Letter 147' and *The Trinity*, I will argue that his understanding of bodily and spiritual vision, whilst not always consistent, presents an influential model for relating the state of the soul to the type of object that is being viewed. In Section 2 of the chapter, I will introduce Julian's categories of vision and the visionary sequence itself as a unitary phenomenon. The shifts in Julian's visionary capacity from blindness to spiritual sight, from darkness to light, mark movements in a visionary universe, not a movement out of the visionary towards the mystical.

Chapter II examines the religious life of a church anchoress. In this chapter, I aim to challenge the picture of Julian as an anchoress that is prohibited from any engagement in her community. Section 1 begins by considering Julian's identity as an anchoress. The anchoritic guides emphasize that as a solitary individual, an anchoress is in constant danger of being overcome by demonic forces. Julian, by contrast, presents her encounters with the devil as a lesson in faith applicable to all Christians. Section 2 will challenge the idea that Julian can be identified as a 'solitary heroine'. I will use the anchoritic account of *St Katherine* to demonstrate that Julian could learn more from this example about her didactic role in her community than about ideas of

heroic solitude. Section 3 will examine two ideas of discernment, one general and one technical. The general idea of discernment concerns male regulation of the religious lives of women in the Middle Ages. In this part of the section, I will look at male stereotyping of religious women as morally weak and subject to their bodily affections. Such affections, including visions and voices, are relevant to the technical sense of discernment, as the ‘discernment of spirits’. In the Middle Ages, a higher percentage of women than men reported visionary phenomena. Male religious were concerned that visions being reported by bodily women could be demonic. I will examine the advice of the anchoritic guides on the matter of discerning divine and demonic experiences. The advice of the guides ranges from total censorship of all visions to mild caution. Interestingly, Julian invites her audience to discern the value of her visions for themselves. She urges her fellow Christians to take from the vision what is helpful and disregard what is unhelpful. Section 4 is divided into three subsections, and examines looking, listening and loving as possible didactic influences in the life of an anchoress. I will argue that these influences or modes of teaching, implicit in the anchoritic guides, compare favourably with Julian’s own didactic methods.

Chapter III concentrates on the idea of visionary didacticism itself. The argument is constructed with ideas of reception, transmission and audience in mind. Thus, ‘Who was Julian’s audience?’ and ‘How and why did Julian address her audience in the language of a visionary experience?’ are central questions. Section 1 assesses the role of Julian as an author. In this section, I will argue that Julian did not rely on the production of a text to transmit her vision. Her project was not a writing project, but the revelation of God’s love to the Christian community. In section 2, I argue that Julian could facilitate the task of transmission by combining didactic imagery and oral instruction. In this section, I attempt to establish the idea that Julian used elementary didactic devices that her audience could anticipate and then use for the purpose of their spiritual guidance. In Section 3, I pick out evidence of orality in *Showings* to support the theory that Julian’s theology was transmitted by means that were more immediate than a text. Finally, Section 4 will try to combine the theory of visionary didacticism

with religious practice, in the form of the Eucharist. I will argue that Julian deliberately sets the account of her visions in liturgical time to emphasize their communal significance as a daily reminder of Christ's Passion.

Chapter IV, the final chapter of the thesis, considers the role of the body in Julian's theology of salvation and redemption. In Section 1, I will begin by highlighting the problem of defining 'the body'. I will then turn to a medieval understanding of the body, and argue that by the late Middle Ages the body of Christ enters Christian thinking as the reality of human salvation and redemption. I will trace this development in the medieval practice of meditating on Christ's Passion, highlighting the continuity between this practice and Julian's visionary didacticism. Section 2, will examine points of departure between Julian's understanding of Christ's body as a redemptive reality and Caroline Walker Bynum's idea of accessing the divine in or through the body. Bynum's historical survey is perhaps too broad to accommodate the intricacies of Julian's theology of salvation and redemption. Julian consistently states that Christ's body is the reality of the human condition's salvation and redemption; her own body is a body saved and redeemed. In Section 3, I will introduce the idea that the transference of Julian's bodily claims and spiritual needs, onto or into the redemptive body of Christ, results in a shift of perspective towards the divine. In an example of a lord and a servant, a visionary parable that is described by Julian, I will demonstrate that Julian establishes a divine perspective in her visionary didacticism. In the final section of the chapter, Section 4, I will consider how the process of redemption operates in Julian's anthropology. I will argue that, in *Showings*, the work of redemption is achieved by rejoining of the sensual and divine aspects of the human soul. Julian describes this rejoining of the dislocated parts of the soul, as the work of redemption, which is fulfilled by Christ's motherhood. To conclude the section, I will examine how Julian articulates her redemptive theology in the form of a perceptual exchange between Christ as Mother and humanity her child.

It is my hope that this thesis will demonstrate the need for Julian scholars to abandon easy identification with existing terminology and definitions of 'the mystics'.

If this is possible, work on new insights and developments in Julian studies can begin. Setting Julian's theology in a visual context is one aspect of this work. However, it is one aspect that allows for a fresh and full reading of *Showings* that does justice to some of the major themes and images in Julian's teaching. Julian has remained an obscure but much loved figure in mystical scholarship. To a degree, Julian's obscurity rests upon certain suppositions, outlined above, that are rarely questioned. I think it would make little difference to Julian whether she was known to anyone, or rediscovered by scholars today. However, it would be disastrous to think that Julian's teaching - her pedagogic attempt to present a profoundly important theological message - could be lost in a heap of overused definitions and misplaced generalizations. This thesis is an attempt, above all else, to present Julian's spiritual practice and her theology accurately and honestly.

I

Understanding Julian's *Showings* as Visionary Theology

In the introduction, I argued for the removal of the protective term 'mystic' when considering Julian's spiritual life and practice. This chapter will be the first stage towards detailing the reasons for referring to Julian in language that is not burdened by presuppositions concerning the mystics and the mystical. It is worth emphasizing that allocating something as 'mystical' is not erroneous in itself. Rather, in what follows, the term will be set aside to avoid misreading Julian through the employment of unquestioned characteristics of what is mystical and what it is to be a mystic. If these characteristics are rejected, and Julian's writing and spiritual life is considered afresh, it can be demonstrated that alternative terms of reference need to be implemented. The revised terms themselves are not new, as evidenced in Watson's use of labels such as 'vernacular theology' and 'pastoral care' when referring to spiritual writing. However, the use of such terminology does mark a new start in the scholarly study of such writing. Watson redefines the mystical life as a creative experiment with vernacular language that is pastoral in intention. This chapter offers a set of observations necessary for reconsidering and understanding Julian's *Showings* as visionary theology. I will argue that taking the visual element out of Julian's theology is a mistake. More significantly, the strong visual element in Julian's theology must not be devalued as a result of comparison with existing mystical categories.

The character of mystical experience is a leading category of mystical scholarship of which one needs to be constantly wary. When mysticism is defined as an experience, it brings with it a series of suppositions concerning experience generally. Therefore, questions concerning what cognitive capacity receives such an experience and the content or the veracity of the experience have become a feature of scholarly

debate.¹ As consequence of the shift towards cognition, content and veracity, one is left to conclude that inquiring about such matters is a true reflection of activities in which mystics engaged. Furthermore, raising questions about the character, origin and veracity of a certain type of experience has some relevance for how the relationship between God and humankind is conceived. That is to say, the concept of mystical experience is loaded with a series of assumptions concerning how human beings come to know God, and what is known of such a God. In what follows, I will demonstrate that talking about 'knowing' God in the context of mystical experience confuses epistemological concepts of philosophical interest with devotional concepts such as closeness to God, seeing God and the love of God. Julian never doubts that a sight of God is saved for the life after death. However, what is revealed to Julian as a lesson of love, in a vision of Christ's Passion, is of didactic importance for her in this life. The epistemic claims of the vision presuppose a level of devotion, something Julian calls 'good will and proper intention'.² The vision, the sight of Christ's suffering and joy, is an exposition of a Christian life lived in periods of one's own suffering and joy. The theological import of the vision, its didactic goal, is the understanding that in this life we are constantly in God's loving gaze, whether we are certain of this or not.

The temptation to fix Julian in the company of mystics by other routes must also be resisted. Assumptions concerning mystics and mystical experience tend to colour increasingly sophisticated attempts to secure Julian's mystical membership. Thus, efforts to present Julian's writing as mystical that rely on a shift from the concrete and visible to the abstract and invisible repeat assumptions concerning the character and nature of the mystical as ineffable, pure and imageless. Proponents of this approach appear to be searching for an inner 'mystical' quality in the visions, discarding the

¹ For philosophical studies that compare and contrast the knowledge claims of mysticism and sensory experience see William Wainwright, 'Mysticism and Sense Perception' *Religious Studies*, 9 (1973), 257-78; See also William Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). For criticism of Alston's approach see Richard Gale, 'Why Alston's Mystical Doxastic Practice is Subjective', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 54 (1994), 869-75.

² *Showings*, p. 134.

more concrete visual husk in the process. The first part of this chapter will demonstrate that what has been assigned to opposing areas of the visual and the conceptual is, in fact, one with the process of vision itself. This is not to suggest that a conflation of the visual and the conceptual means that Julian claims to see an abstract God. Rather, it focuses attention on two central features of Julian's teaching. First, Julian is engaging in a visual transmission of the visions she receives. She is not offering a progressive ascent towards abstraction and away from the visual. In Julian's theology, matters that are generally assumed to be beyond vision are meditated upon, critiqued and unified in a visual medium. Second, the primary focus of Julian's vision is Christ's loving act of salvation and redemption in the Crucifixion. It is the detail, shape, colour and movement of this spectacle that informs and then revises Julian's theology. Julian's reference to this image is constant, although the countenance of the figure changes from suffering to joy, darkness to light and brokenness to wholeness. It is worth remembering that Julian is not shown a vision of God, whatever that would mean, but a revelation of God's love in the Crucifixion of Christ.

The temptation to separate the visual or sensation from the conceptual has a long history.³ Since early Greek thought, the bodily senses have aroused suspicion. How the bodily senses reported objects in the world and how the bodily senses were related to the human soul and transcendent realities were considerable matters of debate. Certain areas of this debate were given a Christian form in the Middle Ages. Thus, speculative theologians constructed cosmological and psychological systems to account for God's relationship to the world and the part or capacity of the human being that apprehends God.⁴ In such systems it is assumed that the material world including the body and bodily senses is categorically opposed to a spiritual, incorporeal God. As a consequence, progress towards God is charted in the faculties of the human soul in

³ See David W. Hamlyn, *Sensation and Perception: A History of the Philosophy of Perception* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961).

⁴ See Eric Osborn, *The Beginning of Christian Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 31-50; Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, trans. by A.H.C. Downes, repr. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), pp. 229-68.

separation from the bodily senses. A necessary part of this chapter, therefore, will be an account of some of these ideas concerning the perceptual acuity of the soul and its relationship to the embodied human being. In this regard, I will make reference to three thinkers that profoundly shaped the intellectual environment of the Middle Ages: the three thinkers I will consider are Plato, Aristotle and Augustine. All three devoted some time to considering the role of the senses, especially vision, in the pursuit of truth, beauty, knowledge and God.⁵

Plato and his student Aristotle appear to occupy different ends of the scale concerning the senses. Plato's philosophy can be regarded as a paradigm of otherworldly, pure Forms to which the bodily senses are an obstacle. The bodily senses tend to have an instrumental use for Plato: they are the instruments *through* which the external world is perceived *with* the mind. For Aristotle, by contrast, the soul is embodied in the activity of seeing itself. The soul of sight is the activity of seeing, according to Aristotle, in the same way that cutting defines the activity or function of an axe. For Aristotle, the soul is the presence or ability to do certain things that are characteristic of living beings.⁶ In the theology of Augustine, there is a combination of the metaphysics of Plato and the biological approach of Aristotle. For Augustine, bodily vision and the vision of the mind operate as a fruitful metaphor for one another. The act of visual perception, initiated by the viewer, requires the concentration and selective focus *intentio* of the human soul.⁷ The selective focus of the soul has its moral corollary in the objects that the viewer finds either attractive or repugnant. For Augustine, the affinity of the viewer's adaptable affections to the qualities of objects delighted in is a reflection of inner order. The bodily senses are only considered an

⁵ See David Luscombe, *Medieval Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). At the beginning of his study, Luscombe argues that attempts to understand Plato and Aristotle by thinkers including Augustine, Boethius and Pseudo Dionysius mark the beginnings of medieval philosophy. For a study of Platonic influence in Augustine, Boethius and Pseudo Dionysius see M.D. Chenu, *Nature, Man and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essay on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West*, trans. by Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

⁶ See T.K. Johansen, *Aristotle on the Sense-Organs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 25.

⁷ See Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind* (London: Duckworth, 1987), pp. 84-7.

obstacle where the object of attention, that which attracts and holds the senses, is morally deficient. However, Augustine's treatment of the bodily senses in relation to the perceptual acuity of the soul is not always consistent. Indeed, Augustine's inconsistency is due in part to his admission that the subject is extremely difficult.⁸

Plato and Aristotle share Augustine's concern for the object of the senses and the moral consequences for the viewer. The pursuit of knowledge and the pursuit of virtue, or the Good, are intricately related in their philosophical thinking. It is precisely this point that makes the inclusion of these thinkers valid in a study of Julian's visions. For Julian, as for Plato, Aristotle and Augustine, what is looked at and the way something is looked at carries bodily and spiritual consequences. The role of the senses, especially vision, is inextricably linked to the moral condition of the human being. The senses, therefore, must be educated as a part of human moral improvement. The first section of this chapter will elaborate on the idea of educating the senses. To begin, I will introduce the thoughts of one modern thinker, before demonstrating the method and means of educating the senses in Julian's text.

1. The Education of the Senses

In this section, I will briefly sketch a thesis proposed by Rudolf Arnheim and relate some of the concerns and solutions he considers to the recasting of Julian as a visual theologian.⁹ Arnheim is particularly relevant to this thesis for two reasons. First, he has a concern for the visual and its role in determining human action and identity. He bases this concern upon the premise that visual activity is central to an individual's ability to learn about the principle components of the world in which they live.¹⁰ Second,

⁸ See Augustine of Hippo, 'Letter 147: Augustine to the Noble Lady, Pauline, greeting (413)', in *Augustine of Hippo: Selected Writings*, trans. by Mary T. Clark (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), pp. 365-402 (p. 365). I will discuss the contents of this letter in subsection iii. of the current chapter.

⁹ Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*, 2nd edn, rev. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

¹⁰ See Rudolf Arnheim, *The Split and the Structure: Twenty-Eight Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 13-23. For an anthropological approach to the senses see the influential

processes that are usually assigned to cognition (rational organization, collation and categorization of sense data), he reassigns to the act of visual perception itself. However, Arnheim is convinced that the dominance of cognitive processes over the sensory, according to which the bodily senses give a distorted view of the world, is virtually complete. A result of this dominance is an unquestioned acceptance of a mental picture of the world as the only one we can trust.¹¹ In other words, thinking and sensing are sharply distinguishable events. In a pedagogic context, therefore, the visual operates as a superficial starting point before abstract, propositional learning can begin.

Arnheim's concern to reposition the senses resonates in the need to reconsider Julian outside the category 'mystic'. Where Julian continues to be considered a mystic, there is a delimited possibility for studying the visual and didactic character of *Showings*. The category 'mystical', like the cognitive categories, limits the role of the bodily senses. What is mystical, therefore, is not presented to the senses.¹² The senses are locked in the bodily existence of the human condition, a condition that must be transcended according to normative mystical values. Julian's theological model is more modest. Her understanding of the human condition is fixed in the doctrine of the Incarnation. In addition, Julian never suggests that the human condition must be transcended in some heroic spiritual act. In Julian's theology the human condition is not overcome, but redeemed. The work of redemption is precisely what Julian is shown in a vision centred on Christ's Passion.

So, if it is a mistake to define Julian as a mystic, it follows that it is mistaken to assume that the visual is assigned the same superficial role in her theology as it is in

work of Davis Howes and others in *The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses*, ed. by David Howes (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

¹¹ For an interesting corollary to Arnheim's thesis see David Michael Levin, *The Opening of Vision: Nihilism and the Postmodern Situation* (New York; London: Routledge, 1988). Levin argues that objectivity and rationality are the dominant modes with which we perceive the world and others. As a consequence, he contends that we are no longer sensitive to the destructive potential that seeing objectively and rationally has as a means of exerting power and control. According to Levin, we must come to accept vision as a gift that can be denied or cultivated: it is our visionary project 'that is the measure, the test, of our character, our development of self', p. 56.

¹² See Alston, *Perceiving God*, pp. 13-14. Alston only wants to claim that a generic comparison can be made between mystical and sensory perception.

the mystical models being rejected. Indeed, Julian lived in a rich visual culture that she incorporated into the transmission of her visions. The visual, for Julian, engages the emotions, imagination, belief and creativity.¹³ For Arnheim, too, the expansion of the visual beyond the passive role of data collection is a matter of signal importance:

We have neglected the gift of comprehending things through our senses. Concept is divorced from percept, and thought moves among abstractions. Our eyes have been reduced to instruments with which to identify and to measure; hence we suffer a paucity of ideas that can be expressed in images and an inadequacy to discover meaning in what we see.¹⁴

In the passage above, Arnheim repeats his concern regarding the separation of the visual as information from the secondary processes of conceptual abstraction. This separation is founded upon the assumption that the senses are the harvesters for the mind, the passive collectors of raw sensory data for cognitive interpretation. What is sensory, therefore, still requires a thinking apparatus to decide what is seen. This separation in the perceptual process explains Arnheim's description of a breakdown in the ability to express the world in images, which has the effect of an inability to *see* meaningfully. As human beings, then, we have our minds to thank for the fact that we can make perceptual sense of the world. After all, the senses report a distant object as small, when we know that, close at hand, the same object is not the size it appears at a distance, and it does not change size. To some degree, the senses threaten to confuse a correct, mental, picture of the world.¹⁵ For Arnheim, however, the senses 'think'.¹⁶ The

¹³For critical approach to the notion of cognition as a system of processing information that is independent of our beliefs and actions see David W. Hamlyn, *Perception, Learning and the Self: Essays in the Philosophy of Psychology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983).

¹⁴ Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception*, p. 1.

¹⁵ O'Daly explains that in Augustinian terms sensory stimuli can effect disturbance and resistance. The effort to overcome this disturbance is called 'perceiving', an effort that Augustine describes as painful. See *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind*, p. 87.

¹⁶ See Rudolf Arnheim, *Visual Thinking* (London: Faber, 1970), p. v.

senses are not passive, but assume a level of activity that is creative and not merely functional:

Far from being a mechanical recording of sensory elements, vision proved to be a truly creative apprehension of reality – imaginative, inventive, shrewd and beautiful. It became apparent that the qualities that dignify the thinker and the artist distinguish all performances of the mind [...] All perceiving is also thinking, all reasoning is also intuition, all observation is also invention.¹⁷

It is with some justification that one could argue that sensory perception and supernatural visual experiences have little in common. After all, what connection is there between Julian's sensory perception of the world and a visionary experience of Christ's Passion? In the case of Christ's Passion, Julian is met with a spectacle that was vividly represented in imagery, religious lyrics, drama and the liturgy of the late Middle Ages. As Gail McMurray Gibson has argued, with specific reference to East Anglia, religious art and devotion in the Fifteenth Century centred around an 'incarnational aesthetic' that was of communal not private significance.¹⁸ In the late Middle Ages, according to Gibson, it was Christ's suffering human body not the Godhead which represented an accessible depiction of how God and humankind were related. In fifteenth-century devotion, visual art and religious drama, Gibson argues, it was the Incarnate Son that was 'fixed before the eyes of the beholder'.¹⁹ In this visual environment, reports of visionary experiences were not too far removed from concrete expressions of divine mysteries. To emphasize this point, Gibson gives the example of a vision of the Ascension received by Margery Kempe. In her description of the vision, Margery claims that it is her eye that follows the beauty of Christ's ascending form.²⁰

¹⁷ Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception*, p. 5.

¹⁸ Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 12. For an expression of the 'incarnational aesthetic' with special reference to Julian see Domenico Pezzini, 'The Theme of the Passion in Richard Rolle and Julian of Norwich' in *Religion in the Poetry and Drama of the Late Middle Ages in England*, ed. by Piero Boitani and Anna Torti (Cambridge: Brewer, 1990), pp. 29-66.

¹⁹ Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion*, p. 6.

²⁰ Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion*, p. 7.

Gibson goes on to add that Margery may well have been referring to the actual stage machinery of an Ascension play in her description of her vision rather than making a bold claim about what is aesthetically possible.

When Julian speaks of her vision, instinctively it appears that this is not the same as reporting cases of eyesight. This is true in the sense that another person cannot *literally* see what Julian was shown in her visions. As I will demonstrate below, Julian was very sceptical about the value of visions in themselves. There is no possibility that Julian was promoting the spiritual benefits of receiving visions. However, it is possible that by appealing to imagery of the Passion and Incarnation that was commonplace in the visual arts and devotional practices of the late Middle Ages the visions may have taken on a greater immediacy for Julian's audience. This is not the same as saying that Julian's audience can see what she was shown, but that there is a commonality between what Julian was shown and imagery that was accessible and familiar to those who have never had visions. In this respect, Julian is prompting a devotional response to concrete depictions of divine love that can be accessed either in her visions or the visual, devotional and liturgical media of her audience.

Accessibility and absence of privileged access to the visions are points that Julian refers to repeatedly in her *Showings*. The visions have already begun in the Short Text version of *Showings* when Julian feels it is necessary to assure the audience:

And so it is my desire that it [the visions] should be to every man the same profit that I asked for myself, and was moved to in the first moment when I saw it; for it is common and general, just as we are all one; for I am sure that I saw it for the profit of many others.²¹

The visions are didactically efficacious and accessible to all Christians. There is nothing in the series of visions which is meaningful to Julian alone. For this reason the visual significance of the vision itself is not lost in its textual form. *Showings* is not a

²¹ *Showings*, p. 134.

best attempt to get at something, a quality in experience, that language cannot describe. The point must be stressed again that the language and imagery in *Showings* is employed didactically. To insist that, although the account of the visions may be didactically motivated, the visions themselves are private and inaccessible is to restate the normative assumptions of mystical scholarship in a different form. Julian is consistently ambivalent about the value of visions as a certain type of experience. For Julian, if a vision has no purpose for the recipient apart from its colourful psychological qualities, it must be rejected. In the Short Text again, Julian emphasizes:

I am not good because of the revelation, but only if I love God better, and so can and so should every man who sees it and hears it with good will and proper intention.²²

The vision Julian receives guarantees nothing unless it is put to work for the love of God. The passage above is also significant as it demonstrates Julian's understanding that an audience of good will and proper intention will be able to see what she was shown. Following Watson's model that I set out in the introduction, in this sense, Julian's vision is communicable. *Showings* is not an attempt to describe a series of private experiences. Julian, like Arnheim, does not characterize sensory perception as passive, but as creative and thinking. Moreover, sensory perception sets a context for the human condition in the world. It is in the world that Julian seeks the meaning of the visions, as a participant in the practice and spiritual life of the Christian community.

The gap between the profoundly visual culture in which Julian lived in the late Middle Ages, and the visionary experiences she receives, must be narrowed. The understanding of mysticism as otherworldly, and the superiority of mental processes over sensory perception threaten to maintain this gap. The distinguished medieval art historian Michael Camille, for instance, has argued for a renewed effort to understand a

²² *Showings*, p. 134.

medieval sensory universe that is unlike our own.²³ Camille's point highlights the concern of this thesis to give examples of visual experience a time, a place and a purpose. Although Camille admits that it is never possible to see through the eyes of another historical period, he argues that critical work can proceed where it attempts to relate visual representation to the requirements of a particular individual or group. Camille states that his interest is in fixing visual perception in a medieval context, a context that understood the eye as, 'a powerful sense-organ of perception, knowledge and pleasure'.²⁴ It is with this eye that, Camille argues, scholars should study the medieval world.

Julian gives an example of the close relationship between visual representation and visual experience in Chapter i of the Short Text. She establishes a commonality between artistic representations of the Crucifixion and the visionary encounter she is about to describe:

I thought that I wished that I had been at that time with Mary Magdalen and with the others who were Christ's lovers, so that I might have seen with my own eyes our Lord's Passion which he suffered for me, so that I might have suffered with him as others did who loved him, even though I believed firmly in all Christ's pains as Holy Church shows and teaches, *and as paintings of the crucifixion represent*, which are made by God's grace, according to Holy Church's teaching, to resemble Christ's Passion, so far as human understanding can attain.²⁵

The above passage contains several visual references. First, Julian emphasizes that Christ's pains, represented in the Crucifixion, are a feature of Church painting and teaching. Julian adds that it is her desire to see Christ's Passion with her *own eyes*. In

²³ See Michael Camille, *Gothic Art: Visions and Revelations of the Medieval World* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1996), p. 15. For further studies by Camille see, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) and 'The Image and the Self: Unwriting Medieval Bodies', in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. by Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 66-92.

²⁴ Camille, *Gothic Art*, p. 11.

²⁵ *Showings*, pp. 125-6, my emphasis.

one sense Julian, like her audience, stands before the visions like a viewer before a painting. Occupying this position, Julian, having no uniquely private claim to the visions, is identical to the Christian audience she is addressing. In another sense, Julian is a more active perceiver. She wants to participate in the action represented in the paintings. This participatory feature of Julian's visual encounter broadens her understanding of sensory presence. Julian's desire to see Christ's suffering with her own eyes is correlated to her own desire to suffer. Seeing with her own eyes denotes presence in real time for Julian and articulates a devotional yearning to witness and share in Christ's suffering. Visionary participation, in this sense, is not the passive reception of sensory data. Indeed, Julian implies that Church painting and the desire to be present at the Crucifixion must coalesce in devotional practice. The disposition of the viewer is certainly important for Julian when addressing the audience for the visions. In the Short Text again, Julian proclaims:

And you who hear and see this vision and this teaching, which is from Jesus Christ for the edification of your souls, it is God's will and wish that you accept it with as much joy and delight as if Jesus had shown it to you as he did to me.²⁶

It is notable that Julian incorporates the affective language of desire to be present at the Crucifixion, to see and suffer, into the visual representations of Church art, which she describes as the best efforts of human understanding. Julian describes Church art as the work of grace, leading human understanding as far as possible to appropriate the teaching of the Church. The disposition of the audience, the reception of the vision and teaching in joy and delight, is described by Julian with greater immediacy than a reliance on intellection will allow. The joy and delight with which Julian receives the vision determines its seamless transmission to an audience of the same intention. Furthermore, the edificatory origin of the vision is Christ. It is Christ's role in edifying

²⁶ *Showings*, pp. 133-4.

the Christian community that, in the end, guarantees the means by which the vision can be shown collectively.

So far, I have set out the need to distinguish the visual didacticism in Julian's theology from an understanding of visionary experience as something irreducibly private. In so doing, I have tried to demonstrate that, where the visual is understood as instruction or edification the gap between visionary experiences and visual representation can be narrowed, given the right disposition of the audience. In what remains of this section, I want to give a brief account of Julian's profoundly visual description of the events that lead up to the onset of the visions that she receives. This visual prelude creates a frame for approaching the visions as a public spectacle. The way Julian describes the events in her visions operates as a tool to engage the visual acuity of the audience. Like many medieval meditations on the Passion, Julian invites the audience to look with her.²⁷

In Chapter ii of the Short Text, Julian explains that, at the age of thirty and a half, God sends her an illness which causes her to remain bedridden for three days and three nights.²⁸ On the fourth night, Julian receives the last rites of the Church believing that she will not last until morning. The surety that she will die causes Julian to reflect on the shortness of her life and her desire to continue living for God's greater glory. Julian's desire to go on living is the first indication to the audience that the drama that is about to unfold is rooted in this life. Her prediction that she will die on the fourth night, however, proves to be false. Instead, she lasts until the following day and asks to be comforted by being lifted up in her bed and supported. It is impossible to verify whether the reference to being lifted up and supported is a deliberate attempt to

²⁷ For series of excellent studies of visual aspects in meditation practice see David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History of Theory and Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Flora Lewis, 'The Wound in Christ's Side and Instruments of the Passion: Gendered Experience and Response', in *Women and The Book: Assessing the Visual Evidence*, ed. by Lesley Smith and Jane H.M. Taylor (London: British Library, 1997), pp. 204-29; Giles Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 210-13; Barry Windeatt, 'Julian of Norwich and Her Audience', *The Review of English Studies*, 28 (1977), 1-17.

²⁸ See *Showings*, p. 127 and p. 179 respectively. See also Section 2 of the current chapter for a fuller explanation of Julian's request for an illness, sight of the Passion and 'wounds' of contrition, compassion and longing.

provoke a recollection of the Crucifixion.²⁹ However, given the description of Julian's deathbed scene that follows, the image of a mimetic crucifixion is quite pronounced.

A parson arrives with a little boy to be present at Julian's death. The parson has brought a crucifix with him, which he sets before Julian's eyes. He then gently instructs Julian:

Daughter, I have brought you the image of your saviour. Look at it and take comfort from it, in reverence of him who died for you and me.³⁰

Prior to receiving the crucifix, Julian explains that her eyes are fixed and she cannot speak.³¹ The scene is now silent and exclusively visual. The visual focus, the image of the cross, is the medium with which Julian maintains a link to the living world. Indeed, the horizontal plane of Julian's sight in the direction of the crucifix is prioritized over a vertical plane, which would set her eyes towards heaven. In Julian's own words:

It seemed to me that I was well as I was, for my eyes were set upwards towards heaven, where I trusted that I was going; but nevertheless I agreed to fix my eyes on the face of the crucifix if I could, so as to hold out longer until my end came, for it seemed to me that I could hold out longer with my eyes set in front of me rather than upwards.³²

Julian maintains the fixed position of her eyes, trained on the crucifix, in spite of her belief that she is destined to go to heaven. The fact that Julian continues to gaze at the cross to the point of death appears to be significant. Julian may be emphasizing not only her desire to go on living in this act, but the shared significance of the visions to

²⁹ Here I am thinking of the Throne of Grace image in the fourteenth-century *Lutterell Psalter*. For an example of this image and commentary on its influence in *Showings* see, Denise N. Baker, *Julian of Norwich's Showings: From Vision to Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 55-62.

³⁰ *Showings*, p. 128.

³¹ For an interesting discussion of loss of speech and the Divine call to write amongst women visionaries see Rosalynn Voaden, 'God's Almighty Hand: Women Co-Writing the Book' in *Women, The Book and the Godly*, ed. by Lesley Smith and Jane H. M. Taylor (Cambridge: Brewer, 1995), pp. 55-65 (p. 58).

³² *Showings*, p. 128.

the living.³³ The visionary sequence that Julian describes is fixed on a popular image of the crucifix, stressing that to continue living she must fix attention on the cross and not look up.³⁴

Julian then describes how her sight began to fail. Care must be taken when deciphering this comment. Julian does not say that her sight fails, but that it *began* to fail. The passage reads:

After this my sight began to fail, and it was all dark around me in the room, dark as night, except that there was ordinary light trained upon the image of the cross, I never knew how.³⁵

Reading the passage above, it seems that far from failing completely, the appearance of the crucifix is inexplicably exaggerated. The crucifix that Julian describes seeing is now set starkly in ordinary light, like daylight, against the darkness or night that surrounds it. Julian's visionary world has closed in on one object; the rest is darkness.

In the final paragraph of Chapter ii, Julian again speculates that she will not continue to live. However, at the point of death, miraculously, all Julian's pain leaves her. The upper part of her body, wracked with pain moments before, is left free of any suffering. Julian is still convinced she will not live. However, in spite of her pessimism and her protest that she never desired a bodily vision or revelation, the visions begin with a sight of the crown of thorns and blood trickling from Christ's head. It is perhaps significant that Julian is not in pain when the visions begin. First, Julian appears to come to her senses before the visions begin. Spiritual writers in the Middle Ages were concerned to distinguish between authentic visionary encounters and delusional

³³ For the importance of worldly setting, scenery and space in visionary experiences of other worldly realms see Paul Piehler, *The Visionary Landscape: A Study in Medieval Allegory* (London: Edward Arnold, 1971); Anthony C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp 11-24; Peter Dinzelbacher, *Vision und Visionsliteratur im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1981). My thanks to Petra Galama for her help with the translation of Dinzelbacher's work.

³⁴ For a short account of Julian's response to the stimulus of a crucifix see Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative*, p. 18.

³⁵ *Showings*, p. 128.

states.³⁶ Second, the vision that Julian receives and protests over is not compensation for any pain she has suffered. Pain is not unique to Julian and neither is the vision. The vision, as has been pointed out, is for all Christians. Third, suffering is redemptive in Julian's theology. References to Julian's own pain and suffering threaten to confuse this point. The vision begins with a didactic image of the crown of thorns, an image that will inform the entire visionary sequence. The first sight of suffering in *Showings* is Christ's suffering, which is endured for love alone. The unitary importance of the crown of thorns is stated explicitly in the First Chapter of the Long Text:

This is a revelation of love which Jesus Christ, our endless bliss, made in sixteen showings, of which the first is about his precious crowning of thorns; and 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 which follow are founded and connected.³⁷

From the beginning of Julian's visionary sequence, the first sight is inclusive of all the sights that remain to be seen. The sight of the crown of thorns is presented as a corporeal image. Yet, it is this image that discloses abstractions, such as the Trinity and the union of God and man's soul. Does Julian confuse corporeal and spiritual categories in the image of the crown of thorns? As I have said above, the visionary language of Julian's theology, set in a devotional context, is capable of unifying the concrete and the abstract. In Julian's theology, the visual is not relegated beneath either the otherworldly or the inner mental processes. As the opening sequence to *Showings* clearly illustrates, the place of visual encounter is this world, incorporating the Trinity and the union of man's soul with God. Julian does not say that the corporeal 'signifies'

³⁶ See Rosalynn Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries* (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 1999); See also two articles by Dyan Elliott, 'Seeing Double: John Gerson, the Discernment of Spirits, and Joan of Arc', *The American Historical Review*, 107 (2002), 26-54 and 'The Physiology of Rapture and Female Spirituality', in *Medieval Theology and the Natural Body*, ed. by Peter Biller and Alastair Minnis (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 1997), pp. 141-73.

³⁷ *Showings*, p. 175.

the abstract but that, in the first sight of the crown of thorns, all the visions and teaching are founded and connected. By fixing her gaze on the cross and not looking up, Julian emphasizes the positioning of the viewing audience in the world.

The following three subsections will consider further examples of educating the senses. The thinkers I want to consider, Plato, Aristotle and Augustine, cast a formidable influence over the understanding of the senses in the Middle Ages.³⁸ I am

³⁸ I have included Plato, Aristotle and Augustine in this opening chapter as a means of offering some foundation for the idea of educating the senses. I do not intend to integrate these small subsections into the thesis as a whole. Rather, the reader should remain aware that, for example, 'the sight of beauty' in Plato, the recollection of past virtuous acts in Aristotle and faith's refining of spiritual sight in Augustine resonate in medieval notions of seeing God, recollecting images for meditation and the necessity for moral reform to enable a clearer sight of God. A secondary motivation for including these thinkers in this thesis is the tendency amongst commentators of mysticism to characterize the mystical path as a movement beyond the senses towards an imageless union with God. In this respect, Plato is often introduced as a proto-mystic because of his supposed mistrust of the senses in relation to a transcendent world of non-sensory Forms. In subsection i, therefore, I will argue that not only is this a possible misreading of Plato's cave analogy in *Republic*, in the *Phaedrus* Plato employs the senses directly as a means of apprehending beauty. According to Plato, vision is the clearest of the senses and more equipped than wisdom to savour beauty. Unlike Plato, Aristotle is generally ignored in discussions of mysticism. My concern is that this oversight may be caused by the categorization of mysticism as something detached from worldly concerns. In subsection ii, therefore, I want to show that for Aristotle how human beings perceive the world and how that experience is organized and stored in the memory is a reflection of a person's moral condition. A similar process, in theory, may be at work in Julian's lifetime of meditation on the visions she received. Her understanding of the diverse images, colours and textures in the visions is at times acute and then confused. Julian is sure, however, that as long as she remains secure in faith, represented by the three wounds of compassion, contrition and longing, the meaning of the visions will be revealed to her. Julian's attempts to develop her faith are replicated in her attempt to re-collect or organize her visionary experience. As for Augustine, my main aim is to introduce alternative Augustinian sources into a discussion of the bodily and spiritual senses. Traditionally, reference is made to Augustine's hierarchical classification of visions as corporeal, imaginative and intellectual in Book 12 of *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*. See *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. by J.H. Taylor, Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation, no. 42 (New York, 1982), pp. 185-8. However, to use this scheme is to risk insisting on distinctions between 'bodily' and 'spiritual' sights in Julian's visions that are far from clear. For differing accounts of the applicability of Augustine's scheme for Julian visions see Paul Molinari, *Julian of Norwich: The Teaching of a 14th Century English Mystic*, reprint, (London: Longmans, 1958) pp. 60-70 and Nicholas Watson, 'The Trinitarian Hermeneutic in Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Love*, in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*, ed. by Marion Glasscoe (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1992), pp. 79-100 (pp. 85-86). Molinari argues that although Julian's categorization of her visions is similar to Augustine's there are significant differences, whereas Watson contends that Julian uses the Augustinian categories although they are not always adequate. In this thesis, I will argue that Julian's understanding of her visions is more integrated than Augustine's tripartite scheme will allow. For Julian bodily and spiritual or 'ghostly' sights integrate in images of the Incarnation and Passion that dominate her visionary experience. It is of equal importance, therefore, that Julian claims to see these events directly or bodily, because she believes that this will enable her to develop compassion, and spiritual so that she can come to understand the salvation of humankind and the love with which God sees the human condition in sin. With reference to 'Letter 147', which deals directly with the question of seeing God, and *The Trinity*, I want to show both that Augustine's pronouncements on the possibility of seeing God are not always easy to separate into bodily and spiritual categories. In the sources I will use, Augustine acknowledges that settling the question of seeing God is difficult. It will be useful therefore to examine some of these difficulties and, in later chapters of the thesis, see how the tension between bodily and spiritual perceptual capacities is resolved

not suggesting that Julian was directly aware their influence, although Augustine is a possible exception. Principally, I am interested in what each one has to say about the senses that connects seeing and educating. An ulterior motive for examining these thinkers is the fact that modern commentators often begin the story of mysticism with Plato, ignore Aristotle, and continue with the strongly Platonic theology of Augustine. However, if so-called mystical categories are put aside, a study of each thinker's model for vision as interaction with beauty (Plato), the world of objects (Aristotle) and God (Augustine) reveals a concern for moral reform and education. For these thinkers, as for Julian, visual acts are not neutral but determine the moral condition of a human being.

i. Plato: The Sight of Beauty and Moral Education

Before considering Plato in more detail, a caveat must be put in place. As I mentioned above, I am not suggesting that Julian had read or could have read Plato. Indeed, the transmission of Plato's works in the Middle Ages, unlike that of the works of Aristotle, was both fragmentary and prolonged.³⁹ It was the philosophical systems and references to Plato in influential thinkers like Boethius, Augustine, Alan of Lille and Bernard Silvester amongst others that guaranteed the infusion of Platonic ideas concerning cosmology, the human soul, morality and sensory perception in the Middle Ages.⁴⁰ Accounting for the possibility of the transmission of Platonic thinking in the

in Julian's idea that to learn from her visions the sights must be apprehended directly (bodily) and more obliquely (spiritual). I have called the process of learning to understand Julian's visions, a process open to a Christian audience, 'the education of the senses'. The use of this generic title is an attempt to demonstrate that the senses are employed directly and more metaphorically in discussions of 'mystical' phenomena that tend to exclude the senses altogether.

³⁹ For a useful summary of the transmission and translation of Platonic and Aristotelian works in the Middle Ages see, B.B. Price *Medieval Thought: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 70-92. See also James Hankins, 'Plato in The Middle Ages', in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. by Joseph Strayer and others (New York: Scribner, 1982), IX (1987), 694-704; William A. Wallace, 'Aristotle in The Middle Ages', in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, I, (1982) 456-69.

⁴⁰ For evidence of the medieval use of Platonic categories with specific reference to the senses see Elizabeth Sears, 'Sensory Perception and its Metaphors in the Time of Richard of Fournival', in *Medicine and the Five Senses*, ed. by W.F. Bynum and Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 17-39; David C. Lindberg, 'The Science of Optics' in *Science in the Middle Ages*, ed.

Middle Ages is, however, no justification for directly linking Plato and Julian of Norwich. The purpose of this subsection is to examine Plato's *Phaedrus* as an example of the education of the senses, not to establish a link between Julian's theology and a systematic presentation of Plato's thought.⁴¹ In this respect alone, Plato acts as a useful precedent for setting the senses in a pedagogic context.

In mystical scholarship to date, Plato has been represented as a thinker who was ambivalent about the senses.⁴² According to this presentation of Plato, the senses are constantly prone to error, reporting a changing sensory world contrasting the unchanging world of pure Forms. In what follows, I want to argue that sketching Plato's philosophy in this way misrepresents at least one aspect of his thinking about sensory perception. What I have in mind is particularly evident when considering vision and moral reformation in the *Phaedrus*. I will concede that, in other areas of Plato's thought his concern with the senses is specifically epistemological (how perceptual claims can act as the basis of knowledge). However, as well as examining the role of the senses epistemologically, Plato also considered the sense of sight in the face of beauty. In his example of the perceptual exchange between the lover and beloved, Plato opens vision to the absolute as a means of a moral reformation. The reformatory process is not isolated in the mind in this exchange. Rather, it is bodily vision that, as the seat of desire longing for the beloved, requires education. A reading of the *Phaedrus* offers occasion to reconsider the assumption that Plato radically separates sensory perception and the absolute. First, I will illustrate a more conventional understanding of Plato's influence in the history of mystical theology.

In an attempt to locate a starting point for his discussion, Denys Turner looks to Plato, in particular his cave simile in Book Seven of the *Republic*, as a possible source

by David C. Lindberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 338-68; Andrew Louth, 'The Body in Western Catholic Christianity', in *Religion and the Body*, ed. by Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 111-130.

⁴¹ Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. by R. Hackforth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952).

⁴² See Turner, *The Darkness of God*, pp. 14-15.

for the language of mystical theology.⁴³ Plato is not a singular influence on the development of mystical language according to Turner, but one of a pair with the Exodus story of Moses' encounter with Yahweh.⁴⁴ Turner locates the influence and imagery of these stories in the theology of Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor and, significantly, Denys the Areopagite. Considering the impact of Denys the Areopagite and the precedents his language system and imagery have for what is understood as mysticism, Turner explains 'This is the vocabulary of our mysticism: historically we owe it to Denys; and he owed it, as he saw it, to Plato and Moses'.⁴⁵ With this comment Turner makes the connection between Plato and 'our' mysticism explicit.⁴⁶

However, Turner does not base his assumptions concerning the origins of mystical language on Plato's philosophy as a whole. Rather, his argument rests on the Platonic simile of the cave. In this now familiar simile, Plato compares the world experienced through the senses to a prisoner who sees the shadows of puppets cast by fire upon a cave wall. The lesser reality of the sensory world of shadows is contrasted to the soul's progress out of the cave towards the light of the sun, the true reality. Given this interpretation, the cave simile is a striking example of the downgrading of the bodily senses in a movement upward, an ascent, to a reality beyond the senses.

Interpreting the cave simile as a movement beyond the senses to an ultimate reality is standard. It gives the impression, when reading Plato, that there is always a strict divide between the erroneous senses and the truth of pure Forms. In a superficial sense, there is some justification to reading Plato in this way. However, two further points need to be considered. First, the cave simile does not represent all that Plato has to say

⁴³ Turner, *The Darkness of God*, pp. 11-18. Plato, *Republic*, trans. by H.D.P. Lee, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955) pp. 278-86.

⁴⁴ Exodus 33. 17-23.

⁴⁵ Turner, *The Darkness of God*, p. 13. For a detailed study of the Pseudo-Dionysian mysticism see Paul Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis*, Studies and Texts; 71 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), pp. 132-49.

⁴⁶ For a discussion of whether Plato can be considered a mystic see Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, vol. 1 (London: SCM Press, 1991), pp. 24-35.

about the senses and the search for the absolute. The *Phaedrus*, considered below, guarantees the sense of sight a role in the soul's longing for the absolute, as the faculty of the human being that requires moral reform. Second, Plato's ideas concerning perception shifted after the *Republic*, the treatise that contains the cave simile, leaving certain elements in Plato's thinking about sensory perception unexplained.⁴⁷ It would be a mistake, therefore, to represent all Plato's references to the senses as contained within a unified system of thought.

At the end of Book Five of *Republic*, for instance, Plato bases his thinking about perception on a distinction between knowledge, ignorance and an intermediate state, opinion.⁴⁸ Plato refers to these 'states' as forms of awareness or acquaintance with something. Therefore, knowledge is awareness of that which has being; ignorance is awareness of that which does not have being; and opinion is awareness of something that is between being and non-being. These distinctions have a specific function in the simile of the cave, part of which is to outline a process of education. The cave illustrates the progress of the soul, drawn up by education, to knowledge of reality (the Good), free from opinion. According to Plato, knowledge or apprehension of the Good is free from error, whereas opinion, an intermediate state between knowledge and ignorance, is prone to error. Plato, however, does not formally equate opinion and sense perception. The assumption is implicitly founded upon the fact that the object of opinion is the sensible world, which produces relative judgements. That is to say, according to Plato, when I look at my fingers, for instance, the senses can judge for themselves that they are confronted with fingers. However, Plato argues that the senses cannot judge whether the finger is big or small, rough or smooth, because these properties depend on what it is being contrasted with it. It is only in the case of incompatible judgements (my finger is both big and small, rough and smooth) that the senses require the assistance of reason.

⁴⁷ See Hamlyn, *Sensation and Perception*, pp. 10-16.

⁴⁸ Plato, *Republic*, 234-44.

It is after the *Republic* that Plato begins to talk about perceiving *through* the senses, and *with* the mind or soul.⁴⁹ Hamlyn suggests that this shift in Plato's thinking may have been caused by an attempt to confront Heraclitus' idea that the sensible world is in a constant state of flux.⁵⁰ Confronting this problem may have led Plato to mistrust all judgements of the senses, and posit, instead, a world of pure Forms of which the sensible world is an imitation. Having said that, it still holds that it is incorrect to view the cave simile as a complete divorce of the erroneous senses and true reality. Instead the *Republic* concentrates on a fruitful analogy between the sun as the source of light that enables one to see and the Good as the source of light that illuminates objects of truth and reality:

The Good has begotten in it's own likeness, and it bears the same relation to sight and visibility in the visible world that the Good bears to intelligence and intelligibility in the intelligible world.⁵¹

Therefore, just as the sun makes things visible to the eyes, the Good is described as the source of the intelligibility of objects of knowledge.

Following the argument above, it appears that Plato's cave represents more than the narrow epistemological desire to escape the senses. If this is the case, what other properties does the cave simile represent? One answer points towards the pronounced moral and educational tone of the simile. Plato's *Republic* is a treatise concerning, amongst other things, who or what a philosopher ruler should be. According to Plato, a philosopher ruler will judge according to what is ultimately good and true, and not rely on mere opinion. The would-be ruler must move out of the cave, out of the realm of opinion towards knowledge, but must make an imminent return to rule wisely. For Plato, the philosopher ruler must not only be accustomed to the light of the Good but must become reacquainted with the darkness of the cave, being acutely aware of the

⁴⁹ For a fuller exposition of this distinction see M.F. Burnyeat, 'Plato on the Grammar of Perceiving', *The Classics Quarterly*, 26 (1976), 29-51.

⁵⁰ Hamlyn, *Sensation and Perception*, p. 12.

⁵¹ Plato, *Republic*, p. 272.

deceptions of those only acquainted with shadows. In Plato's words, addressing a would-be philosopher ruler:

You must therefore each descend in turn and live with your fellows in the cave and get used to seeing in the dark; once you get used to it you will see a thousand times better than they do and will recognize the various shadows, and know what they are shadows of, because you have seen the truth about things right and just and good.⁵²

In his exposition of the cave simile, Plato refers to those philosophers who, having contemplated the truth, unsurprisingly, want to forego the affairs of state and bask in the light of knowledge. However, he adds 'They cannot refuse, for we are making a just demand of just men [...] they will approach the business of government as an unavoidable necessity'.⁵³ Contemplation of the absolute is not the end point of the cave. The cave simile is designed to establish the foundations of good government. The progress of the soul, as an education from opinion to knowledge, must be made available and usable for those still living amongst the cave's shadows.

Andrew Louth picks out the moral context of the cave simile in his study of the origins of Christian mysticism.⁵⁴ He is careful to distinguish when Plato is considering narrowly epistemological issues and when he is considering broader issues that encompass moral aspects of the human condition. Louth comments:

The vision of the Good and the Beautiful, of the source of true reality, enables one to understand how all true reality fits together [...] A man who has seen the truth like that is the man who can help his fellow men, help them to order their lives.⁵⁵

⁵² *Republic*, p. 285

⁵³ *Republic*, pp. 285-6.

⁵⁴ Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition from Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981). See also McGinn who argues that personal, political and religious reform, powers the whole of Plato's philosophy. See *The Foundations of Mysticism*, p. 25.

⁵⁵ Louth, *Origins*, p. 16.

According to Louth, the cave simile acts as a means of identifying city-state rulers who can discern the principles governing the good life. Louth adds that seeing the truth is not a guarantee of success amongst those blighted by ignorance and opinion, but that such a sight can be employed for the benefit of others. It appears from what has been said above, with the supporting evidence of Louth, that there is not always a neat bifurcation in Plato's philosophy between the worldly and the absolute. In a moral and educative context, at least, contemplation represents the possibility of applying knowledge of absolutes to worldly ends. This is a useful way of introducing the *Phaedrus*, which employs the sense of sight as a means of moral reformation.

In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates recounts the story of the human soul that has become embodied. Unlike the souls of gods, which are all good, the human soul is likened to a charioteer, with one good horse symbolizing the spirited and passionate part of the soul and one recalcitrant horse symbolizing the appetites. Whilst the gods can enjoy a vision of true Being, apprehended by reason alone, the human soul must participate in this vision by degrees determined by the success with which the charioteer, the reflective and calculative aspect of the soul, can control the horses of passion and appetite.⁵⁶ It is in this aspect of the embodied soul, trying to win over the recalcitrant forces of the appetites, that vision enters the story in a pedagogic context. Refining vision towards a vision of true Being is presented as a process that is contiguous with the ethical education of the individual. The refining process, itself, is achieved in a movement from the sight of a beautiful object to the sight of true beauty. Unlike the recollection of Forms, the form of beauty is readily recollected because it is revealed to sight, the keenest of the senses. Thus, the second speech of Socrates in the *Phaedrus* begins:

Now beauty, as we said, shone bright amidst these visions, and in this world below we apprehend it through the clearest of our senses, clear and resplendent. For sight is the keenest mode of perception vouchsafed us

⁵⁶ Hackforth encourages the reader to remain sensitive to the poetry of the *Phaedrus* so as to avoid trying to commit Plato to scientific statements about the function of the soul in its different aspects. See *Phaedrus*, p. 72, fn. 2.

through the body; wisdom, indeed, we cannot see thereby – how passionate had been our desire for her, if she had granted us so clear an image of herself to gaze upon – nor yet any other of those beloved objects, save only beauty; for beauty alone this has been ordained, to be most manifest to sense and most lovely of them all.⁵⁷

Socrates, Plato's mouthpiece, continues his discourse by offering an example of how the sight of beauty can be lost in misplaced passion. The uninitiated or corrupted, Socrates argues, are given over to seeking pleasure in beauty's earthly form. Ethical language dominates this part of the discourse. A misplaced sight of beauty has its corollary in action, as Socrates explains:

When he beholds that which is called beautiful here; wherefore he looks upon it [...] surrendering to pleasure he essays to go after the fashion of a four-footed beast, and to beget offspring of the flesh; or consorting with wantonness he has no fear nor shame in running after unnatural pleasure.⁵⁸

In contrast to the uninitiated, the new initiate is immediately fixed, in awe, by anyone having a godlike face or form. Socrates describes the initiate's reaction to this sight in physiological and therapeutic terms. It is the faculty of sight that is the cause of shuddering with awe. Once the shuddering has ceased, Socrates explains:

A strange sweating and fever seizes him: *for by reason of the stream of beauty entering in through his eyes* there comes a warmth, whereby his soul's plumage is fostered; and with that warmth the roots of the wings are melted, which for long had been hardened and closed up that nothing could grow.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ *Phaedrus*, p. 93.

⁵⁸ *Phaedrus*, p. 96.

⁵⁹ *Phaedrus*, p. 96, my emphasis.

The soul's wings, preparing for flight, is a metaphor for love. The wings begin to grow in the 'fermenting' soul, which is compared to the irritation felt during teething. The recollection of beauty causes the physiological conditions that are necessary for the sight of the beloved to grow into winged love in the lover's soul. When separated from the beloved, the outlet for the soul's ferment, the wings of love are described as 'hardened' and 'closed up'. The blockage causes a throbbing and maddening that only beauty can assuage:

At last she does behold him, and lets the flood pour in upon her, releasing the imprisoned waters; then has she refreshment and respite from her stings and sufferings, and at that moment tastes a pleasure that is sweet beyond compare.⁶⁰

Next, Socrates assigns the lover, who is refreshed by the renewed sight of her beloved, a moral character. Such a lover, Socrates claims, will not forsake her beloved. Although the lover has forgotten her mother and brethren, she will think nothing of losing her property and neglects the rules of conduct and graces of life. Importantly, it is pride in these relationships with property and rules that is forsaken. Socrates does not say that property and rules of conduct are detrimental in themselves. The lover who has forsaken pride is identified exclusively with the beloved 'the only physician for her grievous suffering'.⁶¹

The therapeutic value of beauty, with sight as its medium, encompasses the physical and the mental life of the individual. A shuddering, which is the physical response of the individual who receives beauty through the eyes, is not merely a metaphor. As I explained above, Plato's purpose is pedagogic. He does not seek to avoid the carnal excitement of human beings when viewing beautiful bodies, because this is one way embodied human beings react to such a sight. Rather, Plato guides the initiate to a point of accepting a form of loving that cannot be fulfilled by a physical

⁶⁰ *Phaedrus*, p. 97.

⁶¹ *Phaedrus*, p. 97.

body. Seeking fulfilment in one physical body would be a form of individuation to which Plato was opposed.⁶² In the *Symposium*, for example, Plato describes the first step towards beauty as the movement from the love of one attractive body to two bodies, and then from two bodies to physical beauty in general and so on.⁶³ The lover's love for beautiful things is the desire for happiness that comes from the permanent possession of true beauty, which is identical to the Good. Again, there is a stress upon the path the lover must take. It is the lover, prepared and strengthened in her passage from the love of beautiful bodies to the love of beautiful souls, to whom the beautiful will be revealed suddenly - enabling the birth of true virtue.

Considering Plato, Margaret Miles argues that the bodily experience of beauty permanently connects ideal beauty and the sensible world. For Miles, concerned with the educational value of imagery, Plato offers an alternative to a standard propositionally based model of learning. Miles does not ignore the developmental requirement for the initiate to see beauty:

The role of vision is to concentrate, through the stimulus of the beautiful image, the *energeia*, the intellectual and somatic intensity of *eros* which is a necessary precondition of learning.⁶⁴

Visual experience requires the development of virtue and wisdom in the individual so that seeking fulfilment in lesser forms of beauty is avoided. In the *Phaedrus*, the beloved, the soul's object of love, is understood as physical initially and as abstract through developed wisdom and virtue. The perceptual capacity and educational progress of the viewer determines the development of wisdom and virtue. Plato is

⁶² See *Republic*, pp. 183-93. In this part of his treatise, Plato parallels the disruptive conflict between the soul's appetites and authoritative reason at an individual level, and the attempt to structure society according to an ideal of just authority. See also Anthony Kenny, *The Anatomy of the Soul: Historical Essays in the Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973), pp. 1-27. In his chapter on Plato's *Republic*, Kenny discusses the idea of the 'mental health' of the soul and how harmony in its disruptive elements can be brought about in the judgement of a just ruler who can 'diagnose' the soul's illnesses.

⁶³ Plato, *Symposium*, trans. by Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 55.

⁶⁴ Margaret R. Miles, *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), p. 142.

concerned to show that because visionary experience is led by beauty no lesser object should satisfy the individual.

The visual exchange between the lover and beloved in the *Phaedrus* is a good example of what I have termed the education of the senses. Plato is clear that bodily sight is the keenest of the senses with which to discern the beloved. Whereas the visual intake of beauty suggests a passive perceiver, the necessity to develop wisdom and virtue underlines an active development in the pursuit of a clearer vision. Plato does not describe this development in narrowly epistemological terms. Rather, he places emphasis on moral reformation as the yearning for a vision of what was once seen with clarity. As a consequence, Plato assigns sight a central role in moral development where it is accompanied with passionate self-surrender.

Aristotle, the next thinker I want to consider, is also concerned with the moral concomitants of perception. Unlike elements of Plato's philosophy, in Aristotle's thought there is not as much emphasis on whether perception can act as the basis of knowledge. Rather, Aristotle is interested in the practices of sensory perception and the conclusions that can be drawn from these practices about what it is to be a living human being.

ii. Aristotle: The Physiology of the Senses and Moral Consequences

Aristotle is another major contributor to the shaping of medieval ideas concerning the role of the senses and the act of perception. I acknowledge, however, that considering Aristotle in a discussion or reassessment of mysticism is unconventional. For scholars of mysticism, Aristotle's philosophical method does not carry the same appeal as the absolutes of Plato. Indeed, a cursory survey of the philosophical tenets of Aristotle and Plato reveals seemingly irreconcilable differences. For example, whereas Plato can be read as representing the values of Forms that transcend the world, Aristotle fixes his philosophical investigations in the realm of the mundane. In this

subsection, I want to focus on at least one common feature of sense perception in Aristotle and Plato that is not defined in narrowly epistemological terms. By invoking the role of the memory in perception (the mind according to Aristotle cannot think without a memory image), Aristotle extends his theory of perceptual activity to include ideas of moral improvement.

Historically, the transmission of Aristotelian texts in the Middle Ages was more prolific than the works of Plato. There are two distinct groups of translated texts attributed to Aristotle which can be identified by the base language translated into Latin. In one group, Greek texts were translated into Latin; the other group comprised Arabic texts, either originally in Arabic or translated from Greek exemplars. The medieval Latin collection of Aristotelian texts included fifty-five works by seventeen identifiable translators.⁶⁵ The industry of translators contributed to Aristotle's far-reaching influence in the medieval period. As well as scholastic efforts to produce intricate commentaries, Aristotelian works of logic, natural philosophy, biology and music defined the scope and prestige of a university liberal arts education in the Middle Ages.⁶⁶ I have no intention of arguing that Julian enjoyed such an education, or had ever studied the works of Aristotle. Rather, as in the previous subsection, I want to demonstrate a way of thinking about the bodily senses that includes a concern for moral education. If the bodily senses were a concern for medieval spiritual writers, as they were for Julian, an examination of the senses cannot be excluded on the basis of mystical categories that necessarily exempt them. Precedents for the inclusion of the senses in the spiritual life and its practice are understudied at present. Reflecting on Plato, Aristotle and, in the next subsection, Augustine is an attempt to conduct some necessary groundwork concerning the senses in relation to non-mystical categories.

⁶⁵ Price, *Medieval Thought*, p. 75.

⁶⁶ For a useful comparison of the curriculum of Thierry of Chartres (d. 1157) and a Composite Curriculum from the beginning of the thirteenth century see Price, *Medieval Thought*, appendix 7, pp. 221-4. The syllabus gives conclusive evidence for the influence of the Aristotelian corpus in the study of natural philosophy, moral philosophy and metaphysics.

Aristotle's conception of mental activity is not comparable to a post-Cartesian understanding of the mind.⁶⁷ In his introduction to Aristotle's *De Anima*, Lawson-Tancred neatly summarizes the difference between modern assumptions about the human being's mental life and Aristotle's examination of the soul.⁶⁸ He argues that, since Descartes, philosophical enquiry has tended to assume the importance of the mental life of human beings over the general features of all human life. Aristotle reverses this tendency and starts with a general concept of human life which he hopes to clarify with an examination of the function of the soul or what Descartes would call 'Mental Properties'. For Aristotle, the mind explains the aspect of the soul's function that relates to understanding and the acquisition of knowledge.⁶⁹ Likewise, the soul's relation to the eye is the eye's *ability* to see. Nature does what it does for the sake of something, and, according to Aristotle, in animals that end is the soul. In *De Anima*, Aristotle explains:

For if the eye was an animal, then sight would be its soul, being the substance of the eye that is in accordance with the account of it. And the eye is the matter of sight, so that when sight [the *ability* to see] leaves it it is no longer an eye except homonymously, in the way of a stone or painted eye.⁷⁰

For Aristotle, the soul is the first actuality of a natural body that has potential to live. Having a soul, therefore, is a prerequisite for anything that can be said to be alive. Aristotle uses the word *entelechy* or 'actuality' to describe this function of the soul. The matter of the eye or 'eye jelly' is in a state of potentiality, it is the soul that makes the eye come alive. The ability to see is the first actuality of an eye, the second

⁶⁷ For a stimulating critique of Cartesian individualism and its implications for Theology see Fergus Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985).

⁶⁸ Aristotle, *De Anima (On the Soul)*, trans. by Hugh Lawson-Tancred (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), pp. 11-16.

⁶⁹ According to Aristotle, the soul relates to function and organization rather than a separate, immaterial, existent thing. See, Aristotle, *De Anima*, pp. 155-8.

⁷⁰ *De Anima*, p. 158.

actuality is seeing itself.⁷¹ For Aristotle, to talk about the activity of the eye is to talk about the function of a living being.

In *De Anima* Book Three, Chapter Seven, Aristotle reaches the conclusion that the soul never thinks without an image.⁷² To understand the ramifications of this statement, and how it differs from modern presuppositions, it is necessary to grasp what Aristotle means by 'thinking' in this instance. Aristotle states:

Perceiving then is analogous to mere saying and thinking, but when it (perceiving) is of the pleasant or painful the soul engages in pursuit or avoidance and these are analogous to assertion and denial.⁷³

Thinking, like perceiving and saying, is described as an activity.⁷⁴ Perceiving is a form of 'thinking' where it involves the active flight to or flight from an image. Without an image the soul does not think at all where it does not act to avoid or pursue. In other words, images cause the thinking soul to act, and thinking is the function of the soul reacting. Aristotle closes the distance modern assumptions have reopened between the visual image and the cognitive processing of the image.⁷⁵ According to such a separation, activity is on the side of mental function, which is conceptual not visual. For Aristotle, the soul of vision *is* the function of seeing. As Aristotle claims 'The thinking faculty, then, thinks the forms in images, and, as what it should pursue or avoid is defined in the images'.⁷⁶ Seeing, in this respect, is active. Seeing is the pursuit or avoidance of pleasantness or painfulness

In Aristotle's treatment of the senses, there is a physiological concomitant to thinking in images. According to Aristotle, memory images which are produced in the

⁷¹ See Johansen, *Aristotle on the Sense-Organs*, p. 27.

⁷² *De Anima*, pp. 207-9.

⁷³ *De Anima*, p. 208.

⁷⁴ For an interesting discussion of the genesis and influence of Aristotle's ideas concerning the function of the soul see Hilary Putnam, 'How Old is the Mind?' in *Words and Life: Hilary Putnam*, ed. by J. Conant (Cambridge, Mass; London: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 3-21.

⁷⁵ According to some commentators, Aristotle never resolves the conflict of the active and passive role of the senses. See Hamlyn, *Sense and Perception*, p. 26.

⁷⁶ *De Anima*, p. 209.

sensitive part of the soul, are described as physiological affections denoting both a change and the disposition to change in a particular way.⁷⁷ Aristotle describes how memory images stamp the receiving matter, like a seal onto wax. Interestingly, in the *Theaetetus*, Plato also describes recollection as ‘seeing internal pictures’ which are impressed on the memory as traces on a wax tablet.⁷⁸ The memory reads from these impressions like a reader following the impressions of the written word on a page. Aristotle calls the imprint on the memory an *eikon* or ‘copy’. These copies or *phantasmata* were stored in memory and recollected as readable pictures. Mary Carruthers observes that *phantasmata* are a combination of representation and response. Representation can be understood as a photographic act of perception, and response (*intentio*) is characterized by the pleasure or pain the recollected picture causes.⁷⁹ Carruthers argues that the ‘hurtful’ or ‘helpful’ nature of the phantasm evokes emotion, which brings moral excellence and ethical judgement into being:

Every emotion involves a change or movement, whose source is the soul, but which occurs within the body’s physiological matrix: such ‘affects’ are ‘movement [s] of the soul through the body’ [...] Thus the phantasm is ‘conceived as a controlling factor in the whole mechanism of emotion and action, with which moral excellence is concerned.’⁸⁰

At this stage, concern may be raised by the apparent shift in the argument from so-called immediate experience to the storage of experience in memory. For Aristotle, however, there was great ethical value in the ability to reproduce past experiences from memory. Past experience was stored, so to speak, in its immediacy. The ability to reproduce past experience was evidence of wisdom and virtue, predicated on the ability

⁷⁷ Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 49.

⁷⁸ Plato, *Theaetetus*, trans. by John Mc Dowell (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), p. 85.

⁷⁹ Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, p. 68.

⁸⁰ Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, p. 68.

for past virtuous acts to be repeated in the present. Therefore, retaining and recollecting memory images had moral consequences for the individual.⁸¹

In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle argues that moral excellence is the result of a habit or disposition that forms from the repetition of emotional responses to remembered past acts, which influence the individual's future actions.⁸² This process is not something that takes place independently of sense perception, because it is sense perception that gives rise to memory and a general notion of 'experience'. As Carruthers explains, 'experience' is formed from re-membering: the making of one out of a number of repeated memory events. Thus, she continues:

Experience - memories generalized and judged - gives rise to all knowledge, art, science, and ethical judgement, for ethical judgement, since it is based upon habit and training and applies derived principles to particular situations, is an art.⁸³

Aristotle provides an instructive example of how perceptual processes and moral language combine. According to Aristotle, the function of the mind, which thinks in images, links past and present experience with an inbuilt moral expectation that previous good actions can be repeated in the present. Like the reform of the lover in the *Phaedrus*, the moral agent in Aristotle relies on increasing perceptual acuity and memorial organization to judge the ethical value of present experience. Disorder at the level of perception, understood as perception and judgement, results in moral blindness. Augustine, the next thinker to be considered, combines some of these insights in a Christian programme of moral training.

⁸¹ For a more detailed account of this process see Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, pp. 68-9.

⁸² Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by Hippocrates G. Apostle (Boston: Dordrecht, 1975), pp. 21-2.

⁸³ Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, pp. 68-9.

iii. St Augustine: Vision of the Body and Vision of the Mind

In this section I will examine Augustine's treatment of the bodily and spiritual senses in 'Letter 147', and his more systematic work *The Trinity*.⁸⁴ Augustine is particularly relevant to the ensuing discussion for two reasons. First, much of what has been set out above in the writings of Plato and Aristotle, in terms of moral reformation, resonates in Augustine's account of bodily sight and spiritual sight. Second, the works of Augustine were canonical for medieval theologians. Whereas, I denied that Julian had encountered either Plato or Aristotle knowingly, it is quite possible, though difficult to prove, that Julian had some knowledge of Augustine.⁸⁵

In a letter written to a noble lady named Pauline, Augustine answers a request to consider the problem of whether God can be seen. Reading the letter, it appears that the request is made with regard to bodily sight. Thus, Pauline's request would be drawing on scriptural examples of seeing God such as those found in Abraham (Genesis 18.1), Isaac (Genesis 26.2), Moses (Exodus 33.11) and Job (Job 38.1). In his response to Pauline, Augustine acknowledges the difficulty of the task he has been set. In view of this difficulty, he employs the unquestionable authority of scripture and the works of his contemporary, St Ambrose, to bolster his argument. The problem Augustine faces can be summarized as follows: scripture reports incidents of individuals seeing God; the authority of scripture is beyond question; therefore, reports of individuals seeing God in the scriptures must be beyond question. However, Augustine also knew that scripture reported that no man can see God and live (Exodus 33:20). Such a contradiction leads Augustine, who does not question the authority of scripture at any point in his letter, to analyse what could be meant by 'seeing' in these statements. In this respect, Augustine limits his task to an exposition of nuances in scriptural interpretation.

⁸⁴ Augustine of Hippo, *The Trinity*, trans. by Stephen McKenna, vol. 45 (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1963).

⁸⁵ See, Grace Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian* (London: SPCK, 1987), p. 128.

Having set out his opening comments, Augustine turns on his reader, Pauline, and declares as if perplexed:

Notice what a difficult question you have raised for me, about which you want me to speak at length and thoroughly within the limits of a brief letter, and which it seemed to you should be explained carefully and completely.⁸⁶

Not only is Augustine faced with the problem of scriptural contradiction; he is confronted with the absurdity, as he sees it, that the bodily senses can apprehend God. The solution Augustine provides is not convincing. On the one hand, he argues that if indeed God is seen by the bodily senses this must be due to the will of God. Therefore, if it is God's will to appear before Abraham, for example, then God can be seen by the bodily senses. However, Augustine qualifies his conclusion by adding that on such occasions God only reveals an aspect of his nature, not his true nature to the bodily senses. Therefore, aspects of God's nature, where it is his will, are visible, but God's true nature remains invisible. This is the case, Augustine argues, whether the eyes of the body or the eyes of the mind perform the seeing.⁸⁷ Augustine resolves an apparent scriptural inconsistency with an explanation that relies not on the faculty of seeing, but the will of God and the invisible nature of God. According to scripture, God's nature can never be seen in this life bodily or mentally, and seeing aspects of God's nature is always dependent on his will.

In the final quarter of the letter, however, Augustine shifts the emphasis of his enquiry towards more epistemological concerns. It is this part of the letter that sets out the radical difference between the eyes of the body and the eyes of the mind, capacities that are considered alike, in their inadequacy, up to this point. Indeed, Augustine is clearly satisfied with the explanation he has offered Pauline in the first part of the

⁸⁶ Augustine, 'Letter 147', p. 374.

⁸⁷ Augustine, 'Letter 147', p. 375. Augustine makes a similar point, but more emphatically, later in the letter, p. 378.

letter, telling her ‘I think there is no further inquiry in your question’.⁸⁸ However, he adds, by way of a thought experiment:

But consider in this whole discussion what you have seen [...] among the facts you have seen as true, distinguish further how you saw them, whether by remembering that you had seen them through the body, like heavenly or earthly bodies, or whether you never saw them by bodily eyes but only by mental vision observed that they are true and certain, like your own will, concerning which I believe you when you speak, for truly I myself cannot see it as it is seen by you.⁸⁹

Following this invitation for further epistemological investigation, Augustine outlines his own model of perception. He makes it clear ‘Things seen by the mind need no bodily senses to let us know that they are true, but those seen through the body cannot become our knowledge without a mind to which these incoming messages can be referred’.⁹⁰ Augustine goes on to explain that the mind commits ‘mental pictures’ to memory and judges them with mental vision.

Hamlyn suggests that Augustine’s theory of mental vision, though influenced by neo-Platonism, goes further than any previous neo-Platonic model. Hamlyn explains that in Augustine’s theory of mental picturing ‘the mind receives no impressions itself; it forms its own images and impressions, which are not those of the body’.⁹¹ Augustine, at this stage in his thinking, can be distinguished from Plato and Aristotle; who both retained an idea of impressions being imprinted in the memory like a seal in wax. This is not the case for Augustine, who goes on to denounce the interference of the bodily senses and material imagery in mental vision:

⁸⁸ Augustine, ‘Letter 147’, p. 390.

⁸⁹ Augustine, ‘Letter 147’, p. 390.

⁹⁰ Augustine, ‘Letter 147’, p. 390.

⁹¹ Hamlyn, *Sense and Perception*, p. 44. See also, H.J. Blumenthal, *Plotinus’ Psychology: His Doctrines of the Embodied Soul* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), pp. 67-79.

Pass judgement, then against yourself, on your own behalf, if you cannot drive from your mental vision those many fanciful images of material qualities, and so from your defeat win the victory.⁹²

In this part of the letter, Augustine consistently denounces the bodily senses and stresses the superiority of mental vision. However, it is worth noticing the shift of emphasis from the scriptural to the epistemic which occasions the most negative comments concerning the bodily senses. The problem Augustine sets out to solve remains unaffected by his diversion into perceptual processes as the basis of truth and certainty. That is to say, Augustine's strict divide between the erroneous bodily senses and the clarity of mental vision does not affect God's will to reveal aspects of his nature to human beings. Indeed, in the early part of the letter, Augustine recognizes that this is the case whether or not the perceptual faculty reporting a sight of God is bodily or mental.

Augustine, no doubt, is troubled by the role scripture assigns to the bodily senses because of its incompatibility with the elevated capacity he assigns to mental vision. Indeed, in the final passages of his letter, Augustine returns to the problem he is originally set. In his concluding remarks, he can only emphasize his conviction that mental vision is superior to bodily vision, knowing, as he does, that scripture reports both bodily and more spiritual sights of God. It seems that Augustine, finally, is unwilling to settle on his first conclusion that solves scriptural contradiction in terms of God's will and nature, but not the superiority of mental vision over bodily vision. However, the relationship of bodily and mental vision seems to have stayed with Augustine, who returns to it in *The Trinity*. In *The Trinity*, however, Augustine develops a closer relationship between the bodily and spiritual senses that includes ideas for educating the senses as a means of moral reform.

In Book Eleven of *The Trinity*, Augustine establishes the premise that external things must be used to illustrate interior and spiritual things.⁹³ To facilitate the

⁹² Augustine, 'Letter 147', p. 393.

discernment of internal things, Augustine draws attention to the five bodily senses of the outer person. What one of the senses reports, he argues, holds true for the rest. Therefore, Augustine decides to focus on the sense of bodily vision as that which is closest to spiritual vision.⁹⁴ For Augustine, like Plato, the clarity of vision was an accurate metaphor for knowledge acquisition. Thus, Augustine, following this traditional metaphor, describes the possibility of contact between God and the human soul as rays ‘which shine through them [the eyes] and touch whatever we see’.⁹⁵ According to Augustine’s understanding of bodily vision in *The Trinity*, it is the viewer not the object viewed that initiates the act of perception. Therefore, bodily vision requires the soul’s concentration and selectivity.

Augustine’s theory of vision in *The Trinity* is strongly intentional. The term Augustine uses is *intentio*, which can mean ‘tension’, ‘extension’ or ‘mental concentration’.⁹⁶ He argues that it is the incorporeal will issuing commands to the body that forms the sense of seeing. That is to say, without the input of the will the viewer is not attached to external objects. If no attachment occurs, then no sense of sight is formed. Importantly, for Augustine, the projection of the soul outward is complemented by the absorption of the image of the object, which is received by the memory. Margaret Miles clarifies this point:

Vision is definitely, for Augustine, a two-way street: the soul forms images of sensible things ‘out of its own substance’ (*substantiae suae*), but the result is that the mind itself is formed by the very images it formulates and carries.⁹⁷

⁹³ *The Trinity*, p. 316.

⁹⁴ Augustine states, ‘Let us, therefore, rely principally on the testimony of the eyes, for this sense of the body far excels the rest, and comes closer to spiritual vision, though it differs from it in kind’. See *The Trinity*, p. 316.

⁹⁵ *The Trinity*, p. 273.

⁹⁶ O’Daly, *Augustine’s Philosophy of Mind*, p. 43.

⁹⁷ Margaret Miles, ‘Vision: The Eyes of the Body and the Eye of the Mind in Saint Augustine’s *De Trinitate* and *Confessions*’, *The Journal of Religion*, 63 (1983), 125-42 (128).

The will of the viewer reaching out to its object is central to Augustine's understanding of vision; however, the attraction of the object, which draws out the viewer, is equally present. Although it is the soul that forms images out of its own substance, there is a noticeable emphasis on attachment and retention of images despite the role of the bodily senses.

In *The Trinity*, Augustine's model for bodily vision requires both the will of the viewer and the attraction of the object. The relatedness of the viewer's will and the object viewed resonates in Augustine's model of spiritual vision. Although, according to Augustine, in the absence of divine illumination there is no spiritual vision, the will of the viewer is still a requirement. Therefore, divine illumination is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for spiritual vision. Divine illumination must be accompanied by faith that God can be seen in the human condition. Augustine explains:

But even before we are capable of seeing and perceiving God, as He can be perceived [...] He must be loved by faith; otherwise, the heart cannot be cleansed so as to be fit and ready to see Him.⁹⁸

Faith, in its visual mode, is the preparation for and anticipation of the sight of God for those of a clean heart. Augustine still maintains that God cannot be sought with bodily eyes, because God is not a body. Nevertheless, discussing vision in the context of faith and the will, an ethical dimension is brought to Augustine's perceptual model. The turning of spiritual vision to a divine object requires training, just as bodily sight must become accustomed to objects of dazzling brightness. Here, Augustine's reference to the strengthening of bodily vision in relation to spiritual vision is not merely metaphorical. The well-directed will of the viewer is not an accidental property of seeing spiritually. The eye of the soul is, in some sense, the images to which it is attracted. The more edifying sights will require the training of spiritual vision, which has become unaccustomed to divine objects. Augustine does not suggest that this mode

⁹⁸ *The Trinity*, p. 251.

of vision is more abstract. Rather, emphasis is placed on the condition of the soul; assessed by the objects that the soul finds attractive. It is the investment of the soul that requires training as preparation for spiritual sight.

The condition of the soul, as preparation of seeing spiritually, leads Augustine to discuss the necessity of cleansing. In *The Trinity*, Augustine does not associate cleansing with the eradication of sensible objects. As I have explained in relation to Plato's sight of beautiful bodies, in themselves bodily sights are not problematic. Instead, it is the soul's investment in such sights that can obscure the value of the object. The emphasis here is on the responsibility of the viewer to direct the soul's attention wisely. Visible objects threaten the soul's integrity where there is an imbalance of attention. Therefore, the individual is required to re-collect, literally gather those images to which the soul is attracted, to offset the tendency for attention to shift.

The possibility of the soul's misplaced attention causes Augustine to return to the need for training. Training the soul is not an esoteric practice for Augustine. The training that is required, as preparation for spiritual sight, is the Christian life of faith. Augustine's perceptual language and his language of practice overlap at this point. Such overlapping is particularly evident in what Augustine refers to as the exercise of longing. Longing is understood as the soul's search for the only object that can fulfil it. For Augustine, just as the ray of bodily vision is the focusing of energy on a sensible object, the ray of the spiritual vision is longing, which is the concentration of the soul's love. It is the soul's love that unites with God who is love, a point that Miles explains concisely:

Just as, in physical vision, the will unifies, in the act of vision, two separate entities – the viewer and the object – so in the vision of God, it is love, 'a stronger form of the will', that, in the activity of loving, connects and unites human longing with God's activity of love.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Miles, 'Vision', p. 135.

In *The Trinity*, Augustine refines his thinking about the bodily and spiritual senses. Whilst he retains many of the convictions he set out in his letter to Pauline regarding the erroneous bodily senses, in his more systematic work he uses the attraction of material delights to formulate a notion of spiritual vision that requires training. This emphasis is brought out in the role of the will in seeing objects. In his letter, Augustine is content to distinguish between what can be apprehended by the eyes of the mind and the bodily eyes in terms of perceptual capacity, without reference to the activity of the will. In *The Trinity*, however, Augustine includes the will as a necessary part of making progress towards seeing spiritually.

In the next section, I will return to Julian's visual language. Ideas from the subsections above should prove useful when considering the setting for Julian's visions. Julian fixes her desire to develop contrition, compassion and longing in her religious life without condition. The request for a bodily vision of the Passion, mirroring Augustine, is, however, conditional on it being the will of God. When Julian is granted a sight of the Passion, her unconditional desire to develop the virtues of contrition, compassion and longing and her visionary experience become inseparable. The vision is a lesson which must be applied to her moral development. At their inception, the visions are presented as a difficult and perplexing means of development in the life of faith. Although Julian's request for a bodily vision is conditional upon it being the will of God, the vision she receives of Christ's Passion is critical to deepening not only her religious life but also the religious life of the Christian community.

2. Julian of Norwich: Visual Thinking, Recollection and Moral Training

In the remainder of this chapter, I will explore the possibility that Julian's visions operate didactically as a means of educating the senses and activating a program of moral reform. In Section 1 of the present chapter, I examined the events preceding the

onset of Julian's visionary experience. It became clear from this examination that at the point of receiving the visions, Julian is perplexed, both physically and spiritually. She is physically perplexed because of the pain of her illness and her firm belief that she will die; her spiritual perplexity centres on her request for a bodily vision and her worthiness to transmit it to the Christian community. After Julian is shown the visions, she is left to reintegrate the before and after visionary states of her religious life. Scholarly work has tended to view this process of reintegration as a literary or theological project, abstracting the very grounds (the visions) on which the reintegration is made.¹⁰⁰ In what follows, I will argue that Julian's attempt to live with her visions is led by her further attempts to integrate them into her religious life and the religious life of the Christian community. In this way, the visions set out a didactic program for Julian to follow. Literary skill and theological reasoning are present in Julian's integrating process, but these activities are not external to the religious life she is living. Thus Julian is convinced she is shown something of value to all Christians, and she like the Christian community must come to a fuller understanding of it. To further understanding of the vision, Julian learns that the operating and explanatory principle of the whole sequence, divine love, must yield a response in the Christian life. The vision acts as part of a reciprocal dynamic between what it yields to the viewer and the viewer's progress in coming closer to God's love.

The beginnings of this reciprocal dynamic are set out at the start of *Showings*, in the context of Julian's perplexity over her conditional requests for a bodily vision of Christ's Passion and a bodily illness. As well as making conditional requests for a bodily vision and illness, Julian also unconditionally requests 'three wounds' of contrition, compassion and longing. The 'three wounds' represent necessary aspects of the Christian life, whereas bodily visions and illness rest upon the will of God. Julian could have developed the three wounds, as any Christian, in the absence of visions, but

¹⁰⁰ See Christopher Abbott, 'His Body, The Church: Julian of Norwich's Vision of Christ Crucified', *The Downside Review*, 115 (1997), 1-22. According to Abbott the bleeding body of Christ must become the mystical body of the Church, for Julian's vision to be of value to a Christian community.

she does not. Instead, as the text reports, the very point at which Julian states that she never wanted a bodily vision from God, the visions begin.

It is not easy to account for Julian's shift from a request for a bodily vision to a rejection. Julian's first rejection occurs early in *Showings*, before the onset of the visions. First, however, Julian affirms her desire to have a bodily sight of Christ's suffering:

But despite all my true faith I desired a bodily sight, through which I might have more knowledge of our Lord and our saviour's bodily pains, and the compassion of our Lady and of all his true lovers who were living at the time and saw his pains.¹⁰¹

She then reverses this desire at the point the visions are about to begin:

So it seemed to me that I might with his grace have his wounds, as I had wished before; but in this I never wanted any bodily vision or any kind of revelation from God, but only the compassion which I thought a loving soul could have for our Lord Jesus, who for love was willing to become mortal man.¹⁰²

One initial observation can be made concerning these conflicting statements. Julian's first rejection follows the onset of a severe bodily illness. The illness is requested on the condition that it is the will of God. Julian understands that the request for an illness, as a means of achieving the first wound (contrition), is unconventional. However, when Julian becomes ill, it would appear that it is God's will that her request should be fulfilled. Therefore, it could be argued, Julian ventures to ask for the wound of compassion, which she hopes to be fulfilled in a bodily sight of the Passion, on the basis of divine consistency. Julian's disavowal of a wish for a bodily vision should be read as a reiteration of the conditional aspect of her request. Julian cannot initiate

¹⁰¹ *Showings*, p. 126.

¹⁰² *Showings*, p. 129.

God's will, regardless of her own wishes. Julian, therefore, can claim that she does not want a bodily vision, because what *she* wants is not at issue. That said, Julian's disavowal reveals much about the role of the visions in her religious life, and her religious identity as a result of the visions.

Initially, Julian affirms that a bodily sight of Christ's Passion would increase her understanding of Christ's pain and the compassion of Our Lady. In this way, Julian expresses her request for a bodily sight in the affective language of responses to suffering and the development of compassion. Julian hopes a bodily sight of the Passion will further her knowledge of Christ's pain and help her to develop the true compassion that she desires to see in the sight of Christ's mother looking on at her son's suffering. The response of compassion is Julian's unconditional request, along with contrition and longing. However, at this point, compassion is an image that Julian has not developed fully in her religious life. True compassion is manifest in a picture of Christ's mother responding to the suffering of her son. Therefore, when Julian discredits the need for a bodily vision, she acknowledges a phenomenon that has yet to be incorporated into her religious life. Julian can dismiss bodily visions because she understands that they are not a necessary requirement for the development of compassion in the life of faith. However, the response of Christ's mother to her son's suffering remains instrumental to Julian's idea of true compassion. So much so that, although she understands that compassion can be developed in the absence of visions, Julian still wants to see the response of Christ's mother as an example of loving compassion.

The tension in Julian's request and refusal of a bodily vision reveals the complexity in her visual thinking. Julian does not want a bodily vision as though she were imaginatively present at Christ's Passion. For the development of true compassion, Julian, like Christ's mother, wants to be a first hand witness 'for I would have been one of them and have suffered with them'.¹⁰³ Julian seems to connect witnessing or seeing

¹⁰³ *Showings*, p. 126.

first hand with the response of true compassion. In this respect, Julian's conflicting desire for a bodily sight of the Passion is close to what Ewert Cousins describes as a 'mysticism of the historical event'.¹⁰⁴ According to Cousins, immersion in historical events is a meditative exercise that extends imaginative access to the past. In a summary of his thesis, Cousins states:

In a generic sense, it [the mysticism of the historical event] belongs to that form of consciousness whereby we remember a past event, of our own lives or of our collective history. But it is more than mere recalling, for it makes us present to the event and the event present to us.¹⁰⁵

Cousins emphasizes the role of active participation in gaining meditative access to past events. He argues that the meditator must not remain detached from the imagery of the scene, but that he/she must enter into the drama of the event as a participant. Likewise, Julian does not want a sight of the Passion alone, but what she calls a 'recollection', with feeling and pain. Julian also stresses her desire to identify with the witnesses to the Passion in order to develop compassion in her own religious life. As I explained above with reference to Aristotle, the ability to recollect disparate experiences demonstrates a moral capacity to act virtuously in the present and the future based upon remembered experiences of past virtuous acts. Through recollecting the compassion shown by Christ's lovers who were present at the Passion, Julian is able to integrate her meditative activity and her desire to replicate the virtues of Christ's lovers. The process of integration begins with the recognition that the fragmentary nature of human experience and moral development must be grounded and focused in Christ's Passion.

In the second refusal, following the first revelation, there is closer focusing on what Julian is shown. The model shifts from the Passion scene itself to the unity of the Church. Julian threads the previous reference to the presence of Christ's lovers at his

¹⁰⁴ Ewert Cousins, 'Francis of Assisi: Christian Mysticism at the Crossroads', in *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, ed. by Steven T. Katz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 163-90 (p. 166).

¹⁰⁵ Cousins, 'Francis of Assisi', p. 167.

Passion into the Church of her present in which she participates. What I am calling a refusal, here, is more a qualification of Julian as the recipient of visions and the voice addressing her Christian community. She says:

For I am sure that there are very many who never had revelations or visions, but only the common teaching of Holy Church, who love God better than I. If I pay special attention to myself, I am nothing at all; but in general I am in the unity of love with all my fellow Christians. For it is in this unity of love that the life consists of all men who will be saved.¹⁰⁶

The passage above makes the connection between visions and participation in the life of the Church explicit. Considered alone, the visions are without value. It is only through the development of love, a development that Julian shares with all Christians, that the visions have any value. As Julian herself says, the visions can be seen and heard by those with good will and intention. Properly conceived, the visions are participatory. If the visions are from God, then they cannot be for the spiritual benefit of one person. It is in unity, understood as participation in love, that an individual is truly revealed. In Julian's words:

For it is in this unity of love that the life consists of all men who will be saved. For God is everything that is good, and God loves everything that he has made, and if any man or women withdraws his love from any of his fellow Christians, he does not love at all, because he has not love towards all.¹⁰⁷

The unity that reveals the self to others and others to the self is the practice of love. It is the same unity that informs the visions themselves. As I discussed in Section 1, the first bodily vision, the crowning of thorns, is the unitary feature of the entire visionary sequence. Julian's movement towards unity in the Church is mirrored in her capacity to

¹⁰⁶ *Showings*, p. 134.

¹⁰⁷ *Showings*, p. 134.

recognize unity in the visions. Love is the mode of God's operation, and it is, therefore, the means by which the visions are understood as one.

Julian applies the unity of the visions to the modes of vision that apprehend them. In a formula similar to Augustine's, Julian categorizes her visions as bodily and spiritual, adding an oral mode of revelation described as 'words formed in my understanding'.¹⁰⁸ However, the categories of bodily and spiritual sight are more integrated in Julian's thinking than Augustine's. Julian is never tempted to speculate abstractly on the nature of appearance. The visions are only meaningful within the unity of the bodily and spiritual, reflecting the unity of the Church and the salvation and redemption in the Incarnation. According to Julian's classification of the visions, it would be a mistake to elevate one mode of seeing above another. The modes of seeing are unified in the sight of the Passion and the life of the Church, as shown to Julian in the unifying significance of the crown of thorns suffered for love alone. Therefore, Julian cannot be read in a linear fashion, starting with bodily vision and moving, in greater abstractions, towards spiritual vision. The details of the visions feed back into one another, spiritual insights reveal profound bodily sights, and bodily sights inform spiritual understanding. The final word, as always in *Showings*, is reserved for God not Julian. The visions reveal a teaching that is God-given: the visionary didacticism in the visions is dependent on a divine initiative. The viewer must come to the visions with proper intention, but it is God who vouchsafes what is gained from them. Explaining the three categories of vision, Julian says:

¹⁰⁸ For a concise commentary on Augustine's theory of vision see Frank Tobin, 'Medieval Thought on Visions and Its Resonance in Mechthild von Magdeburg's *Flowing Light of the Godhead*, in *Vox Mystica: Essays on Medieval Mysticism in Honour of Professor Valerie M. Lagorio*, ed. by Ann Clark Bartlett and others (Cambridge: Brewer, 1995), pp. 41-53. Tobin argues that Augustine does not distinguish being sensory perception and visions as acts of 'seeing'; they are both *visio*. For the classification of Julian's visions see Paul Molinari, *Julian of Norwich: The Teaching of a 14th Century English Mystic*, reprint, (London: Longmans, 1958) pp. 60-70. Molinari argues that although Julian's categorization of her visions is similar to Augustine's tripartite model for visions as corporeal, imaginative and intellectual, there are significant differences. Nicholas Watson contends that Julian uses the Augustinian categories although they are not always adequate. See Watson, 'The Trinitarian Hermeneutic in Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Love*, in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*, ed. by Marion Glasscoe (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1992), pp. 79-100 (pp. 85-86).

All this blessed teaching of our Lord was shown to me in three parts, that is by bodily vision and by words formed in my understanding and by spiritual vision. But I may not and cannot show the spiritual visions to you as plainly and fully as I should wish; but I trust in our Lord God almighty that he will, out of his goodness and for love of you, make you accept it more spiritually and more sweetly than I can or may tell you, and so may it be for we are all one in love.¹⁰⁹

Julian is unable to *show* the spiritual vision as well as she had hoped. Instead, Julian makes it clear that, where she is unable, the viewer must await the divine initiative, expressed out of a unitary love, for instruction. As the recipient of the visions, Julian is in no better position than any other member of the Christian community to activate the divine initiative. Like any other Christian in want of further divine instruction, Julian must exercise the type of self-sacrifice, understood as the wounds of contrition, compassion and longing, that will allow the visions to be revealed ever more sweetly by God.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to set out a way of approaching *Showings* as visionary theology. I began by observing the relegation of bodily vision in contemporary pedagogic methods. The cognitive, mental view of the world that predominates has downgraded bodily vision and the bodily senses to a collector of information. The bodily senses are, therefore, stripped of any creative or affective capacity in their role as intermediaries for the mental faculties. Contrary to this understanding, I argued that vision and the visual has an educative significance. Thus, in one sense, there is a need to balance the investment in vision and the visual with a dominant mental understanding of the world. Furthermore, there is a requirement to recognize a responsibility in the use of vision and the visual, and, in so doing, act upon

¹⁰⁹ *Showings*, p. 136.

the opportunities for moral reform in our ways of seeing. The element of visual responsibility appears to be very strong in the opening to *Showings*. Julian's illness, her fading sight and the illuminated crucifix give heightened tension to the framing of a visual event as an invitation to see what Julian sees. To support this theory, I looked at accounts of vision in Plato, Aristotle and Augustine. As well as obvious differences, I found a concern for the perceiver's moral condition in all three thinkers. In addition to demonstrating a history of reformatory ideals in visionary activity, I hoped to demonstrate that founding mystical categories of ascent on a movement from the bodily and visual to the incorporeal and invisible is not always possible in writers that are frequently cited as mystical authors. The concomitants of faith and moral rectitude are always applicable in the religious life as lived, however elevated the sights or experiences. In the final section, I attempted to explain how Julian's visions reciprocally inform and develop three unconditional virtues of the Christian life. The unifying factor that binds the visions and guarantees this process of integration is love, which necessitates the surrender of individual initiative to be led by God's guidance.

The next chapter will examine the life of an anchoress in greater detail. I have set out Julian's visions and text as a didactic enterprise applicable to all Christians. However, commentators of anchoritic literature tend to agree that, as an anchoress, Julian would be expected to renounce any teaching status. I intend to show, with close readings of anchoritic material and *Showings*, that a reconsideration of anchoritic activity may call for a broadening of what we mean by teaching. An anchoress may engage with her community in a variety of ways that offer guidance and learning. A visionary didactic would be one such way.

II

The Didactic Role of the anchoress and Her Community

In the introduction, I set out to demonstrate that attempts to categorize Julian as a mystic can de-emphasize important features of her religious life and practice. I argued that identifying an individual as a mystic tends to exclude certain forms of religious practice by definition. The private tends to be emphasized over the communal, ineffability over communication and the solitary search for God over a pastoral intention to guide spiritually and to instruct. In this chapter, I will move away from discussing Julian in mystical terms and attempt, instead, to put together a picture of her religious life and practice as a church anchoress. By contrast to the problems of locating a mystical tradition, the vocation of anchoritic living in the Middle Ages offers an example of a religious way of life that was well documented and narrowly defined. In particular, I want to propose that as an anchoress it is plausible that Julian could participate didactically in the Christian community. Furthermore, I will argue that Julian's visions act as the didactic means by which she is the recipient of divine teaching as well as offering guidance and counsel to the Christian community.

In the previous chapter, I took initial steps towards establishing a precedent for the idea of educating the senses and its relation to understanding Julian's theology as visual. I argued that in the opening sequences of *Showings*, Julian invites the viewer into the drama of what she was shown as a vision. Significantly, Julian believes that she does not occupy a privileged position as the recipient of the visions. Rather, Julian understands that the visions are meaningful to all Christians of 'good will and proper intention' who, like her, are developing contrition, compassion and longing in their religious life. In the present chapter, I will proceed by highlighting the pastoral significance of an anchoress to the religious community, and the didactic modes that she may have exercised in her life of enclosure. The pastoral role of the anchoress necessitates a close relationship to the religious community. In anchoritic terms,

spiritual guidance presupposes a process of exchange. An anchoress is authorized to guide others where she is guided exclusively by a divine didactic initiative. The true teacher in Julian's visionary encounter is always Christ. Julian's teaching is, strictly speaking, a process of learning available to all Christians. *Showings* guides its audience through the same visionary sequence, which taught Julian. Therefore, Julian addresses her community as guide or counsellor perpetually engaged in a divine teaching.

Identifying Julian as both an enclosed anchoress and a didactic influence in the religious community is, however, problematic for two reasons. First, modern scholarship and, more significantly, guides written specifically for anchoresses in the Middle Ages, stress the total separation of the anchoress from her community. In the guides, the anchoress is often described as symbolically dead to the community. Second, most of the anchoritic guides prohibit any anchoress from teaching. Whilst these two points pose a serious challenge to the argument in this chapter, the challenge is not insurmountable. When reading anchoritic material, care must be taken not to confuse the guide's attempts to regulate and instruct with literal descriptions of what anchoresses actually did. It would seem reasonable to assume, for instance, that a prohibition against anchoresses teaching is actually good evidence for teaching activity amongst anchoresses. In addition, advice on living a solitary life in the guides may not admit half measures. The authors of the guides were well aware of the potential physical and spiritual dangers to an anchoress. Whilst, from a regulatory perspective, it may have been necessary to stress the need for total seclusion to protect the anchoress, this does not guarantee that an anchoress always refused to participate in her religious community. Julian exists as someone who demonstrates a didactic purpose and a desire to communicate. Her teaching is pastoral in intention and governed by the spiritual welfare and comfort of Christians.¹ Julian sees the revelation of love that she was shown as applicable and available to all Christians who wish to love God more. The democratic nature of the vision challenges Julian to discover a means of transmission

¹ For a discussion of Julian's theology in a pastoral setting see Julia Gatta, *A Pastoral Art: Spiritual Guidance in the English Mystics* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1986).

that does not elevate her didactic function above the divine didactic initiative that continues to instruct her.

In the current chapter and for the remainder of the thesis, I will show how Julian uses visual language to direct the process of learning from the visions. At times Julian uses her visual language in a literal 'bodily' sense, comparing sights in the visions to the directness of eyesight. In so doing, Julian is able to draw her audience's attention to the bodily mortification of Christ, Christ's changing demeanour, and his physical discolouration as sights that require an empathetic not a discursive response. In such moments it is as though Julian instructs her audience simply to look, or recollect in their imagination the sight she is describing. The more spiritual or 'ghostly' sights that Julian describes, whilst not entirely distinct from descriptions of literal 'bodily' seeing, direct the audience to the theological significance of the sight she is describing. Therefore, when Julian is describing a spiritual sight of the Incarnation or Passion she is referring to a means of apprehending the love of God, the significance of Christ's suffering for love or the seriousness of sin.² This mode of apprehension is not a perceptual capacity in any individual, but insight that is divinely inspired. In *Showings* each category of vision complements the other. The vivid descriptions of Christ's suffering body are balanced against the spiritual reassurance that God's love is unyielding even in intense suffering. Likewise, Julian learns that in the sight of the Passion God's love is not an abstract ideal but that which is expressed in the Son's suffering for love alone. Bodily sight and spiritual sight are not discrete modes of perception in *Showings*. Bodily sight is not a limiting factor in learning from Julian's

² Commenting on the textual quality of Julian's visionary narrative, Oliver Davies compares the visionary categories of bodily sight and spiritual sight to the medieval exegetical categories 'literal meaning' (*sensus corporalis*) and 'figurative meaning' (*sensus spiritualis*). Because Julian was denied a formal education in the study of scripture, Davies argues that she makes up for her lack of textual expertise by treating her visionary experience as a narrative that requires interpretation. See Oliver Davies, 'Transformational Processes in the Work of Julian of Norwich and Mechtilde of Magdeburg', in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*, ed. by Marion Glasscoe (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1992), pp. 39-52 (pp. 45-6).

visions, but a point at which the observer stands before the Passion awaiting God-given spiritual instruction.³

Before setting out the structure of the chapter, I must say something about the anchoritic sources I will be examining. For study alongside *Showings*, I have decided to use six anchoritic sources in this chapter: Aelred of Rievaulx's *De Institutione Inclusarum* or *Rule for a Recluse* (c.1163); the hagiographical account of *St Katherine* (c.1220) the anonymous guide for anchoresses the *Ancrene Wisse* (c.1225); Richard Rolle's advice to the recluse Margaret Kirkby in *The Form of Living* (c.1348); the anonymous rule *The Myroure of Recluses* and Walter Hilton's work *The Scale of Perfection* written for a female recluse, each dating to the second half of the fourteenth century.⁴ I have chosen these sources for three reasons. First, each source was either originally written in English or later translated into English. The dating and language of the texts makes it possible that Julian may have been familiar with the material in the anchoritic sources. Second, each source was written for a female reader explicitly, with the exception of *The Myroure of Recluses* which appears to have been written with 'ancers and ankeresses' in mind.⁵ Reading the anchoritic sources, therefore, will offer

³ In a chapter that considers anchoritic material in some detail it is important to distinguish Julian's uses of bodily sight from the writers of the guides for anchoress. In an interesting article, Alexandra Barratt has pointed out links between the penitential literature of the early thirteenth century and the *Ancrene Wisse* written during the same period. Barratt observes that *Ancrene Wisse* is rich in penitential themes, especially the regulation of the bodily senses. Interestingly, the bodily senses come to be indistinguishable from the bodily organs associated with those senses. Therefore, as the access point for defiling the soul and their conflation with bodily organs, the bodily senses were thought, doubly, to occasion an opportunity for sin. See Alexandra Barratt, 'The Five Wits and Their Structural Significance in Part II of *Ancrene Wisse*', *Medium Ævum*, 56 (1987), 12-24.

⁴ Aelred of Rievaulx, *De Institutione Inclusarum: Two English Versions*, ed. by John Ayto and Alexandra Barratt, Early English Text Society, no. 287 (London: Oxford University Press, 1984); for the *Ancrene Wisse* see *Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works*, trans. by Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1991); Ricard Rolle, *Richard Rolle Prose and Verse*, ed. by S.J. Ogilvie-Thomson, Early English Text Society, no. 293 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); *The Myroure of Recluses: A Middle English Translation of Speculum Inclusorum*, ed. by Marta Powell Harley (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996); Walter Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, ed. by Thomas H. Bestul (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000). For details of translation, dating, influence and audience see the comprehensive introductions to each edition. See also, Ann K. Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons in Medieval England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 103-4 and her article, 'Old Forms with New Meanings: Changing Perceptions of Medieval English Anchorites', *Fifteenth-Century Studies*, 5 (1982), 209-21; E.J. Dobson, *The Origins of the Ancrene Wisse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976); R.W. Chambers, 'Recent Research upon the *Ancrene Wisse*', *The Review of English Studies*, 1 (1925), 4-23; Aelred Squire, *Aelred of Rievaulx: A Study* (London: SPCK, 1969), pp. 118-20.

⁵ See *The Myroure of Recluses*, p. 13, line 399.

useful insights into how their authors viewed enclosed women and their expectations of them. Interestingly, certain expectations that may be inferred from these works of male authorship are challenged in the female exemplar source *St Katherine*. Third, written in the vernacular, the anchoritic sources enjoyed a readership outside the enclosed life. Vincent Gillespie, for example, mentions an expanded readership for the *Ancrene Wisse* as well as the appearance of *The Form of Living* and *The Scale of Perfection* in booklet form in the fifteenth century.⁶ Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson note the popularity of St Katherine in paintings (Winchester Cathedral, 1225) and the practice of dedicating new English churches to the saint, sixty-two medieval dedications in total.⁷ The availability of the anchoritic sources in English plus the applicability of their content outside a life of enclosure makes for useful material when assessing the relationship of the community to an enclosed individual. The distribution of works on the enclosed life in the late Middle Ages suggests an audience not detached from an anchoress, but an audience familiar with and respectful of the life of enclosure as a good example of spiritual living. I have kept the guides in their Middle English where a translation is unavailable and the language is manageable. However, for the more distant English of the *Ancrene Wisse* and *St Katherine* story, I have decided to use a modern English translation.

I will present this chapter in four sections, with Section 4 containing three subsections. Section 1, an introductory section, examines the history of the term ‘anchorite’ and the increased specialization of the term to denote an enclosed lifestyle. In this section, I will demonstrate how Julian’s response to anchoritic motifs such as enclosure and the assault of the devil is applicable generally as a lesson in securing one’s faith. I will contrast Julian’s encounter with the devil to the *Ancrene Wisse*’s description of an enclosed anchoress as someone who is extremely vulnerable to demonic attacks. The two contrasting accounts are presented in the metaphorical

⁶ Vincent Gillespie, ‘Vernacular Books of Religion’ in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain 1375-1475*, ed. by Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 317-44 (pp. 321 and 327 respectively).

⁷ *Anchoritic Spirituality*, p. 260.

language of a visual exchange. In Julian, her sight of the cross reinvigorates her faith in her visions and her trust that the devil will not overcome her. In the *Ancrene Wisse*, the misuse of bodily vision, signifying the windows of the anchorhold, threatens to destroy the anchoress. Bodily vision is not a redemptive medium in the *Ancrene Wisse*, but a potential threat that is stringently regulated. Therefore, the author of the *Ancrene Wisse* recommends an inward movement away from the threatening external world and unregulated bodily vision. In contrast, the movement in Julian's account is outward, instructing the community to be secure in their faith, led by the comforting sight of the crucifix.

Section 2 challenges the idea of the anchoress as a solitary heroine. In this section, I will examine the St Katherine story as it appears in its anchoritic context. The martyrdom story of St Katherine replicates Julian's problem of identifying herself as a teacher. By accepting a divine teaching, from the true teacher God or Christ, both Katherine and Julian transform worldly learning into a teaching with redemptive possibilities. In the process, both Katherine and Julian re-identify themselves not as teachers in a conventional sense, but as women taught by God.

Section 3 will examine the concept of discernment. Discernment in the context of this section has a general and technical application. The general application concerns male suspicion of female religious. The fact that more women wished to follow a religious vocation in the later Middle Ages is complicated by ecclesiastical demands for male religious to supervise, regulate and guide the religious lives of women. The ill-defined status of religious women - socially, physically and spiritually - gave rise to insistent demands for strict enclosure and warnings about the opportunities for sin that women provided. The technical application refers to discernment as a practice for distinguishing divine from demonic visions. The anchoritic guides are unanimous that visions and dreams must be treated with suspicion, or dismissed altogether. Visions and such phenomena were considered too close to bodily affections that signal spiritual pride to be regarded as an absolute good. In this part of the section, I will examine what the *Ancrene Wisse*, *The Myroure of Recluses*, Rolle's *The Form of Living* and

Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* say about the phenomena of visions and how to distinguish true from false visions. The instruction in the guides varies from the strongly censorial to the mildly cautious. However, a constant feature of all the guides is that bodily affections impair the discernment of divine from demonic visions. To conclude this section, I will show how Julian presents discernment as a further expression of her acceptance of a divine didactic initiative. The audience for *Showings* is empowered to discern the value of the visions for themselves, where the value of the visions is contingent upon developing a life of faith.

Section 4 will consider the didactic modes with which an anchoress could communicate with the community. This section will challenge the assumption that anchoresses never questioned the prohibition against them teaching. Upon examination, it emerges that the teaching activities of an anchoress require a reassessment of how teaching is defined. Teaching, in anchoritic terms, is a process of exchange where learning and the willingness to be taught become a means by which guidance can be offered. In three subsections, I will discuss methods of didactic exchange that are prevalent in the anchoritic guides. The three modes of learning I will consider are: looking, listening and loving.

1. Identity

In the early Christian tradition the hermit and anchorite were synonymous. To be termed a hermit or anchorite meant to withdraw, a meaning that is derived from the Greek (*anachōrein*) 'to go away' to the desert (*eremus*), from which the word hermit (*eremita*) is derived. At this early stage in the Christian eremitic tradition, the terms 'anchorite' and 'hermit' applied loosely to individuals who lived in complete solitude, with a group of solitaries or those who enjoyed a certain amount of movement and social interaction.⁸ As the tradition developed into the Middle Ages, the desert of the

⁸ See Jean Gribomont, 'Eastern Christianity', in *Christian Spirituality I: Origins to Twelfth Century*, ed. by Bernard McGinn and John Meyendorff, World Spirituality, 16 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul,

early eremitic tradition was symbolized by the anchorite's cell or anchorhold, usually close to or attached to a church. Enclosed in a cell, the medieval anchorite shared in the tradition of the desert recluses in Egypt such as St Anthony, St Paul of Thebes and the female exemplar St Mary the Egyptian.⁹ The image of the desert as total solitude represented the arena where the individual was left before God experiencing demonic temptations and intense physical suffering. The negative aspects of such a life represented the necessary disciplines for the beginning of a new life closer to God. The cell of the recluse, a new desert, forced the individual to confront their spiritual self.

The identity of the anchorite's cell as a new desert coincided with the specialization of the terms 'anchorite' and 'hermit' to describe differing religious vocations in the Middle Ages. In contrast to anchorites, medieval 'hermits' continued to be identified as individuals engaged in a variety of spiritual and practical activities. In the first quarter of the twelfth century, the hermit St Robert of Knaresborough, for example, contributed with fellow hermits to farming land and collecting alms. Hugh Garth, the hermit founder of Cockersand Abbey, collected alms for the hospital that predated the foundation of the monastery.¹⁰ In the same period, an anchorite was defined as *inclusus* or *reclusus*, emphasizing fixity of abode and limited contact with the world. According to civil law, the recluse 'is so mured or shut up that he is always alone and remains in his enclosure and can never come out of his place'.¹¹ However, examples do exist of recluses leaving their cells, as well as instances of recluses who do not live in complete solitude, but either with a maid or other recluses. For women religious, the anchoritic life provided the possibility of an alternative religious vocation. A laywomen may have favoured the life of an anchoress over the expensive matter of becoming a nun. A nun,

1986), pp. 113-31. See also, Alexandra Barratt, 'Anchoritic Aspects of *Ancrene Wisse*', *Medium Aevum*, 49 (1980), 32-56.

⁹ For a translation of 'Sayings of the Desert Fathers' see *Western Asceticism*, ed. and trans. by Owen Chadwick, Library of Christian Classics; vol. 12 (London: SCM Press, 1958), pp. 37-189.

¹⁰ For the accounts of St Robert of Knaresborough and Hugh Garth see Ann K. Warren, 'The Nun as Anchoress 1100-1500', in *Medieval Religious Women*, ed. by Lillian Thomas Shank and John A. Nichols; 71, *Distant Echoes*, vol. 1 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1984), pp. 197-222, (p. 199).

¹¹ See Rotha M. Clay, *The Hermits and Anchorites of England* (London: Methuen, 1914), p. 142. Councils in Toledo 646, Constantinople (*in Trullo*) 692 and Frankfurt 794 added that a probationary period was required before full enclosure, and that once enclosed the anchorite must never leave the cell. See also Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons*, p. 54.

on the other hand, may take up the profession of anchoress as an additional vow leading to deeper spiritual commitment.¹² The life of an anchoress appears well defined for women seeking a reclusive life of strict enclosure. If popularity is measured by source references, the unstable life of a female hermit, or its equivalent, appears to have been less attractive.

Although not referred to as hermits, Ann Warren does provide an example of two women leading a version of the hermetic life.¹³ The '*duae sanctae mulieres*' whom she mentions settled in woods near St Albans around 1135. These female recluses practised prayers, vigils and strict chastity whilst living on bread and water. However, the chosen religious life of these women unsettled Geoffrey the Abbot of St Albans to the point that measures were taken to build a cell for the two women. The cell that was built acted as a catalyst for the establishment of Sopwell Priory, a nunnery dependent on St Albans.¹⁴ The climate of growing ecclesiastical control in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries increased the probability that women who had chosen an undefined solitary religious life would become members of a supervised religious community. Warren argues that, in contrast to female hermits, the anchoritic life for women excluded the possibility of incorporation into a religious community. She claims, with some justification, that anchoritic living was not an experiment for women religious in the Middle Ages. The continuity of the anchoritic tradition up to the Dissolution in 1539 is proof of the continuing appeal of an anchoritic lifestyle throughout the Middle Ages.¹⁵ Indeed, Warren goes as far as saying 'The anchoritic life, then, was the most successful form of reclusive life for women in the twelfth century in England [...] and the only form available thereafter'.¹⁶ It should, be noted, however, that Warren models

¹² Warren observes that Goscelin's *Liber Confortatorius*, Aelred's *De Institutione Inclusarum*, Rolle's *The Form of Living* and Hilton's *Scale* were all written for women *reclusae* who had previously been nuns, see 'The Nun as anchoress', pp. 202-3.

¹³ Warren, 'The Nun as Anchoress', p. 200.

¹⁴ Warren gives further examples of 'hermitesses' who were incorporated into communities at Markyate Priory, Kilburn Priory and Crabhouse Abbey. See Warren, 'The Nun as Anchoress', pp. 200-1.

¹⁵ For a general discussion of the life of an anchoress in the Middle Ages see Patria J. F. Rosof, 'The Anchoress in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries' in *Medieval Religious Women*, ed. by Lillian Thomas Shank and John A. Nichols, Cistercian Studies Series; 72, *Peaceweavers*, vol. 2 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1987), pp. 123-44.

¹⁶ Warren, 'The Nun as Anchoress', p. 201.

her ideal anchoress on women religious who had been nuns. Although, once enclosed, laywomen enjoyed equal status with nuns who had become anchoresses, a nun was, according to Warren, a more suitable candidate for strict enclosure.

Warren accurately describes the anchoritic tradition in England as a long and popular one. This insight is supported numerically by Rotha Mary Clay's formative study of English hermits and anchorites, which records eight hundred and two sites for anchoritic cells covering the length and breadth of England.¹⁷ Clay's study also provides useful evidence for assessing areas of England where the number of cells for anchorites was at its most concentrated. Julian's county of Norfolk, for example, contained ninety anchoritic cells, thirty-four of the cells being founded in Norwich alone.¹⁸ In Yorkshire, Clay accounts for one hundred cells including the hermitage at Hampole where Richard Rolle was resident in the mid-Fourteenth Century. The dates of the foundations for the cells are as broad as their geographical dispersal. The community at Farne dates to the late seventh century, whilst the recorded succession of anchoresses in St Julian's church in Norwich extends from Julian, possibly as early as 1373 if not earlier, to Agnes Edrygge in 1524.

An initial stumbling block in any study of the anchoritic life of Julian is the scarcity of detailed resources. Evidence for Julian's vocation as a church anchoress relies on three sources. First, the corroborated accounts of bequests dating from 1393/4 to 1429 that name Julian as a 'recluse' or 'anchorite' at St Julian's church in Norwich. Second, the scribal preface to Chapter i of the Short Text that names Julian as a 'recluse at Norwich' and still alive in 1413. Third, there is the visit of Margery Kempe to 'the ankres' Julian, in Norwich, which occurred sometime before 1413.¹⁹ The visit of

¹⁷ Clay, pp. 203-63. See also Tanner, *Popular Religion in Norwich*, pp. 198-203. Tanner provides names and dates of individuals identified as hermits and anchorites living in Norwich in the late medieval period.

¹⁸ According to Clay, twenty-four hermits and anchorites lived in Norwich between 1370 and 1549. Tanner adds to this figure, recording between thirty-five and forty-seven anchorites and hermits over the same period. Tanner notes that Julian may have been responsible for an increase in anchoritic numbers, though there is no direct evidence for this claim. However, until Julian's lifetime only two anchorites are mentioned in the Leet Rolls of Norwich in 1287/88 and 1312/13 respectively. See Tanner, *Popular Religion in Norwich*, p. 58.

¹⁹ Margery's visit to Norwich took place before her visits to Repingdon and Arundel, which occurred in the summer or autumn of 1413. For an account of Margery's visit to Norwich see *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Lynn Staley (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), pp. 50-6.

Margery to Julian's cell is perhaps the most revealing of the accounts. The bequests, by contrast, tell us very little about the relationship between Julian and her benefactors. One possibility that does arise is that Julian may have been identified as a good investment for benefactors who wanted her to act as an intercessor on their behalf.²⁰ The detail of Margery's account, in contrast, clearly states the purpose of her visit. Margery is not a benefactor. Rather, she visits Julian in person to receive counselling from the anchoress. Two points are relevant here. First, Margery exhibits no hesitation when considering a visit to Julian's cell, although, as an anchoress, Julian is technically dead to society. Second, in the form of counselling Margery, Julian reveals herself as having a didactic influence in the religious community. Moreover, Margery deliberately seeks out Julian for spiritual guidance because of her reputation as an expert in matters pertaining to the religious life. I will return to Margery's visit to Julian's cell in Section 4, subsection ii, of the current chapter. For now, I want to consider the physical environment of an anchoress.

Passages from the anchoritic guides describe the cell in a way that intensifies the image of the anchoress as a solitary heroine, threatened by the outside world and demonic temptation. Julian, however, recreates her own encounter with the devil - a motif of anchoritic devotion - as a means of instructing the Christian community in the value of the visions she receives. Whether Julian was enclosed at the time of her demonic assault, or reflects on the incident after enclosure, she is insistent throughout that what she learns is applicable to all Christians. In what follows, I want to query the representation of the anchoress as a solitary heroine, distinct from community. Julian's anchoritic life confined to a cell does not preclude her desire to instruct the Christian community and offer a message of hope. Although Julian is not directing this message at anchoresses in particular, the message is still applicable to an anchoritic audience because it is applicable to all Christians. *Showings*, therefore, is quite distinct from the anchoritic guides that are written for a target audience which is thought to be spiritually

²⁰ For evidence of intercessional prayers for the dead in medieval Norwich see Tanner, *Popular Religion in Norwich*, pp. 91-8.

more advanced than other forms of Christian living. Julian does not assume that her religious identity more advanced than any other, and she addresses all Christians accordingly.

As it stands today, the cell at St Julian's church in Norwich, destroyed at the Reformation, has been completely rebuilt on its near original site.²¹ The cell appears to be typical of a church anchoress; small and sparsely decorated with two narrow windows, one directed towards the altar in the church and the other looking out onto the street running along the South side of the building. In an early tenth-century rule for solitaries entitled *Regula solitariorum*, Grimlac recommends a living space twelve feet square.²² He also advises that the cell should contain three windows: one looking into the church to allow the recluse to observe the Eucharist, take communion and speak with their confessor; a second to act as an access point for the practical needs of the recluse, such as food and other material necessities; and a third window simply to let in light. The *Ancrene Wisse* offers more cautious advice concerning the windows in the anchorhold. The author encourages the anchoress to cover her windows with a curtain made of black cloth with a white cross.²³ The author then goes to some lengths to expound the dangers of a perforated cell. He associates visual access into and out of the cell with the moral well-being of the anchoress. Thus he warns his readers:

Lord Christ! People should shut fast every window of the house if they could shut death out of it [the death of the body] – and the anchoress will not enclose her eye windows against the death of the soul? – And they might as properly be called “ill-windows”; for they have done much ill to many an anchoress.²⁴

²¹ In 1942 the church was badly damaged in a bombing raid and was in danger of being demolished. The campaigning of Fr. Raybould, who recognized the importance of Julian's text, guaranteed the continued existence of the church and extensive restoration work. For a short account of the history of St Julian's church and some of its features see, Michael McLean, *St Julian's Church & Lady Julian's Cell: A Guidebook* (Norwich, [n.pub.], 1978).

²² See Clay, p. 79.

²³ *Anchoritic Spirituality*, p. 67.

²⁴ *Anchoritic Spirituality*, p. 70. Aelred too warns that the cell's windows are an opportunity for an anchoress to excite lustful thoughts. He states, ‘This wrecchidnes hath often be seen of hem that han ben enclosed, by the whiche the wyndowe hath be maad moor, that evereyther might come in or out to other, soo that atte last of a recluse or of an ancesse selle is made a bordel hous’. See *De Institutione Inclusarum*, p. 2.

The author of the *Ancrene Wisse* discusses the regulation of the windows to the anchorhold in a chapter devoted to the outer senses: sight (eye), speech (ear), taste (mouth), smell (nose), feeling (flesh) as the defences of the heart protecting the life of the soul.²⁵ Yet, it is sight, specifically the unwholesomeness of sight as lechery, which raises concern for the function and care of windows, physically and metaphorically. Indeed, on one level, the advice of the *Ancrene Wisse* is the reverse of Julian's education of the senses in *Showings*. Whereas Julian invites her audience to look with her at the edifying sight of the crucifix and Christ's Passion as an integration of bodily and spiritual seeing, the author of the *Ancrene Wisse* makes a clear distinction between the two. Continuing the metaphorical language of the eyes as windows, the author exhorts:

Truly our enemy, the warrior from hell, shoots more bolts at one anchoress, so I believe, than at seven and fifty ladies in the world. The battlements at the castle are her house's windows and she does not lean out of them lest she have the devil's bolts in her eyes when she least expects it, for he is always attacking. She keeps her eyes in, for once she is blinded she is easily felled; blind in the heart she is easily overcome, and with sin soon brought to the ground.²⁶

The references to the 'devil's bolts' are reminiscent, though in diabolic form, of the shafts of light spoken of in Platonic and Augustinian theories of sight, with which the eyes reach out to objects in the world and ultimately to beauty or God. However, the most dramatic difference in the *Ancrene Wisse* is the assumption that the bodily sight of the anchoress will occasion the victory of sin. There is little scope in these passages

²⁵ Using the story of King David and Bethsheba as an example, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* reminds the anchoresses how, looking out just once, the King's heart fled through 'the window of his eye', *Anchoritic Spirituality*, p. 66. An illumination on parchment of King David and Bethsheba that is meant to illustrate bodily and spiritual modes of perception can be found in the St Louis Psalter, c.1260. See Camille, *Gothic Art*, p. 8, fig. 1. See also Jocelyn Price, "'Inner" and "Outer": Conceptualizing the Body in *Ancrene Wisse* and Aelred's *De Institutione Inclusarum*' in *Medieval English Religious and Ethical Literature: Essays in Honour of G.H. Russell*, ed. by Gregory Kratzmann and James Simpson (Cambridge: Brewer, 1986), pp. 192-208.

²⁶ *Anchoritic Spirituality*, p. 70.

for the intentionality thesis that informs Plato, Augustine and Julian. That is to say, in Plato, Augustine and Julian, it is neither the faculty of sight nor objects themselves that are morally destructive, but the intention of the viewer viewing them. The *Ancrene Wisse*'s later example of King David looking on at Bethsheba bathing, as a misuse of bodily sight, is closer to a form of instruction on the viewer's intention towards an object, although the implication of moral destruction remains the same. In the example, Bethsheba is described as beautiful, but, the sight of her beauty, not an evil in itself (sight or beauty), occasions lustful thoughts in the King. However, the author of the *Ancrene Wisse*, does not make a distinction between bodily seeing, the intention of the seer and the edificatory nature of the object. Seeing with bodily eyes, as in the King David example, is an occasion for sin, and the object of sight, Bethsheba, is the cause. In a vivid portrayal of the temptation to gain a sight of 'objects' like Bethsheba, the *Ancrene Wisse* describes a woman who shows herself to men as one who uncovers a pit which is 'her fair face and her white neck and her light eyes, and her hand, if she holds it out in his sight'.²⁷ There is little scope in the *Ancrene Wisse* for the education of the senses, presupposing a sustained moral development. The heart, the seat of desire, released through the eyes does not act with discretion but betrays any anchoress who dares to see or be seen with bodily eyes, or, worse, the eyes of the devil. By contrast, the emphasis in Julian's 'eye to eye' encounter with the devil offers redemptive possibilities not obvious in the *Ancrene Wisse*. In *Showings*, Julian, already under demonic attack, seeks assurances from God that she will not be overcome. The presence of the devil's face, his close proximity, is not evidence of sin's victory but an occasion for Julian to reassert her faith in the constant care and loving gaze of God that will not allow any Christian soul to be overcome.

After Julian is shown the sixteenth revelation, she sinks into a spiritually arid state. Her sickness returns and she longs for bodily and spiritual consolation, bemoaning her 'weakness, wretchedness and *blindness*'.²⁸ Her lack of sight is a prelude to an assault

²⁷ *Anchoritic Spirituality*, p. 69.

²⁸ *Showings*, p. 310, my emphasis.

by the devil, an order of events that appears to match the *Ancrene Wisse's* model. Julian's own blindness, a lack of spiritual consolation, could represent an occasion for the victory of sin. However, Julian's account of her failing spiritual perceptions is not a causal factor in her assault by the devil. Rather, the focus in this sequence is on Julian's intention. She knows that she *should* have complete faith in the veracity of the visions, but her own suffering leads her to question their value. Thus, when a 'man of religion', figuratively resembling Julian's earlier visitor who presented her with the crucifix for her ease *in extremis*, comes to check on her state of health, Julian tells him she has been 'raving', having seen a crucifix come to life and bleed profusely.²⁹ When the man hears Julian's claim he becomes immediately serious and surprised. Julian responds by feeling great shame saying 'This man takes very seriously every word I could say, *who saw no more of this than I had told him*'.³⁰ It is easy to overlook the importance of this statement. As I claimed in previous chapter, Julian does not occupy a special position by being the recipient of visions. Indeed, Julian is taken seriously by a Christian who has not *seen* what she has seen, but responds immediately to what he is *told*.³¹ Having disowned the visions, Julian is reminded of their value by one of Christ's true lovers; the audience that Julian intends for what she is shown generally. At the beginning of *Showings*, Julian acknowledges that the visions, not significant in a phenomenological sense, mean more to those with greater love of God. Her interview with the 'man of religion' is a case in point.

In what follows, Julian wishes to make her confession but feels unable given her lack of belief in the visions. She makes it clear that, when she saw the visions first hand, it was her intention to believe them forever, but she adds 'like a fool, I let it slip from my mind'.³² In a state of unease, Julian falls asleep and is violently assaulted by the devil. She describes in vivid detail how the devil, who was set at her throat, began:

²⁹ *Showings*, pp. 310-11.

³⁰ *Showings*, p. 311, my emphasis.

³¹ Highlighting an oral exchange between speaker and listener might provide a further clue to Julian's mode of transmission in the context of pastoral care.

³² *Showings*, p. 311.

Thrusting his face, like that of a young man, long and strangely lean, close to mine. I never saw anything like him; his colour was red, like a newly baked tile, with black spots like freckles, uglier than a tile. His hair was red as rust, not cut short in front, with side-locks hanging at his temples. He grinned at me with a vicious look showing me his white teeth so big that it all seemed the uglier to me [...] he held me by the throat with his paws, and wanted to stop my breath and kill me, but he could not.³³

The devil is not a distant threat to Julian, firing bolts through the windows of the anchoress's cell. Julian is literally face to face with her adversary. She can describe in striking detail the features of his face and the viciousness of his look. However, Julian is adamant that the devil cannot kill her, even though she has discredited the value of the visions and is unable to make her confession. It is at this moment that Julian's spiritual eye is reopened and she is given a comforting sight. Julian is shown the soul as a 'blessed kingdom', and from the sight of the soul's spiritual condition she is able to judge that it is a fine city, and in the city sits:

Lord Jesus, true God and true man, a handsome person and tall, highest bishop, most awesome king, most honourable lord. And I saw him splendidly clad in honours. He sits erect therein the soul, in peace and rest, and he rules and guards heaven and earth and everything that is [...] The place which Jesus takes in our soul he will nevermore vacate, for in us is his home of homes and his everlasting dwelling.³⁴

A series of compelling contrasts run through the imagery and theological content of this passage. The handsomeness of Jesus blots out the ugliness of the devil. The peace and rest of Jesus's sitting counteracts the fervid, thrusting attentions of the devil's face. The stability of Jesus's habitation of the soul redeems Julian's hasty disavowal of the visions. The spiritual sight of Christ as guardian of the soul offers greater comfort and security than the *Ancrene Wisse's* image of a perforated cell representing the bodily

³³ *Showings*, pp. 311-12.

³⁴ *Showings*, p. 313.

senses (the guardians of the heart), which, if they are not properly policed, are likely to betray the anchoress. Seeing spiritually that Jesus is the guardian of the soul does not, however, remove Julian from a responsibility to educate the senses and refine her intentions.³⁵ After all, Julian's best intentions fail her at the precise moment her spiritual sight dimmed and she no longer enjoyed the consolation of the visions. Julian must constantly reinvest all the elements of her faith in God's care, if the visions are to guide and instruct. Having the consolation of spiritual sights is proven, vividly, to be insufficient to guarantee her intended belief, and her spiritual sight is only restored to show her that true consolation and security rests in Christ. In the human condition, weak, wretched and blind intentions are often compromised, but Jesus, the guardian of the soul, assures Julian that the human condition is neither blamed nor overcome because of it.

The sight of Jesus sitting in the human soul corrects Julian's earlier wavering. She is now able to assent to what she is shown in the vision. Just as the man who comes to visit Julian is assured by what he is told, it is Jesus who 'without voice and without opening his lips' *speaks* to Julian:

Know it well, it was no hallucination which you saw today, but accept and believe it and hold firmly to it, and comfort yourself with it, and you will not be overcome.³⁶

The words of Jesus fuse the revelatory value of the vision as a source of comfort with the physical crucifix itself, the stimulus and focus of the visionary sequence. This fusion becomes evident with further reflection on the role of her visitor as a symbolic

³⁵ The *Ancrene Wisse* describes spiritual sight as a special reward that is specific to anchoresses. The author marks a contrast between the misuse of the bodily senses and the reward of spiritual sight. He writes, 'This tasting and this knowing come from spiritual sight, from spiritual hearing, from spiritual speech, which those will have who forgo for God's love worldly hearing, earthly speech, fleshly sights. And after this sight now, which is dim here, you will have above – much more than anyone else – the clear sight of God's face, which is the cause of all gladness in the joy of heaven', *Anchoritic Spirituality*, p. 83. Julian elevates neither her own vocation as deserving reward nor the spiritual sight she receives as sufficient to forgo the strengthening of her faith. Spiritual sight does not overcome bodily sight in Julian's theology. Julian is not blamed for the limitation of bodily sight. It is precisely this understanding, engendered in faith and trust, which reopens her spiritual eye to reveal Jesus as the guardian of the soul.

³⁶ *Showings*, p. 314.

reintroduction of Julian's earlier visitor who presented her with a crucifix to look at in her final moments. In the first account, Julian experiences the cross as illuminated with a darkness forming behind it. She accepts it, unable to look away, and the visions begin. In the second instance, Julian symbolically refuses the cross by questioning the veracity of the visions. She is reconciled to the worth of the visions in language that recreates the image of a physical crucifix, as it could be handled or seen by any Christian 'holding' firm to it and taking 'comfort' in it. Again, these words of comfort return the audience to Julian's deathbed, clutching a cross in front of her face, believing she will die. To emphasize the mimetic dynamic of the cross and vision, when the devil returns for a second time in the following chapter, Julian states with greater confidence:

I set my eyes on the same cross in which I had seen comfort before, my tongue to speaking of Christ's Passion and repeating the faith of Holy Church, and my heart to clinging to God with all my trust and strength.³⁷

Again, Julian is reminded that it is the Passion that overcomes the devil. Furthermore, it is the visionary sequence itself, understood as a whole, which leads Julian to understand that although the vision would end, it is faith that maintains it as a comfort and protection. Acknowledging this comfort and protection, Julian declares that she has full faith in he who has revealed the vision and that her newly-tested faith is more capable of holding onto the vision, rejoicing in it and taking comfort in it.³⁸ Yet Julian is certain that the comfort of the vision, prefiguring the cross, is applicable generally. She encourages all her fellow Christians to take comfort in Jesus's assurance that 'You will not be overcome'.³⁹ It is with these words that Julian instructs her audience:

God wants us to pay special attention to these words, and always to be strong in faithful trust, in well-being and woe, for he loves us and delights

³⁷ *Showings*, p. 316.

³⁸ *Showings*, p. 317.

³⁹ *Showings*, p. 317.

in us, and so he wishes us to love him and delight in him and trust greatly in him, and all will be well.⁴⁰

Julian is not told, and does not instruct, that these words eliminate the possibility of spiritual tribulation and disquiet. Julian's understanding is acute enough to recognize that *just* believing that one will not be overcome is inadequate. The testing of faith is constant and must be developed in well-being and woe. What is constant is on the side of Christ, residing in the soul. Inconstancy is on our side, manifesting itself as intolerance and despair because the human condition lacks consolation. Julian learns that the divine assurances she receives should be adequate to assure constancy on our side, but they do not. It is revealed to Julian that faith will be tested and that it requires a dynamic of trust and strength in response. Julian does not trade on the idea of faith as certainty. Rather, she acknowledges that faith requires development; it requires a response to Christ who wants to be trusted and wants to be known. Such a response is inevitable in a life of faith that is never beyond tribulation but will never be overcome.

The redemptive message in Julian's instruction contrasts with the potentially overwhelming attentions of the devil described in the *Ancrene Wisse*. The rhetoric of the *Ancrene Wisse* exposes the anchoress to defeat both at the hands of the devil and her own misuse of her bodily senses. The cell, perforated by windows representing the sense of sight, offers little protection. The anchoress is committed not only to a physical isolation in her cell, but a further movement inward, away from the threat of her own bodily dispositions. I accept that the author's guidance in the *Ancrene Wisse* is specifically meant for those already living an anchoritic life. Thus, representations of the cell as the site of demonic attentions, outside threats and physical hardship act as rhetorical devices to guide the anchoress towards greater 'inward' spiritual growth.⁴¹ Having said that, in the *Ancrene Wisse*, the cell, or rhetorical representations of it, still functions to isolate the anchoress. Julian, by contrast, is constantly engaging in a

⁴⁰ *Showings*, p. 315.

⁴¹ See Nicholas Watson, 'The Methods and Objectives of Thirteenth-Century Anchoritic Devotion', in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*, ed. by Marion Glasscoe (Cambridge: Brewer, 1987), pp. 132-53.

movement outwards, towards the Christian community, irrespective of vocation. It is not clear to me why the sententiousness of the *Ancrene Wisse* should be a prerequisite for the guidance of anchoresses. Modern scholars tend to excuse the excesses of the *Ancrene Wisse* because it is addressing a specific audience that must be guided in a way that is inappropriate for those outside the anchoritic vocation.⁴² I provisionally agree with this sentiment only if it can be accepted that, unlike most medieval Christians, anchoresses always live in total isolation. It is precisely this point that I have reservations about. Julian is an example of an anchoress who engages didactically with the Christian community. Furthermore, her instruction and identity are distinctly pastoral and do not privilege her as either the recipient of visions or an anchoress. It is important to stress Julian's communal significance to support the idea that she was didactically active through instruction, communication and counselling others. In the next section, I will examine Julian's didacticism as God given instruction. I will contrast this didacticism with one scholar's justification for identifying the anchoress as a 'solitary heroine'.⁴³

2. Enclosure

In this section I want to examine Anne Savage's thesis that the anchoress was principally a solitary individual rather than someone, like Julian, who identified herself fully with her community. I am not suggesting that Savage would deny the established role of the anchoress as a spiritual guide and pastoral influence for Christians in need.⁴⁴ Rather, the difference between Savage's approach and the approach I am adopting in this chapter is one of emphasis. Whereas Savage may defend the role of the

⁴² See Watson, 'Methods and Objectives', p. 138.

⁴³ Anne Savage, 'The Solitary Heroine: Aspects of Meditation and Mysticism in *Ancrene Wisse*, the Katherine Group and the Wooing Group', in *Mysticism and Spirituality in Medieval England*, ed. by William F. Pollard and Robert Boenig (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997), pp. 63-83.

⁴⁴ For discussion and examples of anchorites and human intercourse see Clay, *Hermits and Anchorites*, pp. 128-45. See also Jean Leclercq, 'Solitude and Solidarity: Medieval Women Recluses' in *Medieval Religious Women*, ed. by Lillian Thomas Shank and John A. Nichols, Cistercian Studies Series; 72, *Peaceweavers*, vol. 2 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1987), pp. 67-83.

anchoresses as a spiritual guide in theory, in practice she argues that anchoresses enjoyed a special relatedness not to the community as such, but to Christ alone. For Savage, the didactic influence of the anchoress, actively engaging her community, is not a pronounced feature of her thesis. Rather, the anchoress's central activity is described as her bond to Christ formed through meditation practices that reflected her enclosure as a living crucifixion. Julian, however, positions herself within the Christian community as someone who continues to learn from a series of visions she has received. Furthermore, Julian identifies the value of this learning process and endeavours to project it beyond herself and the confines of her anchorhold. For Julian, the bond with Christ and the assurance that faith will be tested but not overcome, as demonstrated in the previous section, is a lesson applicable to all Christians. Julian's private devotions are of secondary importance to her determination to share the message of her visions with her fellow Christians. Whilst Savage's thesis is not representative of the role of the anchoresses as a spiritual guide to community, it does reveal a tendency to take this feature of the anchoritic life as a given without any sustained study of its implications. For example, why were the writers of the anchoritic guides so concerned to advise against contact with other Christians, characterising them, in places, as an unwelcome distraction?⁴⁵ Such questions cannot be ignored and address directly whether an enclosed anchoress was an active didactic influence in her community, or the passive recipient of unwanted attention.

Savage begins her article concerning the relationship between anchoritic practice and anchoritic literature by restating the appropriateness of the anchoritic guides for enclosed women. She claims:

However generally acceptable some of the works in question later became in modified form, it must be constantly kept in mind that the originally intended readers were already committed to the anchoritic life [...] Modern readers will find some of the material alien, even offensive. In

⁴⁵ See Section 4, subsection ii for an example from the from the *Ancrene Wisse* of contact with an anchoress that is caricatured as 'gossiping'.

the context of the lives lived by its readers and listeners, the same material makes much more sense.⁴⁶

Savage justifies the content of the anchoritic guides based on their specific relevance for a target audience. She assumes that the specificity of the anchoritic works is always applicable to anchoresses because what the guides describe matches the detail of the lives such women lived. There appears to be some confusion in this reasoning over the purpose of the anchoritic texts as a guide for anchoresses and their usefulness to scholarship as a description of what anchoresses actually did. This confusion is particularly evident in Savage's discussion of anchoritic solitude as a heroic act.

In order to stress the heroic nature of the anchoress's life of solitude, Savage turns to the female exemplars of the so-called *Katherine Group*: saints Katherine, Margaret and Juliana.⁴⁷ Referring to hagiographical accounts of the lives of these female martyrs, Savage begins to outline how their trials, torture and martyrdom act as a model for living an isolated existence. Savage proposes that:

Living the anchoritic life successfully required some inspiring models: feminine, isolated by their faith, alienated from their society [...] motivated solely by an intimate and special contact with God.⁴⁸

As I have attempted to demonstrate in the previous section, Julian challenges the identity of the anchoress as isolated in her faith and alienated from society. Rather, Julian finds her religious identity in the community of Christians who are all committed to the development of faith. Savage assumes that, because the medieval anchoress was physically separated from society, her identity and the deepening of her faith are distinct from society's interests. Indeed, the hagiographical accounts of the female saints do follow the heroic model for isolation in part. However, Savage is perhaps guilty of over emphasizing those details of the saints' lives that support her

⁴⁶ Savage, p. 65.

⁴⁷ See *Anchoritic Spirituality*, pp. 259-321. See also Bella Millett, 'The Saint's Lives of the Katherine Group and the Alliterative Tradition', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 87 (1988), 16-34.

⁴⁸ Savage, p. 67.

'heroic solitude' thesis. By concentrating on threatening heathen men, imprisonment and cruel torture, Savage is able to claim that these images would inspire an enclosed anchoress to strengthen her faith. Although the various external threats are important themes in the stories of the female saints, the stories themselves are multifaceted and can only be reduced to metaphors for enclosure superficially. Savage, for example, does not expand on the potential for conversion and redemption in the external threats that an anchoress may be presented with. Instead, the female saints are consistently given as examples of the purest faith in the face of circumstances that threaten to overcome them. However, in the story of Katherine, in particular, the strength of her faith is an example to others, inspiring their conversion and assuring their redemption.⁴⁹ Significantly, the themes of conversion and redemption in the Katherine story are set in a didactic context.⁵⁰ Katherine, a woman of great worldly learning, experiences her own conversion from worldly knowledge to a teaching that is divinely initiated. The main action of the story centres on a debate that ensues between Katherine and fifty scholars of reputation, gathered by the emperor Maxentius, in which Katherine's interrogators attempt to reason her out of her faith. Inspired by the simplicity of divine teaching, founded on Christ's name and Katherine's love of Christ, the scholars are redeemed and converted before being put to death by the emperor.

Surprisingly, Savage does not give any sustained attention to the details of Katherine's debate with the scholars. Yet, it is a story that reveals a great deal about the didactic initiative of the divine and the authority of the anchoress to instruct others. The story loses its impetus if it is interpreted narrowly as a model for anchoresses living in heroic solitude. After all, Katherine suffers the worst of her tortures, having converted the scholars who are set against her in debate. In the story, the scholars are requested to come quickly by Maxentius, who promises to reward them if they can

⁴⁹ For the full account of St Katherine's life in its anchoritic setting see *Anchoritic Spirituality*, pp. 259-84.

⁵⁰ Part of this didacticism is visual. In one of the versions of the saint's story, Ringbom notes when she is young a hermit gives Katherine a panel painting of the Virgin and child on which she is told to meditate. Significantly, after meditation and prayer focused on the panel Katherine receives a vision. See Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative*, p. 18.

‘overcome this proud spitfire’ Katherine.⁵¹ Under cross-examination, Katherine is asked to identify herself, the source of her learning and her capacity for sound argument. She replies by stating her name and her identity as the daughter of a King named Cost, an upbringing that had exposed her to worldly learning. However, Katherine goes on to say that she has forsaken the learning of worldly teachers because it encourages ‘idle boasting, is aimed at profit and worldly honour, and in no way helps one attain eternal life’.⁵²

Katherine’s renunciation of worldly teaching resonates in Julian’s wrestling with her need to address the Christian community as a teacher. In the first instance, in passages I have quoted above, Julian states clearly that the visions she receives are meant for all Christians. Julian is nothing outside her identity with all Christians and she addresses the Christian community out of love and not for her own profit. Thus Julian warns:

But God forbid that you should say or assume that I am a teacher, for that is not and never was my intention; for I am a woman, ignorant, weak and frail. But it is truly love which moves me to tell it [the visions] to you, for I want God to be known and my fellow Christians to prosper, as I hope to prosper myself, by hating sin more and loving God more. But because I am a woman, ought I therefore to believe that I should not tell you of the goodness of God, when I saw at the same time that it is his will that it be known.⁵³

Julian’s protest reveals both her wish not to be regarded as a teacher, in any conventional sense, and a need to address the Christian community that cannot be hindered by the fact she is a woman. Julian cannot identify herself as a conventional teacher because the teaching she has received must point towards the true teacher, Christ. Julian, like Katherine, renounces any worldly authority to instruct. As women,

⁵¹ *Anchoritic Spirituality*, p. 265. Fifty masters are selected by Maxentius and described as ‘the wisest in the world in all the arts a scholar should know and in the understanding of all worldly wisdom’, p. 266.

⁵² *Anchoritic Spirituality*, p. 266.

⁵³ *Showings*, p. 135.

Julian and Katherine, address their audience not as inhibited solitary females, but as women taught by God. Julian associates the task of the worldly teacher with her frail and weak womanhood. However, when Julian comes to tell the Christian community of God's goodness, she rejects the idea that her womanhood should act as an obstacle. Julian is authorized to address the Christian community where she renounces conventional teaching to be taught by divine initiative alone.⁵⁴ By exacting a transition from her own initiative to teach to the true teacher Christ, Julian shares in a tradition that has a long history in Christian education. Ritamary Bradley, for instance, has pointed out that Julian's identification of Christ as teacher or master can be traced back to the gospels.⁵⁵ As the tradition developed, Bradley argues that doctrinal interpretations and scriptural exegesis created a pedagogic symbol 'signifying that those who listen to the teacher, Christ, can become that which he teaches by word and in his person: the disciples can become one with him'.⁵⁶ Thus, Bradley contends that Julian identifies herself didactically with *all* Christians not as a teacher but as one being taught by divine initiative. Julian is shown a revelation of love, which admits no partiality. According to Bradley, Julian, identifying herself as a disciple of Christ's teaching, invites her audience to learn with her according to their capacity.⁵⁷ The visions received by Julian and presented to the Christian community are to be engaged in by an audience transfigured as disciples in conversation with Christ, the teacher.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ For an interesting discussion of the theme of female authority to speak of God see Grace Jantzen, "Cry out and Write": Mysticism and Struggle for Authority', in *Women, The Book and the Godly*, ed. by Lesley Smith and Jane H. M. Taylor (Cambridge: Brewer, 1995), pp. 67-76. With specific reference to Julian see also Felicity Riddy, "Women talking about the things of God": a Late Medieval sub-Culture', in *Women and Literature in Britain 1150-1500*, ed. by Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 104-26.

⁵⁵ Ritamary Bradley, 'Christ, The Teacher, in Julian's Showings: The Biblical and Patristic Traditions', in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*, ed. by Marion Glasscoe (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1982), pp. 127-42 (p. 131).

⁵⁶ Bradley, 'Christ, The Teacher, in Julian's Showings', p. 130.

⁵⁷ See Bradley, p.127. Bradley notes that Julian makes fifty-eight explicit references to teaching and learning in *Showings* see, p. 139, fn. 4.

⁵⁸ Interestingly, Bradley questions Julian's direct knowledge of the 'Christ as teacher' tradition as found in the works of William of St Thierry, Aquinas and Bonaventure amongst others. However, she argues that Julian would have come upon the concept in works of art, particularly illuminated Psalters see, pp. 135- 7.

In the Katherine story, the transition to a teaching that cannot be overcome by worldly learning is assured in a message that she receives from the archangel Michael, the angel of revelation. Katherine is told:

Hold courageously to what you have begun - because your lover and Lord, for whose precious name you have undertaken this battle, is always with you, here, there and everywhere, and will guard you well. He promises you that he will pour into your mouth flowing waters of wise words, which will quickly put your enemies to flight. And they will be so amazed by your wisdom that they will turn to Christ and come, through martyrdom, to the Lord in heaven.⁵⁹

Katherine renounces her worldly learning, and is rewarded instead with divine teaching, under divine initiative, with which to enter the debate. Katherine is bereft of her own devices during the interrogation; her words are divinely formed as part of a 'life-giving teaching' that defeats the learning of the scholars. Katherine tells her interrogators:

I declare and I understand and acknowledge no skill except one, which is true reason and wisdom, and the eternal salvation of all those who believe in him truly; that is, in Jesus Christ my Lord and lover.⁶⁰

At the conclusion of the debate, the fifty scholars are reconciled to divine teaching and are sent to their deaths by the enraged emperor Maxentius.

The story of St Katherine offers more than a model for heroic solitude. It presents a model of female piety that, though deeply learned in worldly terms, renounces worldly learning to be led by divine teaching. Indeed, Julian might have been inspired by such a model, although no definitive link can be made. Julian's theology sustains a commitment towards integrating the Christian community, which is identified as one in the love of God. Julian, like Katherine, struggles with her own capacity to transmit the

⁵⁹ *Anchoritic Spirituality*, p. 268.

⁶⁰ *Anchoritic Spirituality*, pp. 268-9

teaching she has received. Julian refers to herself as weak and frail, whilst Katherine is asked to have courage in the words of her lover. Although Julian wrestles with her capacity to communicate what she is shown in the visions, because it is a revelation of love she feels that she must communicate it to others.⁶¹ In the next section, I will examine the type of divine communication an anchoress might receive and how this might translate into a form of instruction. Discussing these matters reintroduces categories of worldly and divine authority, and the efforts of ecclesiastic authorities to regulate and discourage individuals, particularly women, from claiming divine authority on the basis of an assortment of supernatural experiences.

3. Discernment

In the first two sections of this chapter, I examined features of the anchoritic life that are commonly taken to count against the commerce of the anchoress with the outside world. In Section 1, I argued that Julian's encounter with the devil acts as a pedagogic device for understanding the testing of faith that any Christian may experience. The broad application of Julian's demonic encounter modifies the image of the anchoress as singularly involved in heroic conflict with demonic forces. The emphases in Julian and the *Ancrene Wisse* relating to the threat of the devil are quite distinct. Julian's test of faith offers the Christian community the pastoral assurance that God will not allow sin to overcome the human condition. In the *Ancrene Wisse*, the devil acts as a very real threat to the anchoress, forcing a movement inward, physically and mentally, away from the bodily affectations and the outside world through which the anchoress can be overcome. In Section 2, I challenged Anne Savage's description of the anchoress as a solitary heroine. I argued that Julian, like St Katherine, is

⁶¹ Rosalynn Voaden observes a tension in the writing of women visionaries who were commanded by God to communicate their revelations whilst commanded by men to remain silent. Voaden argues that the only solution for such women was to write, disembodied the word and association with women's corporeality in the process. In this thesis, I have left the question of Julian's writing activity open, stressing instead the possibility of visual communication set within a life of moral development. See Voaden, 'God's Almighty Hand', pp. 56-7.

compelled to address an audience, having renounced the profit of worldly learning for a divine didactic initiative that is profitable to all Christians. By considering the themes of anchoritic identity and enclosure, I have attempted to establish an active place for the anchoress in community and a role that carries a didactic significance. Accepting, without question, that anchoresses lived in total solitude, enjoying no commerce with the world, is a counter-position that deprives the anchoress of both the means and motivation to interact with her community.

In the present section, I want to combine the insights of Sections 1 and 2 with the concept of discernment. I will use the concept of discernment to address two issues. First, I will discuss discernment in the context of increasing regulation in the religious life of women. Second, suspiciousness of women religious becomes apparent in the technical use of discernment where it is applied to supernatural experiences. In the Middle Ages, women were regarded as spiritually and intellectually inferior to men and, therefore, more susceptible to bodily affectations such as visions. The notion of spiritually weak women, allied to an understanding of visions as bodily, increased concern that such phenomena might be a gateway for demonic as well as divine communication. The means and method of making distinctions between demonic and divine experiences was referred to as the discernment of spirits (*discretio spirituum*).

At first sight, Julian appears an ideal candidate for both modes of discernment. Julian describes herself as weak woman. She is also a recluse and a visionary who reports encounters with the devil. I have addressed some of these points already and argued that describing herself as weak and coming face to face with the devil were ways in which Julian established the general applicability of the teaching in her visions. I have referred to the general application of the teaching as a development or acceptance of a divine didactic initiative. The visions are not static and their value cannot be judged in the absence of a Christian life committed to greater moral development, leading to a greater love of God. The technical use of discretion in Julian's account is assigned to her audience to enable them to engage in the vision and

be directed to the fruits of Christ's teaching. In *Showings*, self-empowerment is relinquished by Julian to enable the divine didactic initiative to be enacted.

The thirteenth century saw a general shift towards greater regulation of the religious life.⁶² At the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), Pope Innocent III introduced legislation to accommodate his desire for well-regulated and supervised religious activity to counteract the threat of heresy.⁶³ Specific legislation for anchorites in England has its beginnings in this period of Church reform. The new legislation was diocesan and addressed post enclosure problems such as: hearing confessions; anchorites without licenses; and financial problems regarding endowments for the building of anchoritic cells. Archbishop Langton (d. 1228) wrote what are believed to be the earliest statutes for anchorites in an English diocese between 1213-14. In one directive, Langton legislates against any anchorite receiving a woman into his cell by night (in this case the legislation appears to be unambiguously addressed to male anchorites). Langton's statutes were used by Archbishop Poore of Salisbury as the model for the synodal statutes of Salisbury issued between 1217-19. The importance of such regulative effort in the period is commented upon by Ann Warren, who says 'The Salisbury statutes were destined to be among the most significant legislative decrees of medieval England, and they were widely copied in whole or in part by other episcopal legislators of the post-Fourth Lateran period'.⁶⁴ In the mid-thirteenth century, mandates concerning anchorites increased in their specificity. Between 1238 and 1244, the bishop of Salisbury, Robert Bingham, prohibited the building of new anchoritic cells. In addition, Bingham decreed that cells where the recluse had died were to be destroyed. In a Norwich statute issued between 1244 and 1257, bishop Walter Suffield considers the problem of anchorites conversing with parish chaplains. A section of the statute reads:

⁶² For an excellent study of religious reform and innovation in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries see Herbert Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages: The Historical Links Between Heresy, the Mendicant Orders, and the Women's Religious Movement in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century, with the Historical Foundations of German Mysticism*, trans. by Steven Rowan (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

⁶³ See Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*, pp. 58-67.

⁶⁴ Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons*, p. 58.

Sorrowing we note that our subjects have not observed our synodal statutes, that they have ensnared themselves and not feared that we would condemn them. Since, therefore, breaking our law, parochial chaplains are frequently chatting with anchorites in their own houses under the pretext of questioning them, their maid having been sent out in scandal to the church of God and with not a little cost of souls [...] We command also, that they [chaplains] expedite themselves quickly and talk with them [anchorites] chiefly concerning those things that pertain to health of souls.⁶⁵

Although the above passage uses the gender indeterminate *anachorita* in the original Latin, the feminine form *earundum* is the possessive used in each case, denoting *their* maids, *their* houses. Suffield's concern in this matter may be motivated by the fact that his niece Ela was an anchoress in the diocese. Warren argues that Suffield's statute marks a reaction to the growing number of anchorites in the thirteenth century, many of whom were women.⁶⁶ Of further interest is the assumption in Suffield's address that an anchorite, whilst not to be sought out on trivial matters and scandalized in the process, could still be approached at the window that turns to the church for dialogue on matters relating to the health of souls. Statutes such as Bingham's may not be regulating the misbehaviour of anchorites so much as taking measures to legislate against the misuse of an anchorite by certain members of the community. Warren brings this point out well in her observation that the growing number of enclosed women needed 'protection from their protectors'.⁶⁷

In spite of regulatory efforts to protect anchoresses, most enclosed women still relied on men for their devotional needs. Amongst Dominicans and Franciscans there was a degree of opposition to papal pressure for the orders to assume responsibility for

⁶⁵ See Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons*, p. 60.

⁶⁶ Warren's figures report more than a doubling of anchoritic cells from the twelfth to the thirteenth century. In the same period female numbers increase from forty-eight to one hundred and twenty-three compared to thirty to thirty-seven male anchorites (in this period there are fifty-six anchorites whose sex cannot be determined). For full tables see Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons*, p. 20 and p. 38.

⁶⁷ Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons*, p. 61.

women in their care.⁶⁸ At his death, Dominic (1170-1221) warned his followers against close communion with women, especially young women. It appears his advice was put into practice seven years after his death, when the general chapter of Dominicans prohibited the incorporation of nunneries into the order and censured brothers who offered pastoral care to women. In 1218, Cardinal Hugolino requested that St Francis act to house the growing number of women that hoped to replicate the example of the Poor Clares at St Damian. Francis refused Hugolino's request to house the women within the Franciscan order, denying any pastoral responsibility in the process. Francis, reversing his early support for women religious, infamously remarked 'God has taken away our wives, and now the devil has given us sisters'.⁶⁹

The example of Dominic and Francis demonstrates an uneasy relationship between the mendicant orders and the growing demand, sanctioned by the papacy, for women to be housed. The demand for strict enclosure is allied, in some cases, to male suspicion concerning the carnal weaknesses of women religious. Male suspicion of the feminine moral condition is reflected in the sententious tones of Marbod bishop of Rennes (1035-1123), who felt the need to remind the mendicant Robert of Arbrissel that:

These women are the disciples and the followers of your peregrinations; they say you have numbers of women distributed in guesthouses and inns, whom you have deputed to serve the poor pilgrims. Divine and human laws are both clearly against this association. Sin began with a woman and it is through her that death comes to us all. Without doubt, you cannot be chaste if you dwell amongst women.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ For further details of the care of women (*Cura Monialium*) in the Dominican and Franciscan orders see Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*, pp. 124-34. See also John Coakley, 'Gender and the Authority of Friars: The Significance of Holy Women for Thirteenth Century Franciscans and Dominicans', *Church History*, 60 (1991), 445-60.

⁶⁹ See Brenda M. Bolton, 'Mulieres Sanctae', in *Women in Medieval Society*, ed. by Susan M. Stuard (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976), pp. 141-58 (p. 150). See also John R.H. Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order from Its Origins to the Year 1517* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 35.

⁷⁰ See C.H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, (London: Longman, 1984), p. 179.

Robert takes Marbod's advice literally in his practice of *martyrium*, which he exercised for the sins of his youth. The practice required Robert to sleep amongst his female followers to demonstrate control over the body. The spiritual benefit of Robert's *martyrium* is predicated upon the concupiscent disposition of women that can only be resisted by holiness.⁷¹ In Robert's practice of *martyrium*, women acted as a convenient tool for his own spiritual self-expression.

Robert, like Dominic and Francis after him, was under pressure to house and care for his female followers. However, as the protestations of Marbod and the later founders of the mendicant orders demonstrate, to house and to care for women was to put oneself in spiritual peril. The sexual proclivities of women were an unquestioned threat to male sanctity. It is striking how silent the women are in exchanges that concern their spiritual welfare. The women that seek out a religious life with Robert, Dominic and Francis are represented passively as objects requiring spiritual guidance, not agents of their own spiritual development. It is, therefore, pertinent to ask, in a climate of increasing regulative zeal, what possibility existed for feminine spiritual agency. One possibility for women to gain a voice on spiritual matters was the receipt of a divine vision. If women could not speak directly to the world then maybe they could seek direct communication with God. The response of spiritual guides, instructors and confessors to reports of women receiving visions was the predictable use of censorship. Women were associated with their body and the bodily senses, not the censorial powers of reason and the abstracting potential of the intellect. In her recent study of the discernment of spirits, this point is made clearly by Rosalynn Voaden:

Medieval theology generally associated men with intellect, women with senses; men with intellect were superior, women and sense inferior, the spiritual lives of both sexes were shaped by these assumptions. The evidence of saints' *vitae*, theological writings, visionary accounts and mystical treatises, among other material, suggest that it was

⁷¹ See Rosalynn Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, p. 32. In a footnote, Voaden observes that no thought is given to the spiritual condition or physical safety of the women Robert sleeps amongst.

predominantly men who embraced mysticism and, for the most part, women who had visions.⁷²

The male intellect, liberated from the body, was not prone to errors as were the bodily senses associated with women. This is not an epistemic claim, in any strict philosophical sense. That is to say, it is precisely because women were morally categorized as carnal, lascivious and spiritually weak, they were prone to error. This association has little to do with questions concerning sensory perception and knowledge claims, and more to do with the cultural perception of women as carnal and the use of their senses to satisfy their carnal appetites. Therefore, women, constrained by a corrupting body, were prone to bodily visions that were naturally suspected of error. As a consequence, women visionaries required checks and methods for verifying their supernatural experiences. In contrast, male mystics, liberated from their bodies, could enjoy God in the intellect that is free from error. Following Augustine's pronouncement that in intellectual vision there is no possibility of error, Voaden argues 'This being so, it seems that there is little need for checks or safeguards; or for examination of the doctrinal correctness of the experience'.⁷³ However, women visionaries in the Middle Ages were suspected of error from the outset and needed to be saved from heresy. This has two interrelated consequences for a discussion of the technical uses of discernment. First, women visionaries could always be accused of error. The content of a vision, regardless of the appearance of orthodoxy, was suspected of error because a woman's fleshliness made her vulnerable to deception. Second, women visionaries, trapped in their body, were rarely afforded the agency to discern matters concerning their spiritual welfare. In most cases, it was men that decided the question of orthodoxy or error on the visionary's behalf. In what follows, I will examine how suspicions of the body, visions and demonic deception were articulated in anchoritic works of guidance. I will conclude this section by showing

⁷² Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, p. 9.

⁷³ Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, p. 15. See also Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, p. 197.

how Julian first demystifies the suspicious body and then verifies her visions by recognizing their applicability to all Christians and not herself alone.

In the anchoritic guides there are a number of passages that warn against a variety of inspirations. In the *Ancrene Wisse*, for example, the association is explicitly demonic. The author introduces his references to 'dreams' and 'visions' in a chapter entitled 'Temptations'.⁷⁴ In this chapter, a very clear link is made between the vocation of the anchoritic life and the intensity of temptation that such a life attracts. In an instructive metaphor, the author tells the anchoresses that, because they have climbed higher up the hill of the holy life than others, they are more exposed to the winds of temptation. The author adds, however, worse than exposure to temptation is an anchoress who feels no temptation. Such an anchoress, he explains, is being 'all too much and all too greatly tempted.'⁷⁵ Whatever the specificity of the *Ancrene Wisse's* advice for an anchoress who may feel various temptations as a result of enclosure, it is troubling that she is denied any agency in matters that concern her spiritual welfare. The author of the *Ancrene Wisse* feels it is necessary to warn the anchoress that even when she feels she is not being tempted, she almost certainly is being tempted. This proviso is set in the context of a discussion on spiritual pride. The underlying theme of the discussion is that no anchoress should feel that she is beyond temptation.⁷⁶ However, the author crudely infers from this that an anchoress who feels she is not being tempted is an anchoress who believes she is beyond temptation. In the battle against temptation, the anchoress is devoid of any capacity to decide matters of her own spiritual disposition for herself. It is not surprising therefore that the *Ancrene Wisse's* advice concerning visions is strongly censorial, leaving no room for questioning the value of any such experience. *All* visions are delusory and the work of the devil. Thus the author warns the anchoress:

⁷⁴ *Anchoritic Spirituality*, pp. 114-58.

⁷⁵ *Anchoritic Spirituality*, p. 114.

⁷⁶ As seen above, this is clearly not the case for Robert of Arbrissel who obviously felt that he was beyond temptation and used his women followers to prove it.

So the traitor of hell makes himself into a true advisor - never trust him! David calls him *demonium meridianum* (Psalm 90.6), “the bright shining devil”; and St Paul *angelum lucis* (2 Corinthians 11.14), that is, “an angel of light” for as such he often disguises himself and shows himself to many. Regard any vision you may see, whether in dreams or waking, as mere delusion, for it is nothing but his guile.⁷⁷

The passage above is followed by a collation of stories from the *Vitae Patrum*, which describes holy men that have been deceived either by the devil in the form of a woman, or deception leading to moral transgression with a woman. It remains unquestioned throughout the sequence of temptations that the anchoress is an object of demonic temptation. The anchoress can resist the devil’s wiles, but she cannot distinguish true from false spiritual states.⁷⁸ Thus the *Ancrene Wisse* instructs the anchoress to forsake all such phenomena to avoid falling into error.

In the *Myroure of Recluses* the emphasis is less prohibitive, concentrating instead on an exposition of spiritual doctrine. The author recommends:

The seyntes weryn nat woont to receyue of God vysyons or reuelacions of hyd þinges – of God or of heuenly þinges or of þinges þat scholden come or falle – but it were oper in slepyng, whan þat þe vsage of þe wyttis ys wipdrawen for a tyme, or as þat yt were in a rauisschyng, when þe heart or þe þouzt considereth nat þe sensible þinges standinge or beyng oboute.⁷⁹

The author of the *Myroure* rejects visions and revelations because they are bodily affectations. When the body is excited, the author argues, there is a tendency to withdraw the mind from good thoughts. The body is associated with visions and revelations, which are an imposition to the virtuous soul. It is interesting that the

⁷⁷ *Anchoritic Spirituality*, p. 130. The *Ancrene Wisse* also advises against ‘belief in dreams’ and ‘deceptive revelations’, p. 125 and p. 146 respectively.

⁷⁸ For comparison see George Mavrodes, ‘Real v. Deceptive Mystical Experiences’ in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. by Steven T. Katz (London: Sheldon Press, 1978), pp. 235-58. Mavrodes replaces the devil with a Cartesian ‘Evil Genius’ to demonstrate the impossibility of verifying the divine origin of a mystical experience.

⁷⁹ *The Myroure of Recluses*, pp. 16-17.

Myroure retains sleep as a viable mode of receiving visions, as well as a ravishing of the five wits when they are withdrawn from sensible things. The reference to sleeping is not explicitly negative in this context. The *Myroure* author is more concerned with the misuse of the wits in a waking state, cluttering the soul with worldly tastes, sights and sounds.⁸⁰ To counteract any worldly intrusions, the recluse is instructed to employ the wits in prayer, meditation and reading in the pursuit of a contemplative life. The emphasis is placed on disciplining speech, sight and thought to concentrate on God alone. The tone of the *Myroure* is less sententious than the *Ancrene Wisse*. The former is more prosaic in the instruction that it offers, assuming that it is addressing recluses living a perfect life. The *Ancrene Wisse's* tones are more censorial. Although the perfection of the anchoress's vocation is also accepted in the *Ancrene Wisse*, the author still endeavours to regulate and censure his anchoritic audience to ensure that their life is lived perfectly. In contrast, when the *Myroure* author writes about temptation, the spiritual condition of the recluse is a relevant factor in the advice he offers. The author recognizes the spiritual perfection of his audience and limits himself to 'prudently inform' the recluse where there is a possibility of temptation:

Now be yt no displesaunce to 3ow þat I expresse þus vn honest þinges in my wrytynge to folk of clene & perfyt lyf, ffor where is possibilite of tempacioun, þer ys a prudent enformynge of resistence or wiþstondynge ful necessarie & meedful.⁸¹

In *The Form of Living*, Richard Rolle refers to the life of anchoritic solitude as one befitting the receipt of revelations. He says:

The state þat þou art in, þat is solitude, þat is most able of al othre to reuelaciouns of þe Holy Goste. For whan Seynt Iohn was in þe Ile of Pathmos, þan God shewed to hym his pryuetees. The goodnesse of God

⁸⁰ *The Myroure of Recluses*, p. 13.

⁸¹ *The Myroure of Recluses*, p. 14.

hit is, þat he comforteth ham wondrefully þat hath no confort of þe world.⁸²

Like the *Ancrene Wisse* and *Myroure* authors, Rolle also sets the discussion of revelations in the context of temptation and the technicalities of discernment. Once more, the image of the devil as an angel of light is used to emphasize the danger of being deceived. To illustrate this point, Rolle recites the story of a female recluse ‘a good womman’ of whom it was written ‘þe yuel angel oft tymes appered in þe fourme of a good angel, and seid þat he was comen to brynge hir to heuyn’.⁸³ The story allows Rolle to expand on the practical measures that the recluse should take when faced with the possibility of deception. Rolle reports that the ‘good womman’ of the story consults her ‘shrift-fadyre’ or confessor, who counsels her to request a sight of St Mary from the angel and to say an ‘Ave Maria’ if her request is granted. The story is concluded when the evil angel shows the recluse ‘þe fairest body of a womman þat myght be’.⁸⁴ When the recluse, on her knees, says ‘Ave Maria’, as she was instructed, the apparition vanishes and she is never tempted again. The emphasis in Rolle’s story of deception and temptation is on the victory of the solitary. Rolle like the *Myroure* author excuses himself for having to instruct on the matter of the devil’s temptations, but feels that he must err on the side of caution. Rolle does not seem to think that temptation is inevitable in the life of a recluse, unlike the author of the *Ancrene Wisse*. Neither does Rolle suggest that discernment is impossible for the recluse, although he does stress the need for the spiritual counsel of a male confessor and the efficacy of his own teaching.⁸⁵ The agency of the recluse in matters of discernment is still limited to a degree in *The Form of Living*, but as in the *Myroure* the tone is more cautious than censorial. Thus, Rolle explains, summarizing his story of the tempted female recluse:

⁸² *The Form of Living*, p. 6.

⁸³ *The Form of Living*, p. 7.

⁸⁴ *The Form of Living*, p. 7.

⁸⁵ *The Form of Living*, p. 9, lines 264-5. For commentary on the possibility of dialogue between male confessors and their female penitents see Elizabeth A. Petroff, *Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 139-57. See also Brian Patrick McGuire, *Holy Women and Monks in the Thirteenth Century* (Toronto: Peregrina Publishing, 1992).

This I sei, nat for I hoop þat he shal haue leue to tempt þe in þis maner, bot I wol þat þou be warre, if any such temptacioun befalle [þe], sleypyngge or wakyngge, that þou trow nat ouer sone til þou knowe þe soth.⁸⁶

The balance in the *Myroure* and Rolle's *The Form of Living* between the acknowledged spiritual purity of the recluse and the instruction being offered is also present in Hilton's *Scale*.⁸⁷ However, Hilton, too, rejects visions and revelations as affectations of the body. His criteria is quite exacting, rejecting as he does, in a similar way to the *Myroure* and Rolle, anything that is not true contemplation of God:

By this that I have seid myght thu sumwhat undirstonde that visiones or revelaciouns of ony maner spirite, bodili apperyngge or in ymaggynyngge, slepand or wakand, or ellis ony othere feelinge in the bodili wittes maad as it were goosteli; either in sownyngge of the eere, or saveryngge in the mouth, or smellyngge in the nose [...] or onythinge that mai be feelyd bi bodili wit, though it be never so comfortable and lykande, aren not verili contemplacion; ne thei aren but symple and secundarie though thei be good.⁸⁸

Hilton repeats the warning of the *Ancrene Wisse* author and Rolle that bodily feelings may be the work of a 'wikkid angel' transfigured into an angel of light. However, Hilton does concede that such feelings are both good and evil. In so doing, he is following the scriptural lesson of 1 John 4. 1-3. The lesson explains that one should not assent to every spirit without first testing whether or not it is from God. Nevertheless, the risk of being deceived is too great even for Hilton. All visions and revelations are to be treated with the greatest caution because of the devil's expertise in representing in 'bodili felinge' the works of a good angel. The problem that Hilton foresees does not concern those who are expert in discerning good from evil spirits, but those who have

⁸⁶ *The Form of Living*, p. 7.

⁸⁷ *Scale*, p. 31.

⁸⁸ *Scale*, p. 40.

never had any such experience and, as a result, may be deceived. Hilton stops short of the *Ancrene Wisse's* scepticism, distinguishing, instead, between those who are proficient in the use of discernment techniques and those who may be unskilled in the practice of such techniques.

Having made a distinction between more and less experienced contemplatives, Hilton gives a detailed lesson on the discernment of spirits. Although he shows concern for the affectations of the body, Hilton's instructions for discernment centre on the consequences of receiving bodily showings and feelings. The advice of the *Scale* is quite simple. The anchoress is instructed to suspect that the enemy is responsible for any feeling that draws her away from prayer, the desire for virtues and beholding Jesus with her heart.⁸⁹ However, any manner of feeling that increases the anchoress's devotion in prayer, love, and the desire of virtues 'bi thise tokenes may thowe thanne that it is of God, maad bi the presence and the touchinge of the good angil'.⁹⁰ In a similar way to Julian, the value of showings and touchings is balanced against the practice of Christian living. In Hilton's case, he is addressing, with greater specificity than Julian, the state of contemplative living. Thus, Hilton is compelled to offer some technical instruction on discernment of spirits to initiates of the contemplative life who may receive showings or touchings. Julian's visionary theology addresses all Christians, not contemplatives exclusively.⁹¹ Julian discerns the value of the visions within the Christian life as a whole. Any Christian that desires the greater love of God and love of her fellow Christians can benefit from what Julian was shown.

The *Ancrene Wisse*, *Myroure*, *The Form of Living* and *Scale* all instruct against visions and revelations. However, upon close reading, it becomes apparent that the motivations of each author for rejecting such experiences are quite different. All four guides share a general suspicion of body, which is articulated with greater or lesser intensity. The *Myroure*, *The Form of Living* and *Scale* exclude much of the rhetoric of

⁸⁹ *Scale*, p. 41.

⁹⁰ *Scale*, p. 42.

⁹¹ The Short Text does address specifically 'every man and woman who wishes to live contemplatively', as well as a community of Christian, pp. 131-2. All addresses to a discernible group of contemplatives are omitted from the Long Text.

temptation that preoccupies the *Ancrene Wisse* author. The *Myroure* author recognizes both the need for instruction where there is any possibility of temptation and the purity of the life the recluse is living. Rolle's *The Form of Living* heralds the victory of the anchoress who is plagued by the devil's temptations. The *Scale* instructs those who are initiates to the contemplative life, acknowledging the proficient use of discernment amongst experienced contemplatives. Neither one of the later guides creates the epistemological quandary evidenced in the earlier *Ancrene Wisse*. In the *Ancrene Wisse*, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the author denies the anchoresses any spiritual agency because of his stereotyping of women as carnal and spiritually weak. The problem is not that the *Ancrene Wisse* instructs that there is the possibility of error when discerning visions and revelations - all four guides instruct in this way. The problem is, rather, that in the *Ancrene Wisse* there is no possibility of the anchoress being free from error. The *Ancrene Wisse* denies the anchoress the ability to discern matters of the truth and falsity of visions and revelations.

In *Showings*, the focus is continually shifting from Julian to her fellow Christians, and from a first person perspective in the human condition to a divine perspective revealed as a revelation of love. This shifting of focus and perspective allows Julian to modify the idea that it is the visionary who must be able to discern true from false visions. According to Julian, the human condition, male or female, is always prone to error and inconsistency. What is true and constant is God's love. In a striking passage that reveals the constancy of God's love and our fear of the human condition, Julian juxtaposes the process of defecation with God's love for creation. Julian reasons that if the body is loved by God in all its natural faculties, and loved constantly, our fear and suspicion, from the perspective of the human condition, is unfounded. In striking detail, Julian explains:

A man walks upright, and the food in his body is shut in as if in a well-made purse. When the time of his necessity comes, the purse is opened and then shut again, in most seemly fashion. And it is God who does this, as it is shown when he says that he comes down to us in our humblest

needs. For he does not despise what he has made, nor does he disdain to serve us in the simplest natural functions of the body.⁹²

Reflecting on the paradoxical imagery in the example acts as a means for Julian to recommend, once again, a turn to a divine didactic initiative. Julian makes a clear statement that ‘no created being can know how much and how sweetly and how tenderly the Creator loves us’.⁹³ The inconstancy of the body, its morally suspect status, is reformed in *Showings* by the depth of the Creator’s love of which we are ignorant. By contrast, in the technical applications of discernment discussed above, the suspiciousness of the body is unquestioned. Therefore, the bodiliness of visionary experience justifies, according to the logic of discernment, the need to distinguish comforting affections of demonic origin from true divine consolations. What is true and comforting for Julian, and recommended to all Christians, is the depth of God’s love of which we are ignorant. This point is relevant to Julian’s own response to her encounters with the devil. In Section 1, I argued that the attempts of the devil to overcome Julian are presented as a lesson in faith that will be tested but not overcome. This is an important shift of emphasis because, whilst Julian, like all Christians, is the agent of her strengthening faith, she is not the agent that overcomes the devil’s attentions. The devil is overcome by the ‘strength of the Christ’s Passion’.⁹⁴ Julian’s consolation is faith, which she must accept and hold to firmly. In the sequence where Julian is assaulted by the devil, not even the vision remains:

In all this blessed revelation, our good Lord gave me to understand that the vision would pass, and it is faith which preserves the blessed revelation through God’s own good will and his grace; for he left me neither sign nor token whereby I could know it [...] I believe that he is our saviour who revealed it, and that what he revealed is of the faith, and therefore I love it, and I am bound to this, always rejoicing, by everything

⁹² *Showings*, p. 186.

⁹³ *Showings*, p. 186.

⁹⁴ *Showings*, p. 316.

which he intended, and by words which follow next: Hold firmly to it and comfort yourself with it and trust in it.⁹⁵

What is constant in Julian's response to the vision is consistent with her life of faith. Discernment in *Showings* is a category that recommends the security of faith by trusting and rejoicing in it. The epistemological demands on Julian are set within the fluctuations of a Christian life. Like the members of the Christian community, Julian shares in these fluctuations and it is that which allows her to identify fully with her fellow Christians. Discernment, therefore, is not applied to the vision directly in *Showings*. For Julian, deciding whether the vision is of divine or demonic origin is not a process that can proceed outside the trials and tribulations of a spiritual life. Phenomenologically, constancy is not a feature of the vision. Julian is told the vision will pass without trace of its origin.⁹⁶ The comfort and value of the vision must be established beyond any privileged access afforded to Julian. Again, the emphasis shifts back to the divine didactic initiative, the true teaching by which God wants to be known. In the Seventy-First Chapter of the Long Text, the chapter following the description of Julian's encounter with the devil, Julian explains that faith is opposed to the blindness of the human condition and its spiritual enemies and we are taught in a variety of ways how to come to know God. Thus, Julian counsels on the value of faith as a constant feature of Christian living that is always turned and sensitive to true teaching:

And therefore, however he teaches us, he wants us to perceive him wisely, and sweetly receive him, and to keep ourselves faithfully in him. For above the faith no goodness is kept in this life, as I see it; and beneath the faith there is no health of soul.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ *Showings*, pp. 316-17.

⁹⁶ See Debra Scott Panichelli, 'Finding God in the Memory: Julian and the Loss of the Visions', *The Downside Review*, 104 (1986), 299-317. Panichelli explains that Julian learns the lesson of sin through an integration of her understanding of her situation in the world, in which she sins and suffers, and the eternal perspective of salvation that denies sin. The lesson of these integrating perspectives secures the value of the vision in Julian's religious life. Without this integration the lesson of the visions is lost.

⁹⁷ *Showings*, p. 318. The editors note that 'health' could be replaced by 'help' in the final sentence of the passage. I favour this translation as it stresses the instructional, pragmatic purpose of Julian's turn to faith, rather than speculating on the condition or 'health' of the soul.

Discernment of the vision is indistinguishable from faith for Julian, a lesson she recommends to the Christian community. Issues of bodily affectation and female weakness are supplanted by the concerns of faith, through which God teaches and wants to be perceived wisely and sweetly. What is constant in the vision is on God's side. It is the task of faith to attempt to hold firmly to it. In the final section of this chapter, I will examine three didactic modes of exchange that appear in the anchoritic guides. The modes of exchange illustrate the way in which Julian, as an anchoress, could be integrated with the religious community. The didactic nature of the exchange presented in the anchoritic guides is notable for its pragmatism and accessibility to all Christians attempting to hold firm to God in faith.

4. Anchoritic Learning

In the previous three sections, by following two approaches, I attempted to demonstrate, that Julian was actively engaged in her community. One approach sought to challenge scholarly perceptions of the anchoress as a solitary heroine. The other related approach attempted to establish how Julian didactically engaged with her community. Up to this point, I have argued that it is important to recognize a distinction between regulative ideals for anchoresses and suppositions regarding what anchoresses actually did. Where this distinction is not made it is easy to assume that all anchoresses lived as solitary heroines, rather than occupying a role in the community. Of course, many anchoresses probably did live in total solitude. Julian on the other hand consistently refers her visions to the Christian community without distinguishing herself as an anchoress or as a visionary. Julian also recognizes that what she is shown must be transmitted to all Christians for their comfort and edification. The need for transmission requires Julian, prohibited from a recognized teaching role, to revise

conventional ideas about teaching and spiritual instruction.⁹⁸ Following the tradition of St Katherine, Julian identifies herself with Christ and God as true teachers. Julian, like all Christians, is subject to a divine didactic initiative that instructs and prompts in a dynamic that is the life of faith. Julian, therefore, is not teaching in a conventional sense, rather, she is being taught. In Julian's words:

For our faith is opposed in various ways by our own blindness and our spiritual enemies, internal and external. And therefore our precious lover helps us with spiritual light and true teaching, in various ways, from within and from without, by which we may know him. And therefore, however he teaches us, he wants us to perceive him wisely, and sweetly and receive him, and keep ourselves faithfully in him.⁹⁹

Her life of faith is a life of learning; she is sensitive to the fluctuations of such a life but certain that it is a life lived in the constant loving gaze of God. The visions, a contingent part of the life of faith, mimetically play out the highs and lows of loving a loving God. As I have maintained throughout the thesis, the visions are only didactically meaningful where they are fixed in a life of moral development and deepening faith. To conclude this chapter, I will demonstrate that activities such as looking, listening and loving acted as a means of learning for anchoresses within a life of faith.

Recently, Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker has reconsidered the educational practices of anchoresses and recluses.¹⁰⁰ Her findings support many of the observations that I have made above with regard to Julian's method of learning by a divine didactic initiative.

⁹⁸ Although technically women's teaching activity was restricted in the Middle Ages, devotional works continued to be produced for a lay and enclosed female audience. Possession of such works seems to have led to a tradition of women taking responsibility for their child's education. See Susan Groag Bell, 'Medieval Women Book Owners: Arbiters of Lay Piety and Ambassadors of Culture', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 7 (1982), 742-68. See also Ann M. Hutchison, 'Devotional Reading in the Monastery and in the Late Medieval Household' in *De Cella in Seculum: Religious Secular Life and Devotion in Late Medieval England*, ed. by Michael G. Sargent (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1988), pp. 215-27.

⁹⁹ *Showings*, p. 318.

¹⁰⁰ Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, 'The Recluserium as an Informal Centre of Learning', in *Centres of Learning: Learning and Location in Pre-Modern Europe and the Near East*, ed. by Jan Willem Drijvers and Alasdair A. MacDonald (Leiden: Brill, 1995), pp. 245-54.

Mulder-Bakker observes that a number of anchoresses and recluses were named as educators. The *Vita* of the thirteenth-century recluse Yvette of Huy, for instance, records that in her instruction of named and unnamed individuals she was 'like a mother with her daughters, a teacher with her pupils'.¹⁰¹ Hildegard of Bingen, who had a reputation for great learning, was instructed by her aunt and fellow recluse Jutta of Sponheim; Eve of Liège and Juliana of Cornillon, Marie D'Oignies and the anchoress Hedwig, Alijt Bake and the Utrecht recluse are all given as further examples of mutual instruction and edification amongst pairs of female solitaries. Mulder-Bakker's initial findings encourage her to investigate whether the form of instruction anchoresses and recluses engaged in was always a private matter or had a broader, communal significance. She asks:

Should we further imagine these schools as a kind of internal school, like those which monasteries and convents used to have, where young novices were trained by older monks or nuns to learn the profession? This is how we usually tend to interpret the evidence, the old recluse transmitting her knowledge to her servant and subsequent successor. Or is it better to understand the anchorage as an external school, a cultural and educational centre for the faithful in the town?¹⁰²

In the figure of another thirteenth-century recluse from Magedeburg, Margaret the Lame, Mulder-Bakker sets out tentatively to demonstrate the educational significance of the recluse for the community. She notes that Margaret describes herself being taught by Christ and his Mother through the medium of visions and conversations. This leads Mulder-Bakker to speculate that, whilst Margaret was not formally educated, she probably read in her cell in addition to listening to preachers and visitors. This type of personal learning reflects in Margaret's own method of instruction, which is centred on

¹⁰¹ Hugh of Floreffe, *The Life of Yvette of Huy*, trans. by Jo Ann McNamara (Toronto: Peregrina, 1999), p. 119.

¹⁰² Mulder-Bakker, p. 247. It is worth noting that Mulder-Bakker is aware that the question she is asking is a difficult one. Nevertheless, she stills examines the educational activities of anchorites and recluses, rather than ruling out such activity on the basis of prohibitive passages in the anchoritic guides. Mulder-Bakker starts her paper by quoting Aelred's warning against anchoresses turning their anchorholds into classrooms. See *De Institutione Inclusarum*, pp. 3-4.

lists and recitals such as the three pains of Christ, the seven pains of Hell, the five qualities of good prayer and the ten mercies of God. In short, Margaret instructed, under the tutelage of Christ and his Mother, using images and repetitive lists that Mulder-Bakker insists ‘people without formal education love to hear’.¹⁰³ Furthermore, Mulder-Bakker argues that the method of personal instruction Margaret uses gives her an advantage over the impersonal instruction of the priesthood. Margaret could gain people’s trust and confidence with instruction based on visions, ecstasies and infused wisdom.¹⁰⁴ The emphasis in this form of instruction was on the fostering of personal relationships, rather than rationalizing the Christian faith.¹⁰⁵ Mulder-Bakker points out:

These women were in a position of authority in the town, they were central figures in the group of faithful around them [...] They had an open eye, they made investments, so to speak, in social relations: they tied people together, inspired and uplifted them [...] Thanks to their own lay background these recluses were capable of giving the information that people needed in formats which the latter could understand.¹⁰⁶

The anchoress or recluse, Mulder-Bakker argues, was a different type of teacher. The lessons of scripture and its interpretation were brought to life through personal and pastoral investment in the community’s spiritual health. Mulder-Bakker concludes that the *Vita* of Margaret could be used as a textbook. This may be literally true for the community that surrounded her. Margaret’s ‘life’, a combination of learning, teaching and pastoral care was an example to others, a textbook brought to life.

To complete this chapter, I will examine three further didactic modes that appear in the guides written for anchoresses. The advice the guides give on looking, listening and loving, set in a regulative framework, illustrate ways in which anchoresses, without a

¹⁰³ Mulder-Bakker, p. 250.

¹⁰⁴ Mulder-Bakker, p. 251.

¹⁰⁵ I am not suggesting that these women were incapable of rationalizing the Christian faith. Rather, like St Katherine and Julian, they had renounced worldly learning to be taught according to a divine didactic initiative.

¹⁰⁶ Mulder-Bakker, p. 251. See also Rosof, ‘The anchoress in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries’, p. 135.

formal education, could begin to learn. I am not suggesting that the guides intentionally represent looking, listening and loving as modes of learning. Indeed, in what follows, I want to demonstrate that Julian's understanding of these modes of learning modifies some of the more restrictive pronouncements of the guides. For Julian, looking, listening and loving are interconnected ways of learning and instructing within the very fabric of an anchoritic life that is bound up in the spiritual well-being of the community.

i. looking

Looking understood within the practice of meditation had strong devotional as well as regulatory significance in the anchoritic guides. Meditative writing in English in the form of Old English Poetry, pre-dating Anselm's influential *Book of Prayers and Meditations*, formed part of a rich vernacular tradition that encouraged the use of vivid imagery for devotional purposes.¹⁰⁷ In her article on the Old English origins of the English meditative tradition, Anne Savage underlines two points.¹⁰⁸ First, she suggests that there is little formal distinction between written meditations and prayer. Second, she argues that meditation should not be understood as an exclusively monastic practice. Although Anselm's contribution had a lasting effect on the monastic meditative tradition, Savage notes that the series of prayers and meditations he composed was originally dedicated to a laywoman.

An example of detailed meditative instruction for a female recluse can be found in Aelred's *De Institutione Inclusarum*. The final three chapters of Aelred's rule for recluses recommend meditation on things past, present and future as a way of increasing love for God.¹⁰⁹ Aelred's instruction recommends meditation as an ordered

¹⁰⁷ *The Prayers and Meditations of St Anselm*, trans. by Sister Benedicta Ward (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).

¹⁰⁸ See Anne Savage, 'The Place of Old English Poetry in the English Meditative Tradition', in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*, ed. by Marion Glasscoe (Cambridge: Brewer, 1987), pp. 91-110.

¹⁰⁹ It should be noted that what I am presenting as three discrete didactic modes are, in fact, integrated activities in the deepening of faith.

activity. He begins by identifying two things that belong to the practice of loving God: the desire of the soul and the ‘worching’ (work) of the body. The former, Aelred explains, lies in ‘þe swetnes of gostly loue’.¹¹⁰ The latter, the labour of the body, lies in the recluse’s way of living, which includes fasting, prayer, poverty and reading in silence. According to Aelred, it is not the labour intensive activity of reading that nourishes the desire of the soul, but holy meditation on past, present and future events. As I discussed in Chapter I, the movement from past memorial events to present practice and future moral expectations is a distinctive feature of Aristotle’s theory of perception and memory. Although the content of Aelred’s rule is strictly theological, many ideas found in Aristotle echo in the meditation exercises of *De Institutione Includarum*. According to Aelred, if the recluse can vividly engage with past events, biblical scenes and the life of Christ, nourishing the soul’s desire for love of God, she will develop a healthier self-perception in the present. Through meditation on things past, present and future the recluse can develop the surety that Christ’s Passion still sustains her in the present in addition to her worthiness in the sight of Christ at the end of her life. The visual metaphors are pronounced in the meditative sequences which Aelred recommends, combining the recluse’s perception of others, her self-perception and how she will be perceived in the sight of God.

The first image the recluse is instructed to meditate on is the Annunciation. The instruction includes the visual and verbal participation of the recluse, who is told:

Abyde there awhile and thou shalt se hou the aungel cometh and gretith hir, seieing thus: *Aue Maria gracia plena, Dominus tecum*. Al-though thow be astonished of this seconde comynge, natheles dresse the vward and grete oure Lady with the aungel and saye, *Aue Maria*.¹¹¹

Aelred insists upon the repetition of the speech act, instructing the recluse to rehearse the same speech again and again. In the set-piece meditations that follow, the recluse is

¹¹⁰ *De Institutione Includarum*, p. 17, line 687.

¹¹¹ *De Institutione Includarum*, p. 18.

told to follow the Virgin to Bethlehem, to be present at the birth of Christ and follow him through pivotal events in his ministry. The most potent imagery for meditation on things past is saved for the Passion. It is Aelred's instruction and the precision of his Passion imagery that can be fruitfully compared to *Showings*. Many of the features Julian sees in the dying Christ, Aelred places chronologically in the events preceding the Crucifixion, as well as the Crucifixion itself. In the palace where Christ stands before Pilate, for instance, Aelred encourages the recluse to look at Christ's face, despite the fact that maintaining the sight is difficult:

Se than hou his face is buffeted, his heed is crowned with thornes and his hondes despitously bounden with bondes. I woot wel thou maist not suffre this, natheles yit loke vp / with thyn wepyng eye and beholde hou he berith his cros to his passyon with a clothe of purple arrayed, cleuyng ful sore to his forbeten woundes.¹¹²

A comparable passage in *Showings* reads:

And after this I saw, in bodily vision, in the face of the crucifix which hung before me, part of Christ's Passion: contempt, spitting to defoul his body, buffeting of his blessed face, and many woes and pains, more than I can tell; and his colour often changed, and all his blessed face was for a time caked with dry blood. And I was answered in my reason that if God wished to show me more he would, but that I needed no light but him.¹¹³

Julian, too, stresses the need for visual participation in the sight of Christ's bloodied face, saying that she would have liked more daylight to see more clearly.

The art historian Jeffrey Hamburger links Julian's image of Christ's bloodied face to the devotions of an anonymous female owner of Karlsruhe Psalter, commissioned some time after 1234. As an introduction to Psalm 26, the Psalter contains one of the earliest examples of the 'face of Christ' image in the medieval West. Hamburger

¹¹² *De Institutione Inclusarum*, p. 21.

¹¹³ *Showings*, p. 136.

argues that the face of Christ in the Psalter, which is almost entirely obscured by blood, is a reminder of the shifting accessible and inaccessible nature of the image. Indeed, Julian's request for more light to see Christ's face and the answer that the only light she needs is God is strikingly similar to the opening lines of Psalm 27 'The Lord is my light and salvation, whom shall I fear'.¹¹⁴ Later verses of Psalm 27 pick out the desire of the viewer to seek and see the Lord's face 'My heart says to thee: "Thy face, Lord, do I seek." Hide not thy face from me'.¹¹⁵ In an earlier image from the Psalter, the female owner is depicted kneeling in prayer, her text in front of her with her eyes pointing towards heaven.¹¹⁶ Describing this image Hamburger comments:

We can imagine her praying as she appears in her manuscript, the book in her hands and its words on her lips, gazing intently at the Holy Face, the words of the Psalmist giving expression to her desire to see God. As for her celebrated contemporaries, the Holy Face was not merely an effigy, a memorial of the Passion, it stood as a token of the sight that, as heralded by Julian of Norwich, awaits all those who seek the face of God.¹¹⁷

Hamburger's description of the anonymous woman at prayer is an insightful example of how meditation was engaged in as a devotional activity. Underlying the activity of reading, which leads the meditation, was the desire to see God face to face. Significantly for Julian, this activity is practised with her eyes fixed on the dying Christ. Her eyes are trained on a horizontal not a vertical plane. In his comparison of Julian and the woman depicted at prayer in the Karlsruhe Psalter, Hamburger overlooks this important point. Although he acknowledges that Julian records the sight of Christ's face as a bodily vision, he still wants to insist that any reference to the face is a signifier for Julian's future sight of the *visio dei*. However, this is not a feature that is pronounced in *Showings*.¹¹⁸ Instead, following Aelred's instruction, Julian stresses

¹¹⁴ Psalm 27. 1.

¹¹⁵ Psalm 27. 8-9.

¹¹⁶ Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary*, p. 380, fig. 7.47.

¹¹⁷ Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary*, p. 382.

¹¹⁸ Where Julian does refer to the *visio dei* she speaks of it in the context of faith and the darkness of sin, which causes the human condition to fail to see God's great love. Without faith in God's constant loving

that one should remain with the cross and the sight of Christ. At the time that Julian herself is suffering great pain, caused by her illness, she says:

At this time I wanted to look to the side of the cross, but I did not dare, for I knew well that whilst I looked at the cross I was secure and safe. Therefore I would not agree to put my soul in danger, for apart from the cross there was no safety, but only the horror of devils.¹¹⁹

The Passion is not a memorial for Julian in a static sense, but a recollected event accessible in the first person as a source of safety. Julian, like Aelred, is sensitive to a number of perspectives, including her own. Meditation on past events must be practiced in the present in the perfect trust of Christ. Aelred gives this practice a sense of immediacy for the recluse by combining the images of the cell with Christ as the only image the recluse needs:

Be not aferde ne care for honger ne colde, but caste al thy trust in hym whiche fedith birdes and clotheth lilyes. He wil be thy berne [barn] and thy richness, the whicche [chest, coffer] and thy purse, thy wurship and thy delytes and al that thou nedyst.¹²⁰

In meditation of future events, Aelred does refer to the sight of Jesus 'face to face', from which knowledge and love, sweetness and charity will arise. Whilst the reference to this encounter is explicit in Aelred's text, the shift to meditation on future events does not remove the anchoress from her immediate position. Furthermore, the scheme is still a meditative scheme, although the imagery is placed in a heavenly rather than an earthly realm. The sight of Christ's face after death does not mean that meditation on his face when he is living is a memorial of the Passion. First person participation is vital for understanding the development of immediacy beyond the present and into the past and future. In Aelred's scheme, the joy that will be felt in the sight of Christ face

care, Julian appears to think that it would be impossible hold onto the belief in the consolation of the *visio dei* in the life to come. See *Showings*, p. 321.

¹¹⁹ *Showings*, p. 143.

¹²⁰ *De Institutione Inclusarum*, p. 23.

to face is inseparable from the cost of witnessing the Passion. Thus, the couplet that ends his guide reads 'To the whiche ioye brynge vs he, that boughte vs vpon the rode tre, amen'.¹²¹ The immediacy that Aelred demands in meditational activity may have had a formative affect on Julian. *Showings* displays a flair for vivid and sublime imagery, presented in an ordered sequence. Julian like Aelred is quite explicit where to direct the meditative gaze of her audience. Flora Lewis argues for a direct link between meditative activity, visionary narratives and the authentication of visions. Lewis too stresses the personal involvement of the meditator, as both observer and actor in the scene. She goes on to say:

It is clear that much visionary experience was based on devotional practices whose popularity the subsequent visions helped to reinforce, and which also used images as a starting-point. Most guides to meditation were written by men, while reports of visions can show us what use individual women made of them.¹²²

In the example of Aelred and Julian a strong case can be made to support Lewis's theory. References to meditation activity or devotional looking could be multiplied with further research of the other anchoritic guides that have been considered in this chapter.¹²³ For now, I want to move on to examine the didactic mode of listening.

ii. listening

The author of the *Ancrene Wisse* offers straightforward instruction on the possibility of an anchoress teaching. The scene depicts a caricatured version of the anchoress as a gossip that speaks too much when she should be listening:

¹²¹ *De Institutione Inclusarum*, p. 25.

¹²² Flora Lewis, 'The Wound in Christ's side', p. 209.

¹²³ For meditative practices in the *Ancrene Wisse* see Watson, 'Methods and Objectives', pp. 140-5. For Rolle's instruction on meditation see Meditation A, a Passion meditation, believed to be written for the recluse Margaret of Kirkby for whom *The Form of Living* was written, *Richard Rolle: Prose and Verse*, pp. 64-8. For *Myroure of Recluses* see pp. 37-42. For the *Scale* see pp. 66-70.

Someone, perhaps, is so learned or so wise in speaking that she wants him who sits and speaks with her to know it, and pays him back word for word. And she who should be an anchoress becomes a teacher, and teaches him who has come to teach her. She wants to be recognized and known at once for her talk among the wise. Known she is – because on account of the very things for which she expects to be held wise, he understands she is a fool, since she hunts for praise and catches blame; for at the very least, when he has gone away, he will say, “This anchoress talks a lot.”¹²⁴

In the passage above, the vocation of being an anchoress and teacher is not primarily the issue for the *Ancrene Wisse* author.¹²⁵ Rather, the author wants to warn against the anchoress being regarded a fool for seeking attention, a disposition at odds with a life of solitude. To live a life of solitude, the anchoress’s speech must be controlled and the community’s access to the anchoress must be limited. The *Ancrene Wisse* consistently advises against contact between the anchoress and those seeking her out for counsel or confession. In a reversal of Mulder-Bakker’s findings, the *Ancrene Wisse* describes any anchoress who invests in the personal welfare and instruction of the community, through speech and listening, as a captive audience for the local gossip:

Now my dear sisters, keep your ears far from all evil speech that is of this threefold kind, idle, foul and poisonous. It is said of anchoresses that almost everyone of them has some old woman to feed her ears, a gossip that tells her all the local tid-bits, a magpie that cackles about all that she sees and hears, so the saying now runs, “You can hear the news from a mill or market, from a smithy or an anchorhouse.”¹²⁶

The extreme nature and expression of the author’s concerns compounds the assumption that an anchoress who teaches or converses with the outside world is free

¹²⁴ *Anchoritic Spirituality*, pp. 72-3.

¹²⁵ The *Ancrene Wisse* states, ‘An anchoress must not become a schoolmaster, nor turn the anchorhouse into a children’s school. Her maiden can teach some other maiden for whom it would be dangerous to learn among other men or among boys. But an anchoress ought to give her attention only to God – though with her director’s advice she can give some instruction and guidance in learning’. See *Anchoritic Spirituality*, p. 204.

¹²⁶ *Anchoritic Spirituality*, p. 81.

and easy with words, therefore an anchoress should not teach. Furthermore, the notion of intrusive members of the community provides the *Ancrene Wisse* author with a further opportunity to stress that the anchoress's cell should be the 'loneliest place of all'.¹²⁷ The fact that the *Ancrene Wisse* is instructing against the seemingly common practice of conversational contact is significant. In theory the anchorhold should be a place of solitude, but it appears that contact with members of the community was common enough to justify the concern of the *Ancrene Wisse* author. The two passages also reveal that when someone comes to teach the anchoress or an anchoress engaged with the community the method of exchange was oral. It is not accidental that the *Ancrene Wisse* author's prohibition against teaching is allied with the proper conduct of the five senses, particularly speech.¹²⁸

In a more promising passage from the *Scale*, Hilton instructs the anchoress on matters concerning visitors that may come to instruct her. Hilton shows particular interest in the manner with which the anchoress listens. In regard to priests who visit the anchoress, he says:

Yif it be anothir man that cometh to knowe thee, as a man of Holi Chirche, heere hym loweli with reverence for his ordre, and yif his speche comferte thee, aske of hym, and make thee not for to teche hym. For it falleth not to thee for to teche a preest, but in nede. Yif his speech comferte thee not, answeere but lital, and he wole soone goo his wai.¹²⁹

Hilton's advice for the anchoress not to teach a priest is conditional upon the need of the individual concerned. The reference later in the passage to 'nede' indicates that teaching is more akin to a form of pastoral care. Added to this is the implication that an anchoress is in a position to address matters of spiritual concern but not to reprove the faults of others. However, the idea that an anchoress can be approached on matters that require advice or instruction is unquestioned in the passage. Regarding the manner of

¹²⁷ *Anchoritic Spirituality*, p. 81.

¹²⁸ *Anchoritic Spirituality*, pp. 72-82.

¹²⁹ *Scale*, p. 125.

speech and listening, Hilton merely insists that the anchoress should display humility and patience. Hilton's advice is less concerned with the outpourings of the anchoress than the capacity of the anchoress to listen. The example of the speech of a visitor that offers no comfort supports this notion. Presumably a visitor that is happy to talk without edifying the listener would fall into the category of those not 'in nede'. Concerning such individuals, Hilton's advice is simple, say little, listen with patience and a talkative individual will leave.

The visit of Margery Kempe to Julian's cell is an explicit example of an oral, didactic exchange between a so-called solitary and a member of the lay religious community. It is interesting that Margery, at no stage, considers her visit to the anchoress and subsequent stay in Julian's cell as unusual. Chapters Seventeen and Eighteen of *The Book of Margery Kempe* chronicle Margery's visit to Norwich, a visit which included a stay in Julian's cell. During her stay in Norwich, Margery has her visions authorized by three individuals: the vicar of St Stephen's Church in Norwich, Richard Caister, the Carmelite William Southfield and the anchoress Julian of Norwich.¹³⁰ Caister authorizes Margery's visions after initial doubts. Southfield, too, authorizes her visions, adding that Margery should be passive and receptive to the blessings of the Holy Spirit. When Margery visits Julian, however, she is instructed to discern the origin of her visions for herself. Margery introduces Julian as an acknowledged expert in discernment and good counsel.¹³¹ The method of Julian's counsel is a combination of technical advice and pastoral care. Having told Margery that her weeping is authorized by St Paul and St Jerome as more torment to the devil than the pains of hell, Julian, following the model of the anchoress who instructs through personal investment in her interviewee, prays that Margery be granted perseverance and patience.¹³² In a typical example of Julian's pastoral voice, she tells Margery:

¹³⁰ *The Book of Margery Kempe*, pp. 50-6.

¹³¹ *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 53, lines 960-1.

¹³² *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 54.

Settyth al yowr trust in God and feryth not the langage of the world, for the more despyte, schame, and repref that ye have in the world the mor is yowr meryte in the sygth of God. Pacyens [patience] is necessary unto yow for in that schal ye kepyn yowr sowle.¹³³

In *Showings*, several passages are devoted to the nurturing of patience to counteract sloth (impatience), despair and doubtful fear. The exemplar for the development of patience is Christ of the Passion, who suffered for love. Thus Margery is counselled to be patient, suffering patiently as Christ suffered the pains of the Passion. The lesson of patience is explained in *Showings*. An example of one passage reads:

Very meekly our Lord showed what patience he has in his cruel Passion, and also the joy and delight that he has in that Passion, because of love. And he showed me this as an example of how we ought gladly and easily to bear our pains, for that is very pleasing to him and an endless profit to us.¹³⁴

In her understanding of Christ's patience, Julian moves the technical advice of discernment she could offer Margery into the context of pastoral care. Julian counsels Margery, who constantly feared she was in danger of being deceived in her visions, on the necessity of patience that reveals the constancy of Christ's love. It is possible that Julian might be referring to the futility of Margery seeking certainty in her visions through the testimony of various church figures, rather than finding certainty, in patience, as an expression of her faith in the Passion. In her advice to Margery, Julian modifies a traditional discernment model. She does not instruct Margery to be submissive to her as a spiritual director, a necessary requirement for technical discernment discourse. Rather, Julian listens and then counsels Margery on the necessity of patience as an expression of love, for which the example she should follow is Christ who suffered for love.

¹³³ *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 54.

¹³⁴ *Showings*, p. 322.

iii. loving

In the previous subsection, I suggested that Julian tells Margery to exercise patience as an expression of pastoral care. I then suggested that Julian instructs in this way, as a counsellor, in order to demonstrate to Margery that there is greater certainty in Christ's love, exhibited in the Passion, than the endorsements of the ecclesiastical figures she had been visiting. This is not necessarily a subversive act by Julian. In her advice, Julian intimately responds to the source of Margery's doubt and despair, which is Margery herself. Julian explains to Margery that for her to gain comfort and certainty she must attend to the example of the Passion which was suffered with patience and love. The love expressed in the Passion is a salutary lesson for Margery who is encouraged to learn from it and develop patience in her own religious life as a remedy for doubtful fear.

The concept of the didactic potential of love is found in many places in the anchoritic guides. In Chapter Eighty-Seven of the *Scale*, for example, Hilton deals with the question of the soul's relation to its beloved object. He states:

For what is a man but hise thoughtes and his loves? Thise maken a man oonli good or badde. As moche as thou lovest thi God and thyn even Cristene and knowest Hym, somoche is thi soule; and if thou litil love Hym, litil is thi soule; and yif thou nought love Hym, nout is thi soule [...] And yif thou wolt wite what thou lovest, loke whereupoun thou thenkest; for where thi love is, there is thyne iye; and where thy likynge is, there is most thyn herte thynkyng. ¹³⁵

Hilton's reasoning on the matter of keeping one's heart does not distinguish clearly between knowing God and loving God.¹³⁶ This integration is graphically illustrated in Hilton's description of the 'heart thinking'. Hilton does not guide the anchoress to

¹³⁵ *Scale*, pp. 211-12.

¹³⁶ See Bernard McGinn, 'Love, Knowledge and Mystical Union in Western Christianity: Twelfth to Sixteenth Century', *Church History*, 56 (1987), 7-24. McGinn examines Gregory the Great's dictum that love is a form of knowing (*amor ipse notitia est*) in the context of the Western mystical tradition, p. 9.

scripture to decide the state of her soul, but, instead, he instructs her to consider her affections. Where those affections are directed towards God and her even-Christians, as the soul's object of love, the soul is both knowing and virtuous.¹³⁷ The reverse is the case where the soul has little or no love for God and her even Christians. Interestingly, Hilton describes the state of the soul in visual language. The intriguing statement 'loke whereupoun thou thenkest, for where thi love is, there is thyne iye [eye]' works in two ways. On one level it describes God as the object of the soul's affection, because it is truly God as the object of love who sees the state of the soul. It also describes the heart, the seat of the affections, as a means of seeing its object. The eye of love can also be turned to more immediate objects, such as one's fellow Christians. In this respect, Hilton advises that the anchoress should turn from her private prayer and devotion, because she will see God in her even Christians:

And though thou be in preiere or in devocioun, that thee thenketh looth for to breeke of, for thee thenketh thou schuldest not leve God for mannys speche, me thenketh it is not so in this caas; for yif thou be wise, thou schal not leve God, but thou schal find Hym and have Hym and see Hym in thyn even Cristene.¹³⁸

Hilton's ability to articulate a regulative scheme for the contemplative life of a recluse does not equate to his own disposition for such a life. He admits that he has no feeling for it. Therefore, where his book is concerned, a schema supposedly setting out how to lead a contemplative life, Hilton is required to add a condition to his instruction:

And therefore yif ony word be thereinne that stireth or conforteth thyn herte more to the love of God, thanke God, for it is His gift and not of the

¹³⁷ It is important to be aware that Hilton still retains a strict division of the bodily senses and the affectations of the soul. The affective nature of the soul that he refers to as the 'thinking heart' or reformation of 'feeling' is distinct from the bodily senses in Hilton's anthropology. See Ritamary Bradley, 'The Speculum Image in Medieval Mystical Writers' in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 1984), pp. 9-27 (p. 16). I discuss Hilton's dualistic anthropology in Chapter IV, Section 4 of the thesis.

¹³⁸ *Scale*, p. 124.

word. And yif it conforteth thee nought, or ellis thou takest it not redili, studie not to longe therabout, but lei it biside thee til anothir time, and gyve thee to praier or to othir occupation.¹³⁹

A similar passage appears in Rolle's *The Form of Living* in which he considers the devotion to the name Jesus and his Mother Mary. Such devotion, Rolle explains, is integral to ruling one's life correctly and coming to the joy of love. Having expounded the efficacy of such devotions he adds:

The dare nat gretly couait many bokes; hold love in hert and in werke, and thou hast al done that we may say or write. For the fulness of the law is charite; in that hongeth al.¹⁴⁰

It is instructive to compare Rolle's advice to hold love in one's heart with the author of the *Ancrene Wisse* who, whilst advising moderation in such matters, regards reading as a means to compunction. The *Ancrene Wisse* author writes:

Often, beloved sisters, you ought to pray less so as to read more. Reading is good prayer. Reading teaches us how and what to pray for, and prayer achieves it afterwards. As you read, when the heart is pleased, a devotion arises which is worth many prayers. Thus St Jerome says: "Let holy reading be always in your hands. Sleep comes upon you as you look at it, the holy page sustains your falling head." So you should read earnestly and long – though everything can be overdone.¹⁴¹

The *Ancrene Wisse* author appears less confident than either Hilton or Rolle that love is the fulfilment of what can be written and regulated. He relies on a firmer method of guidance in which reading teaches the individual what to pray for and reading leads the heart to compunction. However, in the *Ancrene Wisse* there is some indication that reading is an activity considered good in itself. Reading should not be overdone but it

¹³⁹ *Scale*, p.133.

¹⁴⁰ *The Form of Living*, p. 18.

¹⁴¹ *Anchoritic Spirituality*, p.153.

should always be at hand. Therefore, the book is not only a guide for the anchoress but a support. It must be remembered that reading in the *Ancrene Wisse* is recommended as a remedy for the sin of sloth. The act of reading itself is a means of overcoming torpor.

In *Showings*, love has several expressions. Love is the unity of Christians, the meaning of the visionary sequence as a whole and God's true nature. It is also the concept that underpins Julian's desire for her fellow Christians to profit from the vision as she profits. Divine love, that admits no partiality, necessarily draws Julian into relationship with her fellow Christians, who are loved as one, not as individuals. In Chapter vi of the Short Text, the lesson of divine love is instantiated in how relationships with others are conducted:

For it is in this unity of love that the life consists of all men who will be saved. For God is everything, and God has made everything that is made, and if any man or woman withdraws his love from any of his fellow Christians, he does not love at all, because he has not love towards all.¹⁴²

Julian's lesson in divine love is learnt through her love of her fellow Christians. Julian, following Mulder-Bakker's model, is an anchoress that invests personally in her relationship with community. She cannot be separated from her care of community without ceasing to love. The expression of Julian's anchoritic practice is outward not inward, public rather than private, seeking out God in the life of faith which she shares with the Christian community.

Conclusion

I began this chapter with the concern that anchoresses were consistently depicted as solitary heroines, enjoying little or no commerce with their community. I discovered that one reason for depicting anchoresses in this way is a confusion that can arise when the regulative ideals of anchoritic guides are interpreted as descriptive accounts of what

¹⁴² *Showings*, p. 134.

solitary females actually did. Such misinterpretation is usually a matter of degree, and must stand alongside the very real misgivings that male religious with regulative responsibility had towards a growing number of 'morally suspect' religious women. As a consequence of such misgivings it was generally recommended that women seeking a religious life in the Middle Ages should be closed off from the temptations of the external world. In this chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate how typical anchoritic motifs including visits from the devil, the solitude of the cell and the practice of enclosure are redeveloped by Julian as methods of guidance and instruction for a Christian community. Julian is enabled in this task by identifying herself as one with all Christians and learning from the visions set within a life of faith. The fluctuations of such a life tested, in well-being and woe, feed back into the images and words contained in the visionary sequence. The teaching in the visions is the practice of the life of faith. In the absence of faith in the constancy of God's loving care, the visions themselves are an affectation that will pass without trace of their origin. In the latter stages of the chapter, I presented didactic modes that an anchoress might employ to learn and instruct. These modes are pragmatic and not founded on the privacy of a supernatural experience. Julian invites her audience to discern for themselves what is valuable in the vision, with the proviso that what is constant in the vision is divine not human. The transmission of *Showings* in visual and oral form will be the subject of Chapter III. Up to now, I have tried to establish that Julian, as an anchoress, was didactically active in her religious community. In the next chapter, I want to set out the way in which Julian's visionary didacticism functioned for a late medieval audience.

III

Imagery, Literacy and Audience

In this chapter I will consider the possibility that *Showings* fulfils a didactic function within the oral and visual matrix of late medieval culture. This study will extend and complement the thesis set out in the two previous chapters concerning the education of the senses and Julian's pedagogic role as an anchoress in the Christian community. In what follows, I will argue that a reader or listener can participate in *Showings* visually. To facilitate this process, it is necessary to reconsider modern assumptions concerning a private relationship between the reader and text, where the text is the property of the reader. In the late Middle Ages, book ownership and literacy amongst a growing lay devotional audience were not norms. Access to concepts and imagery was made available through preaching, communal reading, the visual arts and the sacraments, as well as texts. In what follows, I will rely on these suppositions to remove the didactic function of *Showings* from a narrowly textual world. As I showed in the final section of the previous chapter, Julian's anchoritic didacticism is founded on the common features of the life of faith, such as looking, listening and loving. The texts that Julian learns by and directs the Christian community towards are living texts: fellow Christians encountered within the fluctuations of the life of faith. The central image in *Showings* that acts as the dynamism for this encounter is the Passion of Christ. It is a suffering Christ that exemplifies a loving regard, a regard that demands a response from the viewer.

In the devotional practice of the later medieval period, the human Christ dominates the focus of attention. In the imagery of this period, the abstractions of theology are integrated with the sight of Christ's bodily suffering. These images proliferated the medieval world of the late fourteenth and fifteenth century in stained glass, statuary, paintings, Psalters, Books of Hours and medieval theatre. Text, image and performance shared in modes of devotional expression directed to the suffering man-Christ. Text

and pictorial representation also drew on the same repository of images. Unlike modern assumptions concerning the objectification of the text and the dead letter, to the medieval reader of devotional literature, image and the written word combined in a dramatic conversation. The text is incarnate, the Word of God that has become flesh, announced to the Virgin, revealed before men and crucified by men. Christ becomes the author of his Passion narrative in medieval devotional practice. The representation of Christ's bloody body, wracked and wounded is the Word of God written into the sufferings of his Son. By studying the image of the crucified Christ representing the Word of God, the medieval reader of devotional literature could reconstruct the grammar of salvation and redemption. Julian was only shown a vision, yet she was convinced it was the work of divine authorship. It is through necessity that Julian offers what she was shown to the Christian community. Julian 'writes' as a member of the Christian community and is indistinguishable from it, continually learning from what was revealed in the visions.

The current chapter will be presented in four sections. Section 1 will consider the extent to which illiteracy could act as a barrier to sharing the vision that Julian was shown. In this section, I will argue that, in the later Middle Ages, literacy was not a minimal activity of being able to read and write. Rather, being literate presupposed not only the capacity to read and write Latin, but the ability to be conversant in classical literature. Writing in the vernacular, therefore, suggests that Julian desired to reach a particular audience, perhaps a readership of mixed reading and writing skills. I will contend that such an audience would be more sensitive to a visionary, vernacular form of narrative as a didactic mode of expression. Section 2 will examine instances of vernacular sermons and texts that recommend the use of imagery for edificatory purposes. As well as looking at the relationship between oral instruction and the use of imagery, I will consider evidence for Julian's use of elementary didactic techniques in the transmission of her visions. Section 3 will extend the study of oral tropes in Julian's visionary narrative. In this section, I will argue that the uses of emotive description, vivid colour, repetition and movement in *Showings* act as mnemonics that

allow Julian's audience to participate in her visions. The oral and visual features of Julian's presentation support the claim that the audience for *Showings* was largely illiterate (according to a medieval definition), but one that could engage with mnemonic, alliterative and repetitious features of a text as a listening audience that may have sought out a community anchoress. Section 4 places the imagery in *Showings* in the context of the liturgy as the familiar spectacle and narrative of the worshipping Christian community. In this section, I will emphasize the strong visual themes of the Eucharist that allow for the collective response to sensory stimuli in the worshipping community. By setting her visions in liturgical time it could be that Julian was anticipating an audience for her visions that was familiar with communal responses to imagery and sacramental language.

1. The Question of Literacy: Julian as Author

The Second Chapter of the Long Text makes a plain admission concerning Julian's level of education:

This revelation was made to a simple, unlettered creature, living in this mortal flesh, the year of our Lord one thousand, three hundred and seventy-three, on the thirteenth day of May.¹

Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, translators of the edition of *Showings* from which this passage is taken, footnote the word 'unlettered'. In the footnote, the translators confidently state 'Whatever 'unlettered' may mean here, it cannot mean illiterate'.² Although recent study has shown that modern assumptions concerning literacy are not applicable to medieval readers and writers, Colledge and Walsh seem preoccupied with the idea that for Julian to write a text such as *Showings* she must, by modern standards,

¹ *Showings*, p. 177. For an examination of scribal influence in *Showings* 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', *Speculum*, 66 (1991), 820-38.

² *Showings*, p. 177, fn. 1.

have been literate. Indeed, by modern standards, reflecting a minimal ability to read and write in one language, Colledge and Walsh would be correct. However, in the period leading up to the composition of *Showings*, the late fourteenth to the early fifteenth century, literacy, generally, reflected a maximal not minimal ability to read and write in a single language. In this period, the language of the literate was Latin, not vernacular English.

Michael T. Clanchy, for example, argues that the common axiom that laymen were illiterate was brought about by the bifurcation of medieval society into distinct groups: *clericus* and *laicus*, *litteratus* and *illiteratus*.³ Of importance to this section, is the second antithesis in which *litteratus*, comes to stand for a person not only able to read and write but able to display a knowledge of classical literature. Clanchy goes on to argue that, with the reduction of education in the medieval West allied to the successful conversion of the barbarians, the learned *clerici* became synonymous with *litteratus*. Indeed, the use of literacy to designate a cleric was emphasized whether or not the individual was a churchman. Henry I, for example, was given the nickname 'Clerk' or 'Beauclerk' to designate a level of scholarly attainment.⁴ Another example of assimilating clerical status with a high level of literacy is found in Philip of Harvengt (c.1170), who notes that on meeting a member of the monastic community:

We ask him whether he is a *clericus*. We don't want to know whether he has been ordained to perform the office of the altar, but only whether he is *litteratus*. The monk will therefore reply to the question by saying that he is a *clericus* if he is *litteratus*, or conversely a *laicus* if he is *illiteratus*.⁵

³ Michael T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 224-52. See also Bella Millett, 'Women in No Man's Land: English Recluses and the Development of Vernacular Literature in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', in *Women and Literature in Britain 1150-1500*, ed. by Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 86-103.

⁴ Clanchy, *Memory to Written Record*, p. 228.

⁵ Clanchy, *Memory to Written Record*, p. 229.

It appears from Philip's definition that Julian would be considered *illiteratus*. Julian converses in her vernacular language, Middle English, which was an assumed language skill in the late fourteenth century behind the learned languages of Latin and possibly French.⁶ Furthermore, as an anchoress, she would be consigned lay status and, therefore, be considered illiterate by definition. However, Philip of Harvengt's categorization does reveal the arbitrariness of such definitions. In the late fourteenth century, a period of marked social change, the demand for literature from the new middle class put pressure on any simple classification of literacy skills. Indeed, it is an audience that is not easy to define in literary terms that Julian appears to be addressing. Having emphasized that the visions she is shown are not a guarantee of sanctity she states:

I do not say this to those who are wise, because they know it well. But I say it to you who are simple, to give you comfort and strength; for we are all one in love, for truly it was not revealed to me that God loves me better than the humblest soul who is in a state of grace.⁷

In this passage, Julian retains the oral trope of 'saying' to convey meaning. In this sense, Julian's words are superfluous to the wise that 'know' what she has to say. Julian speaks to the simple, not in the abstract terms of knowledge attribution, but in order to offer comfort and strength. One can only speculate about the reading skills of those Julian describes as simple. However, it is important when reading *Showings*, as a modern reader, to remain sensitive to the spoken word in Julian's writing. Julian does not say that she is writing for the simple, indeed her only reference to the act of writing is couched in the language of communal love. In Chapter vi of the Short Text she modestly claims:

⁶ See Janet Coleman, *English Literature in History: 1350-1400 Medieval Readers and Writers* (London: Hutchinson, 1981), pp. 22-6.

⁷ *Showings*, p. 191.

And thus will I love, and thus do I love, and thus I am safe - I write as a representative of my fellow Christians - and the more that I love in this way whilst I am here, the more I am like the joy I shall have in heaven without end.⁸

Thus, in the first movement, when accounting for her place in the visual encounter with Christ, Julian eliminates any reference to herself. I have already referred to Julian's need to integrate her visions with her own religious life and the religious life of the community. The visions cannot serve to isolate her in a private visual universe. Julian's reference to being nothing outside the unity of love should be taken seriously as an ontological claim. According to Julian, God *is* everything that is good, and God has made everything that is made. Partiality is not a feature of the creative program in Julian's theology. To withdraw one's love from the community of all Christians is to withdraw to what is not. The value of the vision lies precisely in its impartiality, mirroring the divine creative act, which loves all that is and is all that loves. Therefore, to access what was shown to Julian, the audience must get beyond the author, if the author is mistaken for Julian.⁹

There seems no easy explanation for how *Showings*, as a text, came into existence. I have said already that the author, if Julian can be considered an author, does not couch her authority to write in the act of writing, but in her unity with her fellow Christians. Indeed, Julian must eliminate herself as an author because her writing is a representation of a communal interest under the didactic initiative of God. Julian's identity as an author does not consistently follow the model of those female visionaries that celebrate the act of writing.¹⁰ For instance, the first page of Mechthild of Magdeburg's (d.1285) *Flowing Light of the Godhead* reads:

⁸ *Showings*, p. 134.

⁹ See *Showings*, p. 135.

¹⁰ For the example of Hildegard of Bingen's and St Umilta of Faenza's proclamation to put in writing what they saw and heard see Petroff, ed., *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, pp. 26-7. Umilta's declaration is closer to Julian's disavowal of her own authorship. However, unlike Julian who does not distinguish herself from the community of Christians in the act of writing, Umilta follows the typological model of a divinely inspired author.

This book is to be joyfully welcomed, for God Himself speaks in it [...] The book proclaims Me alone and shows forth My holiness with praise [...] This book is called The Flowing Light of the Godhead. Ah! Lord God! Who has written this book? I in my weakness have written it, because I dared not hide the gift that is in it.¹¹

There is a curious double voice in Mechthild's text. In this example, one can confidently interpret the self-effacement in her writing project as a literary device. The visionary sequence and the act of writing are at the centre of Mechthild's spiritual program. In a desperate appeal to God to quell her doubts, Mechthild, troubled by her own literary endeavour, pleads:

Lord, now I am troubled: Must I walk uncomforted for thy glory? Thou hast misled me for Thou Thyself commandest me to write.¹²

Mechthild is comforted by God's reassurance that 'The truth may no man burn. Those who would take this book out of My hand must be stronger than I'.¹³ Mechthild is troubled by a deeply subjective experience, an experience that she struggles to articulate in writing. Oliver Davies likens Mechthild's struggle to communicate her deeply personal experience to Julian's own wrestling with her place in the transmission of the vision that she is shown.¹⁴ Davies does not consider that Julian genuinely wishes to displace herself as the author of the vision. A reason for this oversight might be his representation of the visions themselves as truth bearing. In this respect, the way Davies wants to present Mechthild's and Julian's response to their visions conflicts with what I have set out in the thesis so far. Up to this point, I have attempted to demonstrate that in order to engage in the visions Julian was shown their meaning must be found within the life of faith. Julian claims consistently that visions, considered as a certain type of supernatural, private experience, are superfluous to the type of moral development that is required to sustain one's faith. Yet, Davies makes a strong

¹¹ Petroff, ed., *Visionary Literature*, p. 23.

¹² Petroff, ed., *Visionary Literature*, p. 23.

¹³ Petroff, ed., *Visionary Literature*, p. 23.

¹⁴ Oliver Davies, 'Transformational Processes'. For full bibliographical details see Chapter II, fn. 2.

connection between the act of composition and a deeply personal experience.¹⁵ Julian, therefore, is favourably compared to Mechthild as a writer desperately trying to articulate something that threatens to defeat language. Davies assumes that what threatens to defeat language is something deeply personal. Thus, when Davies comes to explain the reception of Julian's writing, he describes an audience sharing a message that is deeply personal and therefore difficult to explain:

Julian's visions are noetic at their very source. Far from being static statements of truth, they are an exercise in the communication of truth which assumes Julian's participant subjectivity [...] Transformation therefore is at the core of Julian's visionary experience, for this experience necessitates of itself her passage into deeper understanding.¹⁶

For Davies, the transformative potential of Julian's writing, an important element of *Showings*, relies on a movement towards greater personal understanding of the visions. Davies, at times, overlooks the importance of the way in which Julian opens the message of the visions to the Christian community. Julian mixes her commentary on the visions with simple descriptions of what she was shown and words spoken to her. Julian does not attempt to interpret all the sights she was shown or the words spoken to her, but offers them instead as comforting images and words that would befit her pastoral role as a church anchoress. According to Julian, what is central to the message of the visions is revealed in Christ; it is not revealed in her attempts to articulate and interpret all that is shown in the visions. Julian writes from the unity of love, outside which she is nothing and inside which she is everything. Her unitary commitment to the Christian community is consistent with the nature of the vision itself. In *Showings* the visions are described as unified in God's sight, to which Julian

¹⁵ Christopher Abbott also makes a strong link between the personal aspects of Julian's experience and the process of making that experience publicly accessible. Abbott's thesis that *Showings* is an autobiographical text detracts from Julian's conviction that the Christian community can be led to see the visions as she was shown them. See Christopher Abbott, *Julian of Norwich: Autobiography and Theology* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1999).

¹⁶ Davies, 'Transformational Processes', p. 43.

assents. Thus, having displaced the importance of herself as an interpreter of the visions and introduced Jesus 'who is every man's teacher', Julian adds:

I beheld the whole of this blessed revelation of our Lord as unified in God's sight, and I never understood anything from it which bewilders me or keeps me from the true doctrine of Holy Church.¹⁷

Even if Julian did write the text of *Showings*, she did not rely solely on the transmission of the visions in a textual form. In practical terms, the act of writing was challenging enough in the Middle Ages. The earliest paper documents did not appear in England until 1296-1303, in the form of correspondence between Italy and Edward I's bankers. The earliest records made on paper in England are from major seaports, a place where paper could be imported. There are extant seaport registers from King's Lynn in 1307 and another from Lyme Regis dating to 1309.¹⁸ As Clanchy points out, summarizing the limited resources for medieval writers of the early fourteenth century 'The most significant fact about paper in England in the period up to 1307 is that it was scarcely known'.¹⁹ Paper did not begin to replace the use of parchment until the fifteenth century. The shift was brought about on economic grounds, with a quire of paper (twenty-five sheets) providing eight times as many leaves as parchment of equivalent cost.²⁰ The private act of writing by Julian as an anchoress not renowned for personal possessions or great wealth is not easy to envisage given that the scarcity of paper would have meant that her writing project would have relied on acquiring a ready supply of expensive parchment. Therefore, regardless of Julian's standard of education, the materials for her to write *Showings* would have been difficult to come by and very costly.

¹⁷ *Showings*, p. 135.

¹⁸ Clanchy, *Memory to Written Record*, p. 120.

¹⁹ Clanchy, *Memory to Written Record*, p. 120. Clanchy notes that in the twelfth century Anselm's *Proslogion* and the life of Christina of Markyate's were written on wax tablets. Writing on parchment appears to replace wax tablets in the thirteenth century, pp. 119-20.

²⁰ See R.J. Lyall, 'Materials: The Paper Revolution', in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain 1375-1475*, ed. by Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 11-29 (p. 11). See also Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing 1450-1800*, trans. by David Gerard (London: Verso, 1984), pp. 17-18.

Dictation was the most proficient way of committing words to writing in the Middle Ages. Following Clanchy again:

‘Reading and dictating’ were ordinarily coupled together, not ‘reading and writing’; the skill of writing a letter in proper form was the ‘art of dictation’ (*ars dictaminis*), a branch of rhetoric. Writing was distinguished from composition because putting pen to parchment was an art in itself. Even when an author declares that he is writing something, he may in fact be using the term metaphorically.²¹

Following the caveat in the final sentence, Julian’s own claim to writing may apply the same metaphor. As I have explained above, Julian’s narrative style is often in a spoken voice, and frequently in dialogic form. Furthermore, speech anticipates the presence of an audience in the way that writing does not. In the thirteenth century, St Francis complained of the spiritually empty book learning of monks. In his ‘Seventh Admonition’ Francis states ‘They have been killed by the letter, who want only to know words in order to be reckoned wiser than other men’.²² In the secular world, in treatises, charters and contracts the written word alone was considered inadequate. The seal for a charter, for example, would be considered more than a method of authentication for its medieval audience. The seal was a tangible object signifying the wishes of the donor. Some seals were disproportionately large compared to the written document they accompanied, which is evidence for the visual impact of such objects over and against the presence of the text. John of Salisbury famously remarked:

Fundamentally letters are shapes indicating voices. Hence they represent things which they bring to mind through the windows of the eyes. Frequently they speak voicelessly the utterances of the absent.²³

²¹ Clanchy, *Memory to Written Record*, pp. 125-6.

²² See Rosalind B. Brooke, *The Coming of the Friars* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1975), p. 126.

²³ See Michael Camille, ‘Seeing and Reading: Some Visual Implications of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy’, *Art History*, 8 (1985), 26-49 (31).

In the Middle Ages, the visual and oral still retained considerable influence in the textual world.

The craft of writing did not emphasize a creative act in the way that it does for a modern audience. St Paul's warning to Corinthian society that 'the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life' was still persuasive for medieval readers and writers.²⁴ Julian herself addresses an audience in spoken words. It cannot be denied, of course, that *Showings*, at some stage, was composed as a text. However, it is plausible to claim that if Julian wrote *Showings* according to certain oral methods she had in mind an audience that would be responsive to a combination of written and verbal modes of communication. Furthermore, it would seem that Julian's account of her visions was not, at its inception, exclusive to the medium of writing. The visit of Margery Kempe to Julian's cell is testimony to Julian's ability to combine oral counsel and sound theological reasoning. Presumably Julian's reputation for good counsel had reached Margery by means independent of a written text. It is conspicuous that Margery does not emerge from a private textual world to seek Julian's advice on spiritual matters; she goes to seek counsel.

In his study of literacy in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Brian Stock, following Clanchy, argues that, in performance, only a loose distinction should be maintained between the oral and written word.²⁵ Writing down oral ways of thinking did not eliminate established practices for oral exchange. In Stock's words:

A text does not cease to be structured discourse, obedient to the laws of grammar and syntax, simply because it is spoken aloud. And oral exchange, if recorded, may still preserve many of its original features, for instance, formulae, repetition, and encyclopedism. Written texts are continually being re-performed offering continuities to human behaviour over time. Oral interpolation may derive from improvisation or from texts.²⁶

²⁴ 2 Corinthians 3. 6.

²⁵ Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 13-19 and 42-59 respectively.

²⁶ Stock, *The Implications of Literacy*, p. 13.

The written word establishes a different relationship between the word and its referent, being less reliant on the presence of a particular person, a time and a place. By contrast, orality relies on the presence of the speaker and an audience. In many cases, the audience would be a collective group and the speaker would deliver a public performance. A restriction of scripture translated into the vernacular meant there was a ready audience for the increasing numbers seeking devotional readings in English.²⁷ Whilst at Gloucester College in the late fourteenth century, Oxford Benedictine monks were required to train in vernacular as well as Latin preaching. The standard preaching handbooks were arranged alphabetically to provide the performer with an index for combining pastoral theology and morality tales familiar to the religious life of their audience. The familiar order and associated key words of the preacher's *exempla* emphasized the didactic function of the spoken word. The preaching formulae aided the audience's memorization of biblical and theological material. The drama of presentation, and fixing the instruction to real time and space would have given the teaching a greater immediacy. Describing the audience's capacity for memorization of didactic preaching, Janet Coleman claims:

A limited number of essential theological and moral notions, illustrated in a concrete way by the same conventional recitations, were presented time and again to the laity, and helped to construct their biblical, theological, literary and political vocabulary.²⁸

In terms of accessing texts, definitions of literacy cannot be restricted to those who can and cannot read and write. An intermediary category of those who rely on the literacy of others for access to written material is a possibility. Susan Noakes, for example, argues that reading in the medieval world was 'a community experience in which the interpretation of the text any single listener or reader developed was the product, not of

²⁷ For details of the need for an episcopal licence to own an English Bible see Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400 - 1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 80.

²⁸ Coleman, *English Literature in History*, p. 177.

his understanding of the text alone, but a combination of questions and insights supplied by others'.²⁹ Reading, not an exclusively private or domesticated event, required a public performance and a means of interaction.

2. Orality and Visionary Didacticism

In the previous section, I attempted to demonstrate that even if Julian wrote a version of *Showings*, it still remained accessible to an audience of variable levels of literacy. In addition, the transmission of the text could be achieved by oral means, requiring the presence of an audience. In this section, I want to connect the oral/textual presentation of Julian's visions in *Showings* with the world of didactic images. I will make this connection in two ways. First, by demonstrating that in the later medieval period images were used, directly and indirectly, during oral addresses such as preaching and sermons. Second, by assessing devotional responses to imagery in the context of religious practice and instruction. I will take these themes in turn, examining the evidence for each before referring back to an explicit example of oral/visual transmission in *Showings*. I will start by assessing links between the oral presentation of theological material and the use of images.

In the opening sentence to her article on preaching and wall painting, Miriam Gill notes that monumental art, in particular wall painting, was described by medieval apologists as 'silent preaching'.³⁰ As a substitute for writing, meditating on a religious image was equivalent to hearing or 'reading' the Word of God for a devotional audience.³¹ Gill goes on to suggest that because of the high didactic content in religious

²⁹ Camille, 'Seeing and Reading', p. 33.

³⁰ Miriam Gill, 'Preaching and Image: Sermons and Wall Paintings in Later Medieval England' in *Preacher, Sermon and Audience in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Carolyn Muessig (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 155-80 (p. 155).

³¹ See Helen Leith Spencer, *English Preaching in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 141. For a discussion of the classifications of medieval sermons see L. J. Bataillon, 'Approaches to the Study of Medieval Sermons', *Leeds Studies in English*, 11 (1980), 19-35. For an expansion of the didactic role of preaching to include cataphesis and the instruction of children see Vincent Gillespie, 'Doctrina and Predicacio: The Design and Function of Some Pastoral Manuals', *Leeds Studies in English*, 11 (1980), 36-50. For a study of preaching with specific reference to Norwich in the early fifteenth century see Simon Forde, 'Lay Preaching and the Lollards of Norwich Diocese,

imagery of the late Middle Ages, imagery remained a popular mode of instruction in lay and monastic contexts. Although unambiguous references to specific wall paintings and other art works in sermons are few, a notable exception is the Augustinian canon John Mirk's *Festial* written between 1382-90.³² Mirk, the Prior of Lilleshull in Shropshire, presented an annual cycle of vernacular sermons relating to the Church year and the feasts of prominent saints. In a passage reminiscent of Julian's reference to works of art in the first chapter of the Short Text, Mirk, countering Lollard hostility to images, states:

Herefor ben roodes [crosses] sett on high in holy chirch, and so by sy3t þerof haue mynd of Christis passion. And þerfor roodes and oþyr ymages ben necessary in holy chirch, whateuer þes Lollardes sayn [...] þer ben mony þousaund of pepul þat could not ymagen in her hert how Crist was don on þe rood, but as þai lerne hit be sygt of ymages and payntours.³³

Like Julian, Mirk recommends the sight of images and paintings to enable an audience to picture how Christ was crucified. Whereas Julian refers to such paintings, generally, as a means of sharing in the suffering of the Passion, Mirk specifically mentions both the affective nature of the audience's response as 'imaging in the heart' and the didactic nature of the image from which many thousands can learn.

Mirk's *Festial* is a particularly good example of late medieval religious instruction that combines textual, oral and visual media. In his sermon for St Margaret's Day, Mirk bolsters his message by reminding the congregation of the saint's traditional iconography:

1428-1431', *Leeds Studies in English*, 29 (1998), 109-26. See also Lawrence E. Sullivan, 'Sound and Senses: Towards a Hermeneutic of Performance', *History of Religions*, 26 (1986), 1-33

³² John Mirk, *Mirk's Festial. A Collection of Homilies*, ed. by Theodore Erbe, Early English Text Society Extra Series, no. 96 (London: Kegan Paul, 1905).

³³ Mirk, *Festial*, p. 171.

Herfor Margret is payntyd opur coruen [carved] [...] wyth a dragon vndyr her fete and a cros yn her hond, schowyng how by uertu of þe cros scho gate þe victory of the fynde.³⁴

As Gill points out, the image of the saint depicted in the way Mirk describes, can be found in many wall paintings of the period.³⁵ Further examples in Mirk's *Festial* apply traditional iconography to an elucidation of the Virgin's love of her child and the combination of allegory and narrative to describe the Annunciation as a lily springing out of a pot.³⁶ Gill argues cogently that the allegorical use of images in sermons formed an accepted format for the presentation of theological material from the pulpit. This supposition is supported by Robert of Basevorn's *Form of Preaching* written in 1322, which encourages preachers to use material from nature, art (meaning all the arts) and history like a doctor securing the confidence of a patient.³⁷

It is significant that Mirk and Basevorn seem to rely on the commonality of the images that they are describing, if not the actual presence of the image itself. There is an assumption that even if the image is not present to the audience, the audience will be familiar with the representation and detail that is being described. In Julian studies there are only scattered references to the relationship between art works and the presentation of her visions in *Showings*.³⁸ This is an important gap to fill, because it adds weight to a central claim of this thesis that Julian, relying on the commonality,

³⁴ Mirk, *Festial*, p. 201.

³⁵ Gill, 'Preaching and Image', p. 161. The one named example Gill gives is Little Wenham in Suffolk, which dates to the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century.

³⁶ See Gill, 'Preaching and Image', pp. 161-2. Gill notes that in the early fourteenth-century treatise *Fasciculus Morum* the loving gaze of the Virgin, like the ubiquitous cross, was a sign of Christ's loving appeal to humanity. Gill stresses that both Mirk and the Franciscan author of *Fasciculus Morum* instruct their audiences to develop a devotional response to common imagery.

³⁷ See Gill, 'Preaching and Image', p. 163.

³⁸ See Richard Kieckhefer 'Major Currents in Late Medieval Devotion', in *Christian Spirituality II: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. by Jill Raitt, World Spirituality, 17 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), pp. 75-108 (p. 89). Kieckhefer likens Julian's descriptions of the distorted body of Christ to fourteenth-century German crucifixes. Catherine Jones offers a causal theory to explain Julian's descriptive skills, likening the use of colour in the fourteenth-century school of East Anglian Art to representations of the Passion in *Showings*, 'The English Mystic Julian of Norwich', in *Medieval Women Writers*, ed. Katharina M. Wilson (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1984), pp. 269-76 (p. 272). Denise Baker suggests that Julian may have seen a crucifixion wall painting dating from 1250 at St Faith's Priory in Horsham, a Benedictine foundation. See Baker, *Julian of Norwich's Showings*, pp. 40-4.

accessibility and didactic potential of the imagery that is independent of the visions themselves, can dismiss both herself as a conventional teacher and the value of visions in phenomenological terms. Like Mirk, Julian points towards imagery in the public domain, accessible to a community in which she participates. Julian can instruct her audience in the imagery that she describes, because it would be familiar and accessible. What neither Mirk nor Julian can guarantee is that devotional responses to imagery will encourage moral development in the Christian life. On this point, whereas Mirk bemoans a potential to misinterpret certain images, Julian recommends all didactic prompting to the true teacher Christ. Julian removes any emphasis on making mistakes in devotional activity, preferring instead to advise Christians to secure their faith in well-being and woe.³⁹

A graphic example of the reformative power of imagery and the galvanizing of faith is found in the *Testament* poem of John Lydgate (1370-1450). Lydgate, who entered a Benedictine monastery at the age of fifteen, writes that it was neither entering the monastery nor the teaching of the monastic *Rule* that had reformed him. He describes being taught the monastic *Rule* by having it read to him, a didactic method that had little effect:

His holy rewle was onto me rad,
And expounded in ful notable wyse,
Be vertuous men, religious and sad,
Ful weel experte, discrete, prudent, and wys
Of observaunces of many gostly empyrse;
I herd all weel, but towchyng to the dede,
Of that thei taught I toke litel hede!⁴⁰

Finding little solace in the *Rule*, Lydgate tells how he is reformed by a didactic image of the crucifixion. The didactic function of the image is pronounced in Lydgate's

³⁹ For Mirk's concern over misinterpretation of imagery see Gill, 'Preaching and Image' pp. 165-6. Gill does point out, however, that Mirk's circumspection is evidence of the laity's over-enthusiasm for interpreting images rather than ignorance.

⁴⁰ John Lydgate, *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, ed. by Henry Noble MacCracken, Early English Text Society Extra Series, no. 107 (London: Oxford University Press, 1911), p. 354.

description, accompanied as it is with the inscription 'vide', to look at the cross. The image is meant to teach the viewer the lesson of forsaking pride:

Myd a cloyster, depicte vpon a wall,
I savgh a crucifyx, whos woundes were not smalle,
With this [word] 'vide', wrete there besyde,
'Behold my mekenesse, O child, and leve thy pryde'.⁴¹

There is a significant blending of didactic media in the example of how Lydgate comes to learn about his vocation. He does not read the monastic *Rule* privately: it is read aloud, probably to a group of novitiates. However, Lydgate is obviously concerned enough about his unenthusiastic response to the reading to recognize that the lesson of the didactic image is directly applicable to him. The link between a textual, oral and visual world, leading to moral development, is clear in the example of the novitiate. Lydgate, seeing a wall painting of the crucifixion. Next, I want to consider devotional responses to imagery as a further extension of the textual world.

A definitive tripartite scheme for classifying medieval responses to imagery has been set out in the pioneering work of Sixten Ringbom.⁴² Ringbom distinguishes three approaches of the Western Church to religious art. The first two categories are exclusive, whilst the third category is inclusive of the previous two. The first category of images Ringbom considers is didactic. According to Ringbom, a didactic image has narrative form that replaces the need for a text. In a sense, these are images that tell a story. The second category of images, cultic images, serves a theological purpose. Adoration of cultic images, originally an eastern practice, was accepted into the West by the second Nicene Council in 787. Ringbom argues that, theologically, devotion to an image meant devotion to the person the image signified. The third category 'the empathetic approach' combines both the didactic and cultic. Ringbom describes it

⁴¹ Lydgate, *Minor Poems*, no. 107, 356-7. Compare with Julian's injunction to look into the wound in Christ's side, *Showings*, p. 146.

⁴² Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative*, pp. 11-22.

further as the 'primary goal for the beholder', who is engaged in the thirst for information or guidance by an historical exemplar.

To make sense of Ringbom's psychological third category, it is instructive to place it in the context of devotional practice. Reference to the 'goal of the beholder' that extends beyond reverence, a subjective state, intimates that Ringbom does not confine his theory to the psychological. Rather, Ringbom recognizes that, throughout the Middle Ages, a devotee's response to images was seen as important and that these responses were articulated in devotional practice. Thus Ringbom claims:

The psychological properties of religious images could be combined with the didactic and cultic functions [...] It provided the owner with a source of edification and guidance, and a recipient for prayer and supplication, as well as an occasion for pity or delight.⁴³

Ringbom's tripartite scheme is approximated in letters written by Gregory the Great (d. 604) recommending the use of images. The Gregorian recommendations for image use were highly influential in the Middle Ages, and subject to adaptation and modification depending on the audience.⁴⁴ In a letter to Bishop Serenus of Marsilles, concerning the didactic and pastoral use of imagery, Gregory famously instructs 'For what writing offers to those who read it, a picture offers to the ignorant who look at it, since in it the ignorant see what they ought to follow'.⁴⁵ When reading Gregory's instruction, it must be remembered that the nature of literacy and use of imagery in the late Middle Ages was diverse. Therefore, care must be taken not to make simple distinctions between an illiterate majority that used imagery in their devotional practices and an educated elite that did not.⁴⁶ To avoid over simplification attention

⁴³ Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative*, p. 13.

⁴⁴ See L. Duggan, 'Was Art Really the "Book of the Illiterate"?', *Word and Image*, 5 (1989), 227-51. See also C. Chazelle, 'Pictures, Books and the Illiterate: Pope Gregory's Letters to Serenus of Marsaille', *Word and Image*, 6 (1990), 138-53.

⁴⁵ See Chazelle, 'Pictures, Books and the Illiterate', p. 139.

⁴⁶ For a critique of the tendency to polarize medieval religious practices into high 'spiritual' and low 'superstitious' expressions see Natalie Z. Davis, 'Some Tasks and Themes in the Study of Popular Religion' in *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Thought*, ed. by C. Trinkaus and H. Oberman (Leiden: Brill, 1974), pp. 307-36.

must be given to examples of spiritual writing that describe the use of imagery and their associated devotional practices. I want to demonstrate that, in the Middle Ages, the poles between devotional practices that used imagery and imageless devotion were not clearly drawn.

A source that is consistently referred to as the definitive word on 'high' and 'low' expressions of medieval religious practice, in relation to imagery, is St Bernard of Clairvaux's "*Apologia*" to William of St Thierry.⁴⁷ In the *Apologia*, Bernard distinguishes the needs of the monastic community and, in his words, the 'carnal' needs of an audience unable to achieve the ideal of imageless devotion. However, upon close reading of the *Apologia*, set in the context of a Bernardine model of the spiritual life, it becomes apparent that Bernard's views are not as straightforward as they first appear. When describing what he considers to be the excesses of Cluniac churches and cloisters, for instance, Bernard complains:

I shall say naught of the height of your churches, their immoderate length, their superfluous breadth, the costly polishings, the curious carvings and paintings which attract the worshippers gaze and hinder his attention.⁴⁸

It is unhelpful that this statement is often abstracted from the *Apologia* as evidence of a Cistercian anti-aesthetic. Emile Mâle, for example, has said that St Bernard was suspicious of artwork because of the danger that the soul would be drawn away from meditating on God's law.⁴⁹ Bernard's comments, however, must be read within the context of his spiritual programme. The crux of his complaint in the *Apologia* is interrogative. Bernard is seeking justification from the Cluniac community for lavish expenditure on decoration whilst the poor, the living images of God, go hungry.

⁴⁷ Bernard of Clairvaux, "'Apologia' to William, Abbot of St Thierry", in *A Documentary History of Art*, ed. by Elizabeth G. Holt (New York: Doubleday, 1957), pp. 18-22.

⁴⁸ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Apologia*, p. 19.

⁴⁹ Emile Mâle, *Religious Art in France The Thirteenth Century: A Study of Medieval Iconography and Its Sources*, trans. by Marthiel Mathews (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 51-2. See also Emero Stiegman, 'Saint Bernard: The Aesthetics of Authenticity', in *Studies in Cistercian Art and Architecture*, ed. by Meredith P. Lillich, vol. 2 (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1984), pp. 1-13 (p. 2).

Bernard emphasizes his point about extravagance in his letter with the refrain 'tell me, ye poor (if indeed, ye be poor), what doeth his gold in *your* sanctuary?'⁵⁰ Anticipating an answer, Bernard suggests that the luxurious sights act as a means of parting a dazzled audience with their money. Yet even this material criticism is set within Bernard's spiritual concern for the poor, as against the spiritually poor. In an enthusiastic outburst, he exhorts:

The church is resplendent in her walls, beggarly in her poor; she clothes her stones in gold, and leaves her sons naked; the rich man's eye is fed at the expense of the indignant. The curious find their delight here, yet the needy find no relief.⁵¹

Bernard's responses to imagery are not all always set in a reformatory context. In the *Sermon on the Song of Songs*, for instance, he alludes to the use of imagery in devotional practice, and an oblique reference to the visual arts:

The soul at prayer should have before it a sacred image (*sacra imago*) of the God-man, in his birth or infancy or as he was teaching, or dying, or rising, or ascending. Whatever form it takes, this image must bind the soul with the love of virtue and expel carnal vices, eliminate temptations and quiet desires. I think this is the principal reason why invisible God willed to be seen in the flesh and to converse with men.⁵²

In this instance, Bernard places the role of the image firmly within the context of spiritual progress towards virtue and away from vice. Bernard's wavering over the use of imagery prefigures the application of monastic spiritual ideals amongst a wider audience in the later Middle Ages. However, this application is not evidence of a

⁵⁰ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Apologia*, p. 19.

⁵¹ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Apologia*, p. 20.

⁵² *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux, On the Song of Songs*; Cistercian Fathers Series, trans. by Kilian Walsh and I. Edmunds, Cistercian Fathers Series, vol. 2, (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1981), p. 152.

dilution of monastic standards. In the late Middle Ages, imagery had a monastic and lay significance that often combined didactic and devotional interests.

Concerning the apparent division between monastic and lay needs for imagery, Miriam Gill has argued that it is very difficult to distinguish images that are meant for a lay audience from those intended for a monastic audience.⁵³ To demonstrate this point, Gill refers to a document from St Albans dating to c.1428. The document describes the possible didactic motivation behind the monastic provision of art works for a lay audience.⁵⁴ The three parts of the document combine an apology for religious art that follows the Gregorian ideal of teaching the illiterate; a description of new paintings in the chapel of the Holy Cross; and the re-establishment of the veneration of saints Lawrence and Grumbald at the altar following the destruction of the almonry chapel. More striking, perhaps, is the document's description of two pillars, one painted an earth colour and the other painted red.⁵⁵ The earth-coloured pillar signifies the love of God and the lowliness of humanity; the red pillar signifies love of the neighbour in the blood of Christ. Both pillars were inscribed with Latin verses and emblems of the Passion. The coloured pillars reveal a clear didactic purpose instigated by a monastic community to be shared with a wider audience. The colour of the pillars, representing divinity and humanity simultaneously, and the inscription and signifiers of the Passion demonstrate their primary educative function. This attention to the didacticism of an object is exemplified in the medieval practice of displaying texts as images, in churches, monasteries, cathedrals and places of pilgrimage. These texts frequently contained a variety of didactic materials including hagiography, prayers, appeals for prayers and lists of indulgences.⁵⁶ In the context of the devotional practice of those pilgrims or lay religious that visited medieval churches, their textual and imagistic worlds were integrated.

⁵³ Miriam Gill, 'The Role of Images in Monastic Education: the Evidence from Wall Painting in Late Medieval England' in *Medieval Monastic Education*, ed. by George Ferzoco and Carolyn Muessig (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), pp. 117-35.

⁵⁴ Gill, 'The role of images', pp. 129-33.

⁵⁵ Gill notes that the pillars are probably the piers of the arcade. See Gill 'The role of images', p. 129.

⁵⁶ See Gill, 'The role of images', p. 131-2.

Gill concludes her survey of the role of art in monastic and lay education by quoting Lydgate's work *The Image of Pity*. The monastic work recommends that its audience should imprint the words of the poem in their heart and then turn to look at or imagine 'Cryst bleeding on the tre' when tempted by sin. Significantly, Lydgate recommends this lesson beyond the confines of the monastery:

Lerne well this lesson, it is both short and lyght,
For with this same the wekest creature
That ys on lyffe may putte þe fend to flyght
And saffe hym-selffe in sole and body sure
To suche entente was ordeynt purtreture
And ymages of dyverse resemblaunce,
That holsom storyes thus sweyed in fygur
May rest with ws with dewe remembraunce.⁵⁷

Meditation on the Passion and suffering of the Christ-man was a potent means of accessing a perfected vision of humankind in the later Middle Ages. The beginnings of this form of devotion can be traced, not to visual stimuli exclusively, but to the monastic practice of the *lectio divina*.⁵⁸ The *lectio*, a Benedictine model for meditative reading (*meditari aut legere*), owes its provenance to the monks of antiquity who sought out the best conditions to maintain the simplicity of a life devoted to God.⁵⁹ It was a precondition of this form of life that a monk should be able to read and write. The activity of reading in the medieval monastic culture was designed to engage not only the eyes perceiving the text, but also the act of pronunciation and hearing the text recited. Although silent reading was not unknown (monks were encouraged to read, in private, at least one book a year), for the full comprehension of a text, reading it aloud was required. In the monastic tradition, the practice of meditative reading was a formulated activity. The activity was focused on the text as the intellectual preparation

⁵⁷ Lydgate, *Minor Poems*, no. 107, pp. 298-9.

⁵⁸ See Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. by Catharine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1961), pp. 18-22.

⁵⁹ See Jean Leclercq, 'Western Asceticism' in *Christian Spirituality I: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, ed. by Bernard McGinn and John Meyendorff, World Spirituality, 16 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), pp. 113-31.

for the infusion of the written word for further reflection. The goal of the meditation was to embrace the text with one's whole being: the body in the act of pronunciation; the memory storing the text; the intellect seeking to understand and the will practising what is learnt.

In *Showings*, Julian's visionary encounter, focused on the cross, displays many of the themes described above. Following Ringbom's tripartite scheme, *Showings* encourages empathetic participation, with an emphasis that the viewer should be moved to moral reform. Julian is clear that by engaging in the vision she is taught something valuable concerning the life of faith. In this way, Julian avoids emotionalism and subjectivism. An important part of what she learns about the vision is its general applicability to the Christian community. In what follows, I want to demonstrate the sophistication of the visionary didacticism of *Showings* as illustrated in Julian's responses to the nature of the visions, the sight of the cross and the theological teaching on sin as the cause of pain and suffering. Julian, like Lydgate, does not reserve the lessons of theology for an educated elite. The significance of Julian's vision and the imagery it contains is unified as an expression of love directed to the Christian community as a lesson of faith.

The entire vision is shown to Julian in an integrative perceptual scheme that includes bodily vision, spiritual vision and words spoken to her in a dialogic and monologic form. As far as her spiritual visions are concerned, Julian is explicit that her own means of presentation, whether textual or oral, limits what can be shown spiritually. This is an important point because it demonstrates that even if Julian did produce a textual account of her visions, she recognized the limitations of a writing project, in isolation, to transmit the visions. It will be instructive to repeat part of the quotation that relates to spiritual visions here. Regarding spiritual vision, Julian claims 'But I may not and cannot show the spiritual visions to you as plainly and fully as I should wish; but I trust in our Lord God Almighty that he will'.⁶⁰ Julian's justification for not revealing the spiritual visions plainly is interesting. Julian does not say that she

⁶⁰ *Showings*, p. 135.

cannot describe the visions plainly, but that she cannot *show* them plainly. In addition, Julian does not say that spiritual visions can never be shown plainly, but that *she* cannot and may not show them plainly. I think Julian's cautiousness supports her own disavowal to teach, supporting the requirement of a divine didactic initiative. The point must be stressed that to assign the value of the vision to Julian is a mistake. Julian occupies a position of guide or instructor only in as much as she, like her fellow Christians, is engaged in continually learning from the visions.

In a vivid example combining the visual and a divine didactic initiative, showing what Julian cannot show herself, she describes her reason telling her to look away from the cross. The suggestion that comes to Julian implies that she is rationally engaged in the spectacle before her; she is not a passive watcher revering an image. It is not clear whether the reference to the cross signifies the crucifix she was handed on her deathbed, or the living crucifix on which the spectacle of Christ's redemptive act is played out. In fact, Julian's answer to the suggestion that she should look away from the cross and towards heaven combines both possibilities. That is to say, the crucifix is always a living crucifix prefiguring the salvific act of Christ. Thus, Julian answers the suggestion to look away vociferously:

Then I saw clearly by the faith that I felt that there was nothing between the cross and heaven which could have grieved me, and that I must either look up or else answer. I answered, and said: No, I cannot, for you are my heaven. I said this because I did not want to look up, for I would rather have remained in pain until Judgement Day than have come to heaven any other way than by him.⁶¹

Given what I have said above concerning the uses of imagery and 'high' and 'low' spiritual exercises, I think this passage is important. Julian refuses the metaphysical gratification of a sight of heaven. Her sight instead, as was the case on her deathbed, remains on a horizontal plane and trained on the cross. Furthermore, Julian is explicit

⁶¹ *Showings*, p. 143.

that the image of the cross is not an impediment to her sight of heaven. She can see nothing between the cross and heaven: Christ *is* Julian's heaven. The emphasis in this passage is not on the vertical access to the divine, but on remaining with Christ. To emphasize the point, Julian stresses the continuity of the scene claiming that she did not want to look up but would rather have remained in pain than come to heaven in any other way than through Christ.

The importance that Julian places on constancy and sight of the cross is given pictorial representation in the paragraph that leads up to Julian's suggestion to look away from the cross. The scene describes Mary and the disciples, like Julian, as onlookers to the Crucifixion. In the description of this scene, the words pain, suffering, love and, especially, unity are repeated.⁶² Amongst the onlookers, the unity of the group that might be threatened by suffering and pain is transformed as an expression of love. By introducing the image of a unified group of Christ's lovers, Julian is able to reiterate the lesson of compassion, literally 'co-suffering', that led to her request for a sight of the Passion. Thus, Mary is described as revealing part of her compassion in the equality of her love and pain 'for Christ and she were so united in love that the greatness of her love was the greatness of her pain'.⁶³ The reference to the compassion of Christ's mother looking on at the suffering of her son is thrust into the audience's space and time with Julian's reference to her own mother trying to close her eyes in the belief that her daughter is dead. Julian's discomfort at having her sight obscured emphasizes the importance she places on retaining visual contact with the cross. In a very visual sequence, Julian describes:

My mother, who was standing there with the others, held up her hand in front of my face to close my eyes, for she thought that I was already dead or had that moment died; and this greatly increased my sorrow, for despite all my pains, I did not want to be hindered from seeing, because of my love for him.⁶⁴

⁶² *Showings*, p. 142.

⁶³ *Showings*, p. 142.

⁶⁴ *Showings*, p. 142.

The act of retaining visual contact with the cross articulates the lesson of compassion. As Julian makes clear in the lines that follow her mother's attempt to close her eyes, whilst Christ is present to her she can feel no pain except for Christ's pains. It is the very next paragraph that introduces Mary as a model for compassion, as someone whose pain is commensurate with her love. Having presented the sequence in explicitly visual language, combining real time and eternity, the mundane and the metaphysical, Julian reminds her audience of the didactic importance of what has been described. Repeating again that she has chosen Jesus as her heaven in times of 'suffering and of sorrow', she adds:

And that has taught me that I should always do so, and choose only him to be my heaven in well-being and woe.⁶⁵

The lesson of compassion is taught to Julian, it is not taught by her. Furthermore, it is a lesson that she is taught and must endeavour to hold onto in well-being and woe. The lesson is, therefore, accessible and applicable to all Christians living a life of faith. The visual lesson must be fixed in a constant reaffirmation of faith, to remain with Mary, the disciples and Julian with eyes trained on the cross.

Julian's advice concerning spiritual vision is more pragmatic than abstract. It also has implications for what she could achieve by producing a text to describe what she saw. Julian wants her fellow Christian to see exactly what she saw.⁶⁶ Following the monastic model of absorption in the text, Julian hopes that her audience will be taught by a divine didactic initiative to accept the visions more 'spiritually and sweetly' that she is unable to describe. Having placed a limitation on her own presentation, Julian extends the lesson of the vision beyond herself and into the realm of visual participation. Julian, incapable of sharing all the teaching of the vision in narrative

⁶⁵ *Showings*, p. 143.

⁶⁶ *Showings*, p. 136.

form, requires a movement of love in order that her fellow Christians might *see* the meaning of the vision.

The participatory nature of the vision extends to the more abstract theological concepts in *Showings*. This is particularly true in Julian's theology of sin and the pain that it causes. Julian gives sin, pain and suffering a visual significance. Sin is given a negative visual significance, Julian is not shown sin, whereas suffering and pain, the consequences of sin, are given graphic representation in Christ's Passion. As I have said already, the extremes of pain suffered are synonymous with the extremes of love in Julian's theology. In a sequence that explains Julian's response to sin, pain and suffering, she enters into a dialogue with Christ. Christ speaking to Julian emphasizes the presence of an audience. The words that Christ speaks combine theological concepts and the reassurance that his love is constant. Christ assures Julian 'if I could suffer more I would'.⁶⁷ In response, Julian explains:

And in these words: if I could suffer more, I would suffer more, I saw truly that if he could die as often as once for every man who is to be saved, as he did once for all men, love would never let him rest till he had done it. And when he had done it he would count it as nothing for love, for everything seems only little to him in comparison with his love.⁶⁸

In artistic terms, the representation of a wounded, bloodied Christ in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries challenged the classical model, revitalized in the sixteenth century, of the equanimity of Christ.⁶⁹ The classical, heroic conception of life was unsympathetic to suffering that destroyed the equilibrium between body and soul. In Julian's visionary experience, like the art of the period, love was expressed through its visual analogue of pain and suffering. In *Showings* it is central that pain and suffering are understood with love and not independently of it. Julian is aware that without love,

⁶⁷ *Showings*, p. 144.

⁶⁸ *Showings*, p. 145.

⁶⁹ See Constable, *Three Studies*, pp. 162-3.

pain and suffering are potentially destructive. In consequence, when Julian is told that sin is necessary but 'All will be well' she responds emphatically:

Ah, good Lord, how could all things be well, because of the great harm that has come through sin to your creatures? And I wished, so far as I dared, for some plainer explanation through which my mind might be at ease about this matter.⁷⁰

Julian is not given an explicit answer to her question. Instead, she is referred back to Christ's atoning act. Interestingly, it is the community of Christians that resolves the abstract matter of sin for Julian. Julian is sure that sin is, in ontological terms, nothing.⁷¹ Julian is assured of this because she is not shown sin. Sin can only be recognized by the pain and suffering that it causes. The inseparability of pain, suffering and love mean that, for Julian, where pain is a necessary consequence of sin so is love. Whereas sin is not revealed to Julian, pain is revealed to her as the substance of the Christian community that is transfigured as compassion. Thus, Julian states with renewed conviction:

Just as I was before filled full of pain and compassion on account of Christ's Passion, so I was now in a measure filled with compassion for all my fellow Christians, and then I saw that every kind of compassion which one has for one's fellow Christians in love is Christ in us.⁷²

For Julian, the sharing of pain and suffering, transfigured as love in communal terms, is not reducible to a subjective or emotive experience. In Julian's own words, sin is 'necessary'. The locus for the transfiguration of pain and suffering to love is the body of Christ and the community of Christians. The visual impact of the suffering Christ is the means for accessing the divine teaching of love. Love is not revealed to Julian as an

⁷⁰ *Showings*, p. 149.

⁷¹ *Showings*, p. 148.

⁷² *Showings*, p. 149.

unmediated experience. The Passion is the means by which the lesson of divine love is taught.

In homely imagery, Julian likens her spiritual learning to an elementary didactic tradition. In the example of a lord and a servant, a microcosm for the entire visionary sequence, Julian sets her spiritual education within an established pedagogic practice of ABC learning.⁷³ She says:

Also in this marvellous example I have teaching within me, as it were the beginning of an ABC, whereby I may have some understanding of our Lord's meaning, for the mysteries of the revelation are hidden in it, even though all the showings are full of mysteries.⁷⁴

Marie Denley has argued that, in religious didactic literature, aimed mainly at lay people, the alphabet was one of four categories for elementary learning that also included catechetical processes involving question-and-answer and repetition, rhymes and proverbs.⁷⁵ Learning, according to this format, had a moral and epistemic significance. Denley explains that elementary education was conducted according to a holistic ideal in the medieval period. Therefore, what went into a child's head and how it was processed were vital for that child's future development, educationally and morally. Denley also makes the interesting observation that in ABC pedagogic schemes of the fourteenth-century, the symbolism of the cross was prominent:

The alphabet opened with a cross and ended with 'amen'; its enclosure by specifically Christian material symbolizes the subsuming of literacy in the scheme of Christian education; it is unsurprising to find that the alternative English name for the ABC, 'abece' or 'absey' is the 'cross-row'.⁷⁶

⁷³ See Chapter IV, Section 3 for a more detailed discussion of the lord and servant example.

⁷⁴ *Showings*, p. 276. I have introduced this quotation now to demonstrate that even when Julian is describing the central mystery of her visions she makes use of an elementary teaching technique.

⁷⁵ Marie Denley, 'Elementary Teaching Techniques and Middle English Religious Didactic Writing', in *Langland and the Mystics*, ed. by Helen Phillips (Cambridge: Brewer, 1990), pp. 223-41.

⁷⁶ Denley, 'Elementary Teaching Techniques', p. 226.

According to Denley, the basic ABC scheme was used to acquire vernacular literacy as well as a passive Latin literacy. The ABC schemes were effective for vernacular language learning because they made greater use of 'phonic and look-and-say methods' than traditional forms of Latin learning.⁷⁷ The rote learning of the alphabet was meant to provide the student with a mnemonic template for religious and moral teaching. In theory, conceptual material could be transmitted through vernacular alphabet verse that combined alliterative and repetitive lines to aid the retention of abstract ideas. In the early sixteenth century, Richard Whitford, a Bridgettine monk at the double monastery at Syon, Isleworth, produced an example of an alliterative ABC scheme for moral training. Whitford produced prose and verse versions of an expanded alphabet for a diverse audience including lay and religious. Furthermore, he had a special interest in giving the layman, and those in a layman's charge, a means of bettering his or her spiritual condition.⁷⁸ A section of Whitford's cross-row reads:

- A ¶ Always loue pouerte/with vyle thinges be contente.
- B Be also in good workes: busy and dilygent.
- C Couet nat moche to speake: but rather to kepe silence.⁷⁹

At the end of his cross-row Whitford extends the use of alphabetic learning to literacy. He explains that the ABC will improve spelling and reading. Significantly, he adds that literacy skills must be accompanied by 'doing together'. Denley interprets 'doing together' as both the reading out loud of certain syllables from a written version, as well as the furthering of religious education in terms of devotional activities. In the ABC schemes, literacy skills are not presented as a good in themselves. Literacy was an aid to spiritual articulation and a goad to devotional practice, even in a very elementary ABC form. It is impossible to prove that Julian was either taught using such didactic devices, or that she is presenting her visions according to similar pedagogic expectations. Nevertheless, Julian's reference to learning from the visions as

⁷⁷ Denley, 'Elementary Teaching Techniques', p. 226.

⁷⁸ Denley, 'Elementary Teaching Techniques', p. 228.

⁷⁹ See Denley, 'Elementary Teaching Techniques', p. 228.

an ABC is conspicuous and has a precedent in medieval educational techniques. Furthermore, it has a precedent that connects elementary learning with the cross, the fulcrum of Julian's theology and visual sequence.

In the next section, I will extract various oral tropes that repeat themselves in *Showings*. Some of these oral tropes - alliteration, antithesis and repetition - have already been introduced as standard education devices in the later Middle Ages. It is significant that many of these devices are used in *Showings* in connection with the sight of the cross. It is the bleeding, wracked body of Christ that represents the grammar of salvation for Julian and her audience. There is a sense in which Julian and her audience read and learn from the body of Christ. I shall conclude this section with an excerpt from a medieval lyric that explicitly links the ABC scheme of medieval education with the sight of Christ crucified. The wooden board on which an alphabet leaf was attached, or nailed, is transfigured as the cross, positioned for everyone to see.

In everi place men mai see,
When children to scole sette schulden be,
A book to hem is brought:
Nailid to a bord of tre
That is clepid an a.b.c
Parfijtliche wrought.⁸⁰

The example is instructive on many levels. The lyric refers to the ABC learning of children, a detail that supports Denley's thesis that the cross was frequently employed in elementary didactic techniques. In addition, the lyric makes it clear that the book of Christ's body is a source of learning that is available to everyone. It is significant that Julian should describe the heart of the mystery of the visions using the language of a basic tool for education. Accepting the burden of proof, it appears that, not only is Julian aware of this basic ABC technique, she employs it to encourage a general audience of vernacular learning to engage in the teaching of the visions.

⁸⁰ Douglas Gray, *Themes and Images in the Medieval English Religious Lyric* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 130.

3. Oral Techniques and Visionary Narrative

In the previous two sections, I have attempted to challenge assumptions concerning Julian's authorship and the reception of her visions in a textual form. I have argued that the potential audience for Julian's visions was familiar with approaches to written material that extended access to writing beyond literacy and the private ownership of texts. In the late Middle Ages, reading formed a continuum with visual and verbal instruction. Instruction through imagery and the spoken word was part of an established educative tradition. It is a supposition of this thesis that *Showings* anticipated an audience familiar with this tradition. Put another way, Julian appears to be sensitive to the various learning capacities of her audience. Therefore, the means by which Julian herself is instructed to understand the visions, through imagery, dialogue and monologue are the same didactic tools that allow her audience access to what she was shown. In what follows, I want to focus on recurrent oral features in *Showings*. The presence of the spoken voice in the text might be evidence of a primary transmission of the visions through Julian's pastoral interaction with the community. Whilst this is difficult to prove, the presence of oral motifs in the text does indicate a desire for memorial retention of material that does not rely upon access to a written exemplar.⁸¹

In his magisterial study *Orality and Literacy*, Walter Ong seeks to distinguish purely oral forms of communication from literary forms.⁸² A leading premise of his argument is that the literary isolates the reader by placing her in a private relationship with the text. Ong argues that, in contrast to the privatizing tendencies of literary communication, orality relies on the presence of an audience, a collective group, for public performance. Furthermore, according to Ong, literate societies have an 'oral residue' through which the private textual world of the reader opens into the communal

⁸¹ Marion Glasscoe argues that Julian probably dictated her visions to an amanuensis. Glasscoe justifies this claim by pointing out that the rhythms and inflexions of Julian's language are those of a speaking voice, which allows the reader to be involved in the 'primary mental process' of the *Showings*. See Glasscoe, ed., *Revelation of Love*, pp. xv-xvi.

⁸² Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 1982).

interests of the group. Consequently, definitions of literacy cannot be restricted to those who can and those who cannot read and write. Following Ong, in literate societies there is an intermediate category of 'readers' who rely on the literacy of others for access to written material.

Michael Camille pinpoints an intermediate category of literacy as crucial and often overlooked in medieval studies.⁸³ Interestingly, Camille argues that this group used visual media as a form of communal reading. He points out that paintings and stained glass would not only have affected an individual response in the perceiver, but a 'choric or mass' response.⁸⁴ Camille appears to draw on the Ongian thesis that reading isolates, whereas the visual remains public and closest to the needs and interests of its viewers. In a colourful example, he cites Bishop Paulinus of Nola (354-431) describing the impact of a new wall painting on peasants entering the monastery's canteen. Paulinus describes how the vivid pictures engage the natural appetites (the vice of gluttony) allowing the inscriptions accompanying the images to be of greater spiritual value. Thus Paulinus concludes 'Maybe that when they all in turn show and *reread to each other* what has been painted, their thoughts will turn more slowly to eating'.⁸⁵ That Paulinus should mention the practice of seeing and communal re-reading is significant. Not only does it emphasize the participation of the visual in the process of reading, the visual impact of the image also facilitates the possibility of communal reading and understanding. In theoretical terms, group reading relies on a common stock of familiar images and concepts. The interests of the group must be engaged and maintained in the understanding that results from communal reading.

As I explained above, the process of reading, exemplified in the *lectio* model, engaged the entire person: the spoken word, intellectual activity and even one's actions. Reading required a public performance, a means of interaction. In relation to imagery the medieval world was, likewise, present in the public domain. Sculpture, reliquaries, stained glass and painting allowed public access to images. For Julian the

⁸³ Camille, 'Seeing and Reading', p. 32.

⁸⁴ Camille, 'Seeing and Reading', p. 32.

⁸⁵ Camille, 'Seeing and Reading', p. 32, my emphasis.

visual made public must also coincide with the interactive in language. The oral language model, as Ong explains, requires an audience. There is a sense in which the specifically visual can remain private, leaving the individual to examine their disposition to an object in the absence of any shared response to what is seen. This will not do for Julian, who is certain that her fellow Christians can be shown her visions as she saw them.

The democratisation of *Showings* is demonstrated in its use of Middle English, rather than Latin. Furthermore, *Showings* displays motifs that Ong describes as characteristically oral; these motifs solve the problem of retaining and retrieving information. Oral practice relies on mnemonic, rhythmic patterns to allow for quick recall and recitation.⁸⁶ Standard features of orality include antithesis, alliteration and assonance, set in standard thematic settings familiar to an audience. As Ong points out:

In an oral culture, to think through something in non-formulaic, non-patterned, non-mnemonic terms, even if it were possible, would be a waste of time, for such thought, once worked through, could never be recovered with any effectiveness, as it could be with the aid of writing.⁸⁷

Julian's use of the vernacular in *Showings* was interactive in a way it could not be for her audience in any other language. Vernacular language, according to Ong's thesis, is 'emotion-charged' and closest to the expectations and perceptions of the community. It is this sense of the vernacular that Ong contrasts with learned Latin.⁸⁸ He argues that whereas the vernacular is close to communal norms, Latin is abstracted from them. According to Ong, Latin served institutional ends and was controlled by them, and the medium that ensured those ends was writing:

Learned Latin effects even greater objectivity by establishing knowledge in a medium insulated from the emotion-charged depths of one's mother

⁸⁶ Ruth Crosby, 'Oral Delivery in the Middle Ages', *Speculum*, 11 (1936), 88-110. Crosby states explicitly that in Middle Ages people read with their 'ears' by listening to others read and recite. (88).

⁸⁷ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p. 35.

⁸⁸ See Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, pp. 112-14.

tongue, thus reducing interference from the human lifeworld and making possible the exquisitely abstract world of medieval scholasticism and of the new mathematical modern science which followed on the scholastic experience.⁸⁹

The features of orality in a textual society exemplified in a common vernacular language, allow for the possibility of access to spiritual teaching that would be alien in the abstract, conceptual world of Latin. The vernacular would be, primarily, a spoken language presupposing exchange. By communicating in the vernacular, Julian could address the broadest range of interests and inter-activity in the religious community. The vivid imagery of the crucifixion scene, for instance, could be described and incorporated into the interests of the group: interests that coincide with images already available to a devotional audience in painting, stained glass and architecture. The vividness of imagery in communities that retain an oral tradition is evidenced in the ways in which the images are kept alive. For an image to remain useful to its audience, to be kept in the collective memory, it must be used constantly. The potency of the image was its capacity to be accessible through time. In oral practices there is no reliance on the text as a means of preserving this potency. The written word confines things to posterity, whereas the spoken word must be present. The same can be said of the image. An image has to be made present to be participated in. In this respect, the ubiquitous image of the Crucifixion would have been extremely potent for a medieval audience in the late fourteenth century.

In Medieval Passion lyrics, for example, there is little reliance on the abstract, theological understanding of an audience. The process of understanding is simplified to the details of the scene. The concrete situation of the action allows the audience access to the event, making it more tangible. The effect of making the audience present is achieved by drawing attention to vivid and evocative details. In a Passion poem entitled *Meditations on the Life and Passion of Christ*, technically a compilation of

⁸⁹ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p. 114.

lines from *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, certain details add immediacy to the scene. Each section of the mediation is introduced with the lines:

Jesus that hast me dere ibought,
Write thou ghostly in my thought,
That I mow with devocioun
Thynke on thy dere passioun:
For thogh my hert be hard as stone,
Yit maist thou gostly write theron
With naill and with spere kene,
And so schullen the letters be sene.⁹⁰

In the above verse, the lesson of the Passion is inscribed in the heart of the practitioner with 'naill and spere' so that the letters, the traditional wounds of the Crucifixion, can be seen. The body of Christ, reflecting the condition of the practitioner's heart or moral condition, becomes a lexicon for access to the Passion. The poem's construction is meant to engage the audience at a personal level. In a further, moving, example of simplicity in the same poem the scene of the Crucifixion is set using stark, chromatic descriptions of a wounded body:

Wyth was hys nakede brest and red of blod hys syde,
Bleye was his fair andled, his wnde dop ant wide,
And hys armes ystreith hey upon the rode,
On fif studes on his body the streams ran of blode.⁹¹

As in the Passion lyrics above, Julian begins her account of the vision she received by focusing on the physical suffering and bleeding of the crucified Christ. Julian also shows evidence of using the tropes that, according to Ong, characterize oral delivery. For oral recurrence, the mind must be trained to think in rhythmic, alliterative, repetitious and antithetical ways. In oral cultures experience is intellectualized

⁹⁰ Gray, *Themes and Images*, p. 127.

⁹¹ Gray, *Themes and Images*, p. 128.

mnemonically. As the seminal work of Mary Carruthers demonstrates, memory is not the storage of information but a process that is actively engaged in shaping and responding to experience. According to Carruthers, the mind thinks with images, it reassembles (re-members) images and weaves them into new modes of thinking and experiencing. Carruthers makes the important observation that medieval writers did not distinguish between 'verbal' and 'visual' memory. Characters used in writing were of considerable visual import in the Middle Ages. The page or parchment was considered a cognitively valuable picture. These literary pictures were constructed to strike the mind of the reader, creating a path through the text that can be led by cognitive matching or contradiction of vivid images. Responding to the eight-century monk Alcuin's suggestion that 'the human mind makes up images concerning each matter; from what it knows it fashions things unknown', Carruthers states:

The products of fantasy and memory are the matrix and materials of all human thought [...] And these thought devices, these fictions by which we can grasp God (or any concept) in our mind, are constructions that someone can hear, smell, taste, touch, and above all see mentally.⁹²

Interestingly, Carruthers likens cognitive image production to the mind 'painting', especially during the act of reading. The assumption, along Ongian lines, is that reading in the Middle Ages was a sensuous activity. The medieval reader did not engage with devotional texts in an exclusively objective, fact-finding way. The reader, instead, attempted to *see* what was written. However, as Carruthers points out, the emphasis is not on faithfully illustrating the words, as we might demand, but on making some mental picture in order to feel and remember in order to know.⁹³ In the process of mental painting, the full epistemic process from reception to retention to knowledge is outlined. Carruthers argues that there must be some affective input for

⁹² Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric and the Making of Images* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 120.

⁹³ Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, p. 132.

the process to succeed because the activities of memory and knowledge are not disinterested processes, but activities to be engaged in.⁹⁴

Before Julian's vision begins, her audience is placed in the context of the explicitly visual. The scene is an antagonistic contrast between the dimness of the room she is in and an unusual natural light that illuminates the crucifix held before her face. Julian describes, with a cinematic vividness, the crucifix illuminated in the darkness. The antithesis of the light and darkness is given a first person perspective through Julian's straining to keep visual contact with the crucifix. The straining of Julian's sight is paralleled in the Christ figure, crucified, and straining for life. In a further juxtaposition of perspectives, Julian's sight begins to fail. The failing of the first person perspective shifts the drama to Julian's wider audience. The audience, not hindered by a deeply personal relationship to the experience being described, is left with the spectacle of the crucifix in a dark room. The illuminated crucifix is the feature that dominates these visual exchanges. Thus, as Julian's own sight begins to fail, the visions begin with this graphic description:

And at this, suddenly I saw red blood trickling from under the crown, all hot, flowing freely and copiously, a living stream, just as it seemed to me that it was at the time when the crown of thorns was thrust down upon his blessed head.⁹⁵

The description of the blood flowing from the wounds caused by the thorns is not burdened by an interpretation of what Julian sees. Indeed, by simply reporting the details of the sight, Julian makes the spectacle approachable to all participant observers. Time condenses in the scene from the sudden appearance of the bleeding head to the omnitemporal act of the Crucifixion as salvation. The use of alliterative tropes 'flowing freely' and the antithetical use of 'dimness and light' are characteristic

⁹⁴ Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, p. 168. In a Christian context, Carruthers notes that the cross was frequently the emotive charge needed to begin visualizing. Furthermore, she points out that, when displayed, the cross was unmistakable, open to view and the focus for church services. Carruthers argues that the cross "gathers" everything else in the church into the "common place" it provides. In this way, it functions as a rhetorical *allegoria*, "drawing in" matters in the hearts of the worshippers', p. 169.

⁹⁵ *Showings*, p. 129.

of oral methods that initiate what Carruthers calls a *ductus* in a visionary sequence.⁹⁶ A *ductus* is a starting point in meditative practice that controls the flow and movement of the composition. This device not only indicates the direction in which the audience should take in the visual sequence, straight ahead (literal) or more obliquely (spiritual), it also gives an indication of temporal movement as shown in the static/living crucifix. Following the promptings of the *ductus* device, Carruthers explains that the person engaged in meditation must construct an image that demonstrates an intention to participate and perform in the visual sequence:

If a thinking human mind can be said to require ‘machines’ made out of memory by imagination, then the ornament and decoration, the ‘clothing’, of a piece will indicate ways in which these mental instruments are to be played [...] Movement within and through a literary or visual piece is performed, as it is in music. Choice is involved for the author in placing ornaments in a work, and choice for an audience is how to “walk” among them.⁹⁷

In *Showings*, the sensorium has both bodily and spiritual modes. It is the interaction of the corporeal and incorporeal, the temporal and eternal, in the sight of the Passion that reconciles the paradox of corporeal sight as spiritually blind with the unmediated sight of God in the spiritual senses. According to Julian, bodily sight requires the spiritual light of God to overcome the dimness of the world of objects. When recounting the blood caked face of Christ, Julian says that she sees it as one would see a physical object:

This I saw bodily and sorrowfully and dimly; and I wanted more of the light of day, to have seen it more clearly. And I was answered in my reason that if God wished to show me more he would, but that I needed no light but him.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, p. 116.

⁹⁷ Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, pp. 116-17.

⁹⁸ *Showings*, p. 136.

Julian emphasizes the objective reference to the body of Christ by wishing for more natural light to *see* more clearly. However, in her vivid descriptions of the Crucifixion she captures more than mere representation. The imagery Julian uses to describe the Crucifixion extends to colour (red blood), quantity (copious), motion (trickling, flowing) and temperature (hot). Through the use of tactile descriptions, Julian engages the whole *sensorium*, inviting the reader beyond the text into the drama of the senses.⁹⁹ The simplicity of Julian's descriptive language emphasizes the requirement for divine guidance beyond it. The guidance that the audience and Julian require to see clearly is explained within the image of Christ's body and the light that God represents.

The idea of Julian and her audience being guided through the sights of the vision is a recurrent theme in *Showings*. In Chapter viii of the Short Text, for instance, Julian is given a spiritual sight of the Virgin during which a divine voice asks 'Do you wish to see her?'¹⁰⁰ The question is addressed equally to Julian and the audience. Julian does not use the term 'spiritual' sight to describe a disembodied mode of perception. She is shown the Virgin as she conceives, in her sorrow under the cross and as she is now in delight, honour and joy. The three sights of the Virgin are examples to Julian of a perfected model of devotion.¹⁰¹ At conception, Christ enters the Virgin who accepts Christ's divinity into her body in perfect equilibrium. The impregnation of the Virgin is the movement that the audience must replicate in their own movement into the body of Christ. It is a replication of the event that, in Julian's language, unites humankind's sensual nature to Christ eternally.¹⁰² The invitation for a sight of the Virgin coincides with the figure of Christ gazing into his wounded side. The opening in Christ's flesh symbolizes the opening of Julian's own eyes, transforming what she can and cannot

⁹⁹ See Rosemary Drage Hale, "'Taste and See, For God is Sweet" Sensory Perception and Memory in the Medieval Christian Mystical Experience', in *Vox Mystica: Essays on Medieval Mysticism in Honour of Professor Valerie M. Lagorio*, ed. by Ann Clark Bartlett and others (Cambridge: Brewer, 1995), pp. 3-14. Hale concludes her article by suggesting that a 'hermeneutic turn' must be taken in how medieval mystical texts are approached, so that 'instead of reading the texts, we could be learning to sense them', p. 14.

¹⁰⁰ *Showings*, p. 147.

¹⁰¹ *Showings*, p. 147.

¹⁰² See *Showings*, p. 292.

see.¹⁰³ There is a prominent sense of movement in this sequence. Entry into the side of Christ represents entry into his body (the Church) and the shared sacrament of blood and water. Thus Christ addresses Julian:

See how I loved you; as if he had said: My child, if you cannot look on my divinity, see here how I suffered my side to be opened and my heart to be split in two and to send out blood and water, all that was in it; and this is a delight to me, and I wish it to be so for you.¹⁰⁴

The imagery of the flesh connoting the Incarnation and Passion is an integrationalist theme that dominates Julian's visionary narrative. One cannot avoid considering the strong element of a birthing sequence in this image of entry and transformation. The polysemic imagery of the wound in the writing of this period, especially amongst women religious, is abundant.¹⁰⁵ The matrix of meanings extends the idea of a bodily wound to a vaginal image, spiritual pregnancy and transformative rebirth.¹⁰⁶ The blood and water flowing from Christ's side is rich in sacramental meaning: the consumption of Christ's body in the Eucharist, and the baptismal entry into the body of Christ as the Church. It is the model of Christ's wounded body that makes the re-negotiation of the subject and community possible.

In a discussion of the *The Prickyng of Love*, a Middle English translation of *Stimulus Amoris* attributed to the Franciscan James of Milan, Sarah Beckwith elaborates on themes of entry and birthing associated with the wounds in Christ's body.¹⁰⁷ Beckwith argues, for example, that the spear of Longinus takes on a sacral quality in the Passion narrative because it *enters* the body of Christ:

¹⁰³ See Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary*, p. 142, fig. 2.

¹⁰⁴ *Showings*, p. 146.

¹⁰⁵ For an excellent survey of medieval women's somatic experience of Christ see Caroline Walker Bynum, 'The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages', in *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), pp. 181-238.

¹⁰⁶ For a vivid image of Christ's vaginal wound see the *Psalter and Hours of Bonne Luxembourg*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters Collection, 1969, [69.86], fol. 331r. For further discussion see Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary*, p. 142.

¹⁰⁷ *The Prickyng of Love*, ed. by Harold Kane, vol. 2 (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1983).

The identity of the worshipper becomes labile in its desire to merge with the spear, with the nails that enter Christ's body. But the identification is also to the cross itself [...] The psychic logic which inspires such preoccupations means that the wounds of Christ - where the inside and the outside of the body become indistinguishable - are densely elaborated.¹⁰⁸

Beckwith goes on to explain that in *The Prickynge of Love* the wounds in Christ's body are so welcoming that they instil the anxiety that the loving soul once entered will not remain enclosed. However, if the wounds were too tightly closed they would not allow entry in the first instance. Beckwith does not miss the opportunity to link this movement in and out of the body of Christ to a birthing sequence. She says:

The image is one of a parturition that can never be finished, so that the wounds can stay open around the infant soul, and the regression to a foetus-like comfort can keep open the boundaries between inside and outside.¹⁰⁹

Theologically, entry into Christ's wounded side illustrates our rebirth through Christ's suffering. Christ, in the flesh, fuses the divine and human, signifying our closeness to God. This closeness is given visual significance in the suffering and bleeding of Christ's body. Julian is committed to the understanding that God suffered for humanity by sharing the human condition. This limitation of God - a limitation transfigured and glorified - allows Julian and the audience to see God, who, in Bernard of Clairvaux's words, while in the flesh, can 'converse with men'. It is only in this way that all those who share in Christ's suffering humanity will encounter his divinity. To see spiritually for Julian is to see from within the body of Christ, as the locus of all there is in a place where all can be incorporated. In this completed ontology nothing

¹⁰⁸ Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 58. See also Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 214-17.

¹⁰⁹ Beckwith, *Christ's Body*, p. 59.

comes between the individual and Christ. From this perspective the human condition is capable of seeing itself as Christ sees it. In a neat summary of the interaction of event, description and vision, Tarjei Park argues that in Julian's visionary sequence:

The passion does not become a momentous act retrospectively responded to, but exists as a dynamic. It involves the synchronicity that demands the response of encounter, its nearness spills into the visionary becoming the first order sense experience of the visionary rather than that seen.¹¹⁰

The incarnate Christ transforms the limitations of the corporeal object, making it a necessary condition for revealing the spiritual. It is in the corporeal, in its full realization in Christ as human, that we see our identity with the divine. The use of the present tense of the verb 'to see' is correct. Strictly, the experience is not retrospective. The senses, a fact of humanness, are reborn into the present, the 'first order'. Thus, the communication of spiritual teaching is also brought into the present. The didactic function of the vision is fulfilled where the observer is brought directly into the revelation of love that, by its nature, is self-explicating. This process functions with the aid of oral tropes in *Showings*. Retaining imagery and responding to it assumes, in a comparable way to oral exchanges, the presence of an audience and heightened sense of immediacy in which images and concepts can be shared.

4. The Eucharist: A Celebration of the Visual

In the previous three sections, I have attempted to establish an extra-textual world for *Showings*. A central premise of this attempt is the function of and access to a stock of common images and didactic techniques that would have been familiar to Julian's audience. Based on this premise it can be argued that Julian's visions become accessible through sharing in responses to common religious images and the

¹¹⁰ Tarjei Park, 'Reflecting Christ: The Role of the Flesh in Walter Hilton and Julian of Norwich' in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*, ed. by Marion Glasscoe (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1992), pp. 17-37 (pp. 36-7).

elementary didactic methods associated with them. Responses to these images are not to be construed as deeply psychological moments, but, instead, as expressions that become manifest in devotional practice. In this section, I want to examine such expressions in relation to the liturgy generally and the Eucharist in particular. I will begin by demonstrating how Julian sets her visionary sequence in liturgical time. In so doing, I will argue that Julian is anticipating an audience familiar with the visual, verbal and audible promptings of a medieval communion.

The vernacular liturgical texts that were available to the laity in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries continued a tradition - shared with Passion meditations, lyrics, didactic imagery and preaching - of instructing those with little formal theological education.¹¹¹ Prymers and the Hours of the Virgin contained canticles, hymns, readings, responses and prayers that allowed a worshipping laity to participate in liturgical time and space. Underlying the Canonical Hours, the official temporal structure for the daily worship of professional religious, and its vernacular alternative was a reminder of the events of the Passion. Thus a general pattern emerged connecting Christ's betrayal with Matins: the trial before Pilate and false accusation with Prime; the crowning with thorns with Terce; the Crucifixion with Sext; the death of Christ with None; the deposition with Evensong; and entombment with Compline.¹¹² In the intimate connections between the community's liturgical worship and reflection on the events of the Passion, a pattern of response to the central teachings of salvation and redemption was established.

In *Showings*, meditative access to the teaching of salvation and redemption is centred on the crucified Christ. The vivid depiction of Christ's suffering for love provides Julian and her audience with a way of understanding and responding to

¹¹¹ See Alexandra Barratt, 'The Prymer and English Passion Lyrics', *Medium Ævum*, 44 (1975), 264-79.

¹¹² For an explanation of this scheme and an appendix containing a Middle English version of the *Patris Sapientia* relating to Hours in the Sarum Rite see Marion Glasscoe, 'Time of Passion: Latent Relationships between Liturgy and Meditation in two Middle English Mystics', in *Langland, the Mystics and the Medieval English Religious Tradition: Essays in Honour of S.S. Hussey* ed. by Helen Phillips (Cambridge; Brewer, 1990), pp. 141-60. See also Walter Simons, 'Reading a Saint's Body: Rapture and Bodily Movement in the Vitae of Thirteenth-Century Beguines' in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. by Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 10-23.

Christ's intervention in human history. By putting this understanding and these responses in a liturgical timeframe, Julian heightens the awareness of her audience to the significance of salvation and redemption in their daily lives. Julian explains that fifteen of the revelations are shown to her between four in the morning, a time close to Lauds, and three in afternoon.¹¹³ In a footnote Colledge and Walsh acknowledge that the time the fifteenth revelation ceases is literally 'noon of the day'.¹¹⁴ However, Marion Glasscoe has pointed out that in Middle English 'noon' written 'none' probably refers to the liturgical time None.¹¹⁵ Glasscoe argues convincingly that by making reference to a liturgical timeframe, Julian applies the relevance of the Passion to all that she understands, although she has been invited to contemplate heaven directly. Glasscoe concludes that for Julian 'All time is seen as sanctified as it becomes the medium for the realization of divine love'.¹¹⁶ In *Showings*, the eternal divine is encountered in real time in the spectacle of the crucified Christ. In Julian's words, reflecting on the change in Christ's countenance from pain to joy:

I understood that in our Lord's intention we are now on his cross with him in our pains, and in our sufferings we are dying, and with his help and his grace we willingly endure on that same cross until the last moment of life. Suddenly he will change his appearance for us, and we shall be with him in heaven.¹¹⁷

For Julian, the human condition occupies the same position as the crucified Christ in real time. However, it is a change in Christ's appearance from suffering to joy that signifies a shift from real time to divine time and space. This shift is not achieved outside the sight of Christ's Passion but within it. Thus, according to Julian, the human condition participates in the Passion until the 'last moment of life'.

¹¹³ *Showings*, pp. 309-10.

¹¹⁴ *Showings*, p. 310, fn. 311.

¹¹⁵ Marion Glasscoe, 'Time of Passion', p. 155.

¹¹⁶ Marion Glasscoe, 'Time of Passion', p. 158. See also William F. Hodapp, 'Sacred Time and Space Within: Drama and Ritual in Late Medieval Affective Passion Meditations', *The Downside Review*, 115 (1997), 235-48. For commentary on the anchoritic liturgical day see Robert W. Ackerman, 'The Liturgical Day in *Ancrene Riwe*', *Speculum*, 53 (1978), 734-44

¹¹⁷ *Showings*, p. 215.

In what follows, I will examine expressions of divine time and space and human time and space in the Eucharist. For a medieval audience, the host as the body of Christ was presented as a visual spectacle that symbolized the efficacy of Christ's salvific act in real time. The fusing of divine presence and real time is heightened for the communicants by practices that surrounded the concealing and revealing of the host. Until it was consumed, the host was physically separated from the celebrating community. Whilst separated from the host, the community, directed by the physical dimensions of the church, was encouraged to look on the host that was elevated above them.

Eamon Duffy observes the importance of the Eucharist in late medieval worship in his comment 'The liturgy lay at the heart of medieval religion, and the Mass lay at the heart of the liturgy'.¹¹⁸ It is through the celebration of the Mass, he argues, that the congregation relived the redemptive act of Christ. The sights and sounds of the Mass, and particularly the priest elevating the host above his head, invited the congregation's visual participation in the moment of divine presence. Thus Duffy states:

Christ himself, immolated on the altar of the cross, became present on the altar of the parish church [...] and his blood flowed once again, to nourish and renew Church and world. As kneeling congregations raised their eyes to see the host held high above the priest's head at the sacring, they were transported to Calvary itself, and gathered not only into the passion and resurrection of Christ, but into the full sweep of salvation history as a whole.¹¹⁹

Although Julian does not give explicit references to her own eucharistic practice, *Showings* remains rich in sacramental imagery. Julian makes frequent references to her participation, visually and physically, in Christ's blood, water and body. Indeed, following Duffy, if the liturgy and the Mass were central to the lives of medieval Christians it would be curious if eucharistic imagery was absent from *Showings*. In

¹¹⁸ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, p. 91. See also John Bossy, 'The Mass as a Social Institution 1200-1700', *Past and Present: A Journal of Historical Studies*, 100 (1983), 29-61.

¹¹⁹ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, p. 91.

fact, the celebration of the Eucharist contains all the elements of visionary didacticism that, so far, I have discussed in other areas of medieval religious practice, including preaching, mediation and moral reformation. The didactic significance of the Eucharist operated as an exchange between the audience and the priest blessing and administering the sacrament. The audience could follow the liturgical rite in the vernacular instruction of their lay prayer books. Above all, 'seeing' marked the ritual. Seeing the host, understanding the full significance of what was seen, afforded the celebrant full participation in the revelation of the divine at the altar.

The *Mass of St Gregory* was a popular image that combined the celebration of the Eucharist with the receipt of a visionary experience.¹²⁰ The image depicts Pope Gregory I celebrating the Mass, either alone or in the company of priests, cardinals and representatives from the entire feudal unit. Christ's perforated and bloodied body, the object of Gregory's vision, is presented on the altar. Blood flows from the wound in Christ's body, the living host, into a sacramental chalice to emphasize the liturgical significance of the vision. The wounds and the blood of Christ were potent symbols for devotional practice in the later Middle Ages, particularly for women. Caroline Walker Bynum records several cases of visionary experiences reported by female religious that were caused by the sight or consumption of the host.¹²¹ Indeed, Bynum goes on to note that miracles related to the Eucharist which include: distinguishing consecrated and unconsecrated hosts; the Eucharist having a special effect on the senses; and living on the host alone for nourishment were an almost exclusively female genre.

A prominent feature of female eucharistic devotion, referred to by Bynum, is Christ's humanity, especially his wounds flowing with blood and water, representing the maternal security of breasts that restore ailing spiritual health. The anonymous biographer of the thirteenth century woman Alice of Schaerbeke describes her running

¹²⁰ See Emile Mâle, *Religious Art in France The Late Middle Ages: A Study of Medieval Iconography and Its Sources*, trans. by Marthiel Mathews (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 99, fig. 52.

¹²¹ Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Women Mystics and Eucharistic Devotion in the Thirteenth Century', in *Fragmentation and Redemption, Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), pp. 119-150 (p. 122).

to 'Christ's breasts and wounds, in every tribulation or anguish, every depression or dryness, like a little child drinking from its mother's breasts'.¹²² In a strikingly similar passage from *Showings* that contains vivid eucharistic imagery, Julian states:

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.¹²³

In *Showings*, the imagery of breastfeeding diversifies as Julian goes on to explain how we are nourished at the wound in Christ's side. The wound, Julian explains, is a graphic illustration of Christ's love for humanity, into which the audience is invited to look. The wound, the representation of Christ's love and source of spiritual nutrition, secures the efficacy of the sacrament as the food of true life.¹²⁴

Colledge and Walsh list twenty-four references to the blood of Christ in their index to *Showings*.¹²⁵ In one particular passage rich in sacramental imagery, Julian links drinking the blood from Christ's wounded body to the image of baptism and the consumption of communion wine. She says:

And after this as I watched I saw the body bleeding copiously, the blood hot, flowing freely, a living stream, just as I had seen the head bleed. And I saw this in the furrows made by the scourging, and I saw this blood run so plentifully that if it had in fact been happening there, the bed and everything around it would have been soaked in blood. God has created bountiful waters on the earth for our use and our bodily comfort, out of the tender love he has for us. But it is more pleasing to him that we accept freely his blessed blood to wash us of our sins, for there is no drink that is

¹²² See Bynum, 'Women Mystics and Eucharistic Devotion', p. 133.

¹²³ *Showings*, p. 298.

¹²⁴ For a fuller account of these details see Elizabeth Robertson, 'Medieval Medical Views of Women and Female Spirituality and Julian of Norwich's *Showings*', in *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, ed. by Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1993), pp. 142-67.

¹²⁵ *Showings*, p. 355.

made which pleases him so well to give us; for it is so plentiful, and it is of our own nature.¹²⁶

In this passage, Julian utilizes the inherited semiotic language of the 'plentiful' amount of Christ's blood to symbolize the 'bountiful waters' on earth. For Julian, the sea of blood that washes away sin and the sacramental blood to drink are synonymous. This multidimensional use of sacramental imagery has a striking similarity to a devotional theme, depicted in a number of later medieval art works, called the 'fountain of life'. Emile Mâle has expertly surveyed a number of paintings and stain glass representations of the theme.¹²⁷ In most of the examples that Mâle considers, the cross is located at the centre of a font-shaped basin; blood from Christ's wounded side fills the basin, whilst onlookers crowd around removing clothing in preparation to bathe. Describing the scene, Mâle argues:

This is no doubt a eucharistic symbol, but one which could only have been created in the violently realistic age with which we are concerned; to have imagined it man's thought would have had to be endlessly occupied with the holy blood.¹²⁸

Unfortunately, Mâle does not elaborate on what he means by the realism of such themes. He does not emphasize, for example, the common stock of images that 'fountain of life' artists were using and that audiences for such imagery would find acceptable. However, Mâle does observe that the representation of Christ's bloodied body in the *Mass of St Gregory* is 'so completely fixed in the popular imagination' artists did not dare alter the constituent parts of the scene.¹²⁹ As I argued in the previous section, the visual tropes that allow meditative access to the events of the Passion rely on sustained absorption into the event. Mâle's intuitive observation

¹²⁶ *Showings*, p. 137.

¹²⁷ Mâle, *Religious Art in France: The Late Middle Ages*, pp. 105 - 12. For a study of seven sacraments medieval fonts, a genre that was particularly popular in East Anglia see Ann E. Nichols, *Seeable Signs: The Iconography of the Seven Sacraments 1350-1544* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1994).

¹²⁸ Mâle, *Religious Art in France: The Late Middle Ages*, p. 105.

¹²⁹ Mâle, *Religious Art in France: The Late Middle Ages*, p. 98.

concerning the endless occupation with the blood of Christ is close to the point. However, this occupation is not an exclusively psychological fixation. It is manifest in the communal rituals of the Church.

During the Eucharist the celebrant was required to kneel, reciting Aves and Paters, and respond to the priest's gestures to change posture. At the moment of blessing, the host was of great significance. The kneeling celebrant would raise both hands, fixing a gaze on the host, and offer an elevation prayer. The prayer is the celebrant's invitation to see the host.

Ihesu Lord, welcome thow be,
In form of bred as I the se;
Ihesu! For thy holy name,
Schelde me today fro synne & schame.¹³⁰

The ringing of a bell and the lighting of a candle further dramatized the moment of communion. In the Middle Ages, the blessings that could be bestowed from seeing the host resulted in the popular practice of carrying it to the sick and women in labour.¹³¹ A further development was the creation of medieval guilds, or private donations to provide a light to precede the host as it was taken through the streets. The sight of this group procession carrying the lighted host on a stick must have been striking.¹³² Margery Kempe, who reports administering help to the sick and dying, attests to the potency of seeing the host:

And most of alle whan sche sey the precyows sacrament born abowte the town wyth lyte and reverens, the pepil knelyng on her knees, than had sche many holy thowtys and meditacyonys, and than oftyntymys schulde

¹³⁰ See Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, p. 117.

¹³¹ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, p. 100.

¹³² Norman Tanner notes the presence of confraternities to the feast of the Corpus Christi and the Annunciation of St Mary in fourteenth-century Norwich. Examining the returns of the confraternities made in 1389, Tanner discovered that the Mass was a central feature of devotional activity in the confraternities. Both confraternities had processions on the day of the feast of Corpus Christi and octave day of the feast respectively. See Tanner, *Church in Late Medieval Norwich*, pp. 73-8.

sche cryin and roryn as thow sche schulde a brostyn for the feyth and the trost that sche had in the precyows sacrament.¹³³

The lighting of the host was a matter of great concern for Margery's local parish in King's Lynn. The increased devotional atmosphere, in addition to the 1349 plague in that town convinced three local man to fund more lights to be carried before the host. The result was the founding of the Corpus Christi guilds. Julian, herself an adult witness to the 1369 plague, makes skilful use of the notion of light, particularly set against the darkness or night, emphasizing the spiritual and physical truth that it is only in the light that we can see.¹³⁴ Towards the end of *Showings* Julian says:

The light is the cause of our life, the night is the cause of our pain and all our woe [...] And at the end of woe, suddenly our eyes will be opened, and in the clearness of our sight our light will be full [...] So I saw and understood that our faith is our light in our night, which light is God, our endless day.¹³⁵

Although it is impossible to determine any direct connection between Julian's references to light and night and the lighting of the host that Margery describes, it is reasonable to assume that Julian's audience would have been familiar with the therapeutic sight of the illuminated host that was carried to the sick and dying.¹³⁶ Furthermore, Julian's reference to faith as the cause of life, lit against the pain and woe of the night, sets what could be construed as an abstract theological teaching in a common, accessible visual analogue.

Church architecture was also a vital component in heightening the sensory drama of the Eucharist. The parish eucharist, celebrated at high altar, would have been at some distance from the congregation and partially obscured by a rood screen. During Lent, a veil would have been suspended within the sanctuary, obscuring any sight of

¹³³ *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 166.

¹³⁴ For details on the Black Death see Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich*, pp. 7-8.

¹³⁵ *Showings*, p. 340.

¹³⁶ See Ann E. Nichols, 'The Bread of Heaven: Foretaste or Foresight?', in *The Iconography of Heaven*, ed. by Clifford Davidson (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 1994), pp. 40-68, figs. 7 and 8.

the priest blessing the host. The veil that deprives the communicants a sight of the host is of ritual significance. For a specific time in the Christian calendar the host was hidden, symbolizing the transfer from festive to penitential time, and heightening the expectation for what would eventually be revealed. The veil that covers the host continues the symbolic tradition of the Vernicle of Rome that is believed to have covered the face of Christ. Julian mentions the Vernicle in two places in *Showings*; on both occasions she emphasizes the accessibility and mystery of Christ's face. Julian instructs her audience that, to access the divine, one must pay attention to the changing colours and appearance of Christ's face. Before describing the details to be meditated upon, Julian offers the following reassurance:

For it is God's will that we believe that we see him continually, though it seems to us that the sight be only partial; and through this belief he makes us always to gain more grace, for God wishes to be seen, and he wishes to be sought, and he wishes to be expected, and he wishes to be trusted.¹³⁷

The repetition of the formula 'and he wishes' substantiates Julian's point. For Julian, the sight of God is tied to her conviction that we believe, seek, expect and trust that we see God continually. In an example of combining appearance with the appropriate devotional response, Julian refers to the veil that covered Christ's face:

But truly I dare to say – and we ought to believe – that there was never so beautiful a man as he, until the time when his lovely complexion was changed by labour and grief, suffering and dying [...] And as concerns the Vernicle of Rome, it changes its colour and appearance from time to time, sometimes more consoling and vivid, sometimes more sorrowful and deathly, as can be seen. And this vision taught me to understand that the soul's constant search pleases God greatly. For it cannot do more than seek, suffer and trust.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ *Showings*, p. 194.

¹³⁸ *Showings*, p. 195.

The contrasting image of Christ's beauty and ugliness is a traditional feature of Christian aesthetics. In his beauty and ugliness, Christ is both hidden and revealed; the paradoxical figure of divinity defiled in the Passion.¹³⁹ In Julian's sight of the Passion, however, Christ's beauty does not transcend his ugliness. Rather, as with medieval aesthetic models which integrated a transcendental idea of beauty, with beauty apprehended in the sensible realm, Julian perceives Christ's beauty (divinity) in his ugliness (humanity).¹⁴⁰ More accurately perhaps, Julian is held in front of Christ's sullied complexion, from which, suddenly, his beauty is revealed. That is not to say, that for Julian Christ's humanity, or humanity in general, is commensurate with ugliness, whilst only his divinity retains the quality of beauty. As I have attempted to make clear throughout the thesis, Julian's modes of vision mutually inform one another: the bodily vision grounds further speculation in the immediacy of Christ's wracked body; the spiritual vision, led by God, slowly penetrates the meaning of what Julian was shown.¹⁴¹ In her bodily vision of Christ's physical deterioration Julian is

¹³⁹ See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of God: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 1: *Seeing the Form*, trans. by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982). Although the scope of this thesis will not allow for a detailed exploration of Balthasar's concept of 'theological aesthetics', the reader should be aware of the enormous contribution he has made in this area. According to Balthasar, the continuity of theology, overrun by tendencies to abstract and dissect borrowed from the exact sciences, depends on the re-discovery of beauty as the 'form' of the living bond between God and the world. Thus Balthasar begins his treatise on theological aesthetics by stating 'Beauty is the word that shall be our first', p. 18.

¹⁴⁰ For an accessible account of medieval theories of beauty see Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, trans. by Hugh Bredin (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1986). Eco makes it clear that in the Middle Ages beauty not only referred to something abstract and conceptual but also to 'everyday feelings, to lived experience', p. 4.

¹⁴¹ Jeffrey Hamburger argues that in Julian's vision of Christ's bleeding and buffeted face his divine and human natures are not exclusive. Hamburger insists that in the depiction of Christ's deteriorating complexion the human and divine are fully integrated and co-existent. His justification for making this claim is that Christ's uniqueness is measured neither by the depths of his degradation nor the heights of his absolute perfection, but rather a combination of both. Therefore, in Julian's vision, Christ is uniquely positioned to offer humankind hope of a final transformation from mortality to eternity, from ugliness to beauty. Importantly, I think Julian would insist that mortality is not seen as ugly from the perspective of the Cross. Rather, Julian comes to understand that Christ's defilement is a result of his love of humankind, and that such a love does not perish through bodily suffering and severe deformity. It is only from the partiality of the human perspective that mortality is seen as irreparably ugly. The dual appearance of Christ as ugly and beautiful is, therefore, a visual lesson that challenges the partiality of the human perspective. See *The Visual and the Visionary*, pp. 362-8. See also Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991). Lochrie argues that Julian's sight of Christ's defilement challenges medieval male perceptions of the female body as chaste, virginal and 'sealed'. She argues that Julian and other medieval female religious sought Christ in his broken body, a body on which the spiritual aspirations of these women were 'written out' or 'inscribed'. Christ's defiled body was, therefore, the very means by which religious women excluded from textual learning could find expression for their spiritual longing. See *Translations of the Flesh*, pp. 37-47.

held before the Passion as a witness. Where spiritual vision offers Julian greater insight into the details of the Passion, she is capable of reflecting on the love that informs Christ's redemptive action.

The paradoxical nature of certain images shown to Julian confirm their role as signifiers for the life of faith, as a life which is defined by seeking and searching in that which appears to be obscure and incomprehensible.¹⁴² As Vincent Gillespie has pointed out, this seeking in the life of faith is replicated in Julian's responses to the sights she is shown, responses that could offer instruction to Christian audience. At a pivotal stage in her vision of Christ's Passion Julian records a change in his countenance. In the Twenty-First Chapter of the Long Text she says:

And I watched with all my might for the moment when Christ would expire, and I expected to see his body quite dead; but I did not see him so, and just at that moment when by appearances it seemed to me that life could last no longer, and that the revelation of his end must be near, suddenly, as I looked at the same cross, he changed to an appearance of joy. The change in his blessed appearance changed mine, and I was as glad and joyful as I could possibly be [...] And here I saw truly that if he revealed to us now his countenance of joy, there is no pain on earth or anywhere else which could trouble us. But because he shows us his suffering countenance, as he was in this life as he carried his cross, we are therefore in suffering and labour with him as our nature requires.¹⁴³

Gillespie argues that the sight of Christ's changing expression teaches Julian that she must abide with Christ on the cross in this life and only then will she witness his look

¹⁴² Vincent Gillespie, 'Strange Images of Death: The Passion in Later Medieval English and Devotional Writing', in *Zeit, Tod und Ewigkeit in der Renaissance Literatur*, 3 vols, Analecta Cartusiana, 117 (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1987), 111-59, (p. 133).

¹⁴³ *Showings*, pp. 214-15.

of joy.¹⁴⁴ Faith seeking understanding, according to Gillespie, is, in Julian's theology, seeking in images a way of beholding God.¹⁴⁵ That is to say, the process of spiritual development in *Showings* is measured by Julian's developing grasp of the grammar of its images, assisted only by her capacity to remain with the paradoxical imagery of the Cross in times of tribulation and blindness as well as in times of well-being and insight.¹⁴⁶

The contrast in Christ's appearance has a redemptive purpose in *Showings*, for only God could, by becoming ugly, transfigure the deformity in fallen humankind. This point is of particular importance when discussing the role of the body in devotional writing. It is generally assumed that full contemplation of God is only possible if the body is overcome. For Julian, it is not just the body understood as Christ's embodiment that is central to meditating on the divine; it is the appearance of the body that leads the viewer to grasp the full significance of Christ's redemptive act. In *Showings*, descriptions of the human body and the body of Christ function didactically. Where the body is described in negative terms one is reminded of the depths to which humankind fell, and the depth that Christ had to fall to redeem humankind.

The veil that obscures the sight of the sacring, like the Vernicle, suggests a profound moment of transfiguration. According to Julian, it is in the bloodied, mutilated features of Christ's face that the divine is encountered, because only the divine could withstand such suffering. Likewise, the appearance of the host from behind the veil signifies the sudden appearance of the divine. Ann E. Nichols argues

¹⁴⁴ For further examples a shift from suffering to joy, or seeking 'love' or 'beauty' in suffering and tribulation in *Showings* see Julian's first personal account of her illness in which all her pain suddenly leaves her at the point of death, p. 128; her conviction to choose Christ crucified as her heaven rather than gaze towards the Father in heaven, p. 143 and pp. 211-12; Julian's description of how God looks on at the human condition in a 'beautiful mingling' of pity and compassion and joy and bliss, p. 271. The pity and compassion, represented by the labourer Adam and Christ's labour in the Passion, guarantee the reciprocal perception of joy and bliss for humanity that was loved without beginning. For a more detailed discussion of the establishment of a divine perspective in Julian's theology see Chapter IV, subsection iii.

¹⁴⁵ Gillespie, 'Strange Images of Death', p. 138.

¹⁴⁶ Julian's conviction that she must remain with the Cross throughout her devotional life has its analogue in the reciprocating relationship between the immediacy of her bodily sights and the penetration of these sights in her more spiritual visions. For just as Julian must witness Christ's suffering to see his countenance change to joy, she learns that she must not abandon her bodily visions for more spiritual sights, but that through constant attention to the bodily sights she may be permitted moments of God-given insight and instruction.

that when medieval artists depicted celebrants taking the host, spiritual communication was achieved in the power of the devotional gaze. She goes on to say:

The worshippers have in some very real sense a preview of heaven when the blessed see the essence of God intuitively face to face. Since this is so, the intense gaze of the faithful directed to the consecrated Host [...] should be added to our list of images of heaven.¹⁴⁷

In the veiling of the host and the Passion, divinity is both hidden and revealed. Both practices, one liturgical the other meditative, emphasize the paradox of seeing. At the Crucifixion, the bodily suffering of Christ is given detailed expression in *Showings*. The suffering body distracts the viewer from the serenity of Christ's divinity. However, it is in the perception of Christ's intense suffering for love alone that his divinity is fully revealed. In comparison, the host is blessed and hidden, and when it is revealed to the congregation it is the host transfigured as the body of Christ that the communicant sees. Nichols's observation that the host offers the celebrant an image of heaven is quite accurate. It is divinity revealed in the host.

An additional feature of church architecture that acted as a means of defining sacred space, whilst encouraging the communicant to visually enter this space, was the rood screen. The screen, only solid to waist height, framed the liturgical drama. Windows penetrated the rood screen and a door in the screen gave access to the ministers, choir and, on occasions, the laity. Eamon Duffy observes 'This penetration was a two way process: if the laity sometimes passed through the screen to the mystery, the mystery sometimes moved out to meet them'.¹⁴⁸ In some examples, the screen's solid section was perforated with squint holes, which trained the eye on the elevated host. In an example of a sixteenth-century rood screen in the church of St Mary Magdalene at Campsall an inscription, at eye level to the kneeling celebrant reads:

¹⁴⁷ Nichols, 'The Bread of Heaven', pp. 51-2.

¹⁴⁸ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, p. 112.

Let fal down thyn ne and lift up thy hart
Behald thy maker on yond cros al torn
Remembir his wondis that for the did smart
Gotyn without syn and on a virgin bor(n);
Al his head percid with a crown of thorn.
Alas, man, thy hart oght to brast in to!¹⁴⁹

The inscription is evidence of the close relationship between ‘empathetic approach’, text and visual response. The inscription is a written account of what the congregation would have been witnessing allied to the required devotional response. The writing on the rood screen is instructional. It tells the celebrant first *what* to look at (Christ on the cross with body torn and crowned with thorns) and then *how* to look at it (as if to split the heart in two).

As I have argued throughout this section, visual tropes and instruction on what images to look at and how to look at them is central to the didacticism of the visions in *Showings*. Julian is instructed by what is revealed to her, and what is not revealed visually is consigned to divine mystery. What *is* revealed to Julian, the message she must transmit to her fellow Christians, is ‘open’ to view. In Julian’s words it is ‘clear and fair and bright and plentiful’.¹⁵⁰ The other portion that is ‘closed’ or ‘hidden’ signifies that which is additional to salvation. Julian instructs the audience to leave this portion alone, not because of any contemplative inadequacy in her audience, but because divine mystery is additional to salvation. What has been done in the acts of salvation and redemption could not have been done any better. This lesson, formulated within her sight of Christ’s Passion, is at the heart of Julian’s didactic message. It is the precursor to the famous dictum of *Showings* that all will be well. First, however, the audience must reflect on what has been revealed and conclude with Julian ‘And in this I was taught that we shall rejoyce only in our blessed saviour Jesus, and trust in him for everything’.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Gray, *Themes and Images*, p. 47.

¹⁵⁰ *Showings*, p. 150.

¹⁵¹ *Showings*, p. 151.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to link a number of complex themes. The suggestion has been made that a text such as *Showings* would have been approached in a variety of ways and in a variety of media. *Showings* maintains a spoken element that addresses the audience as if in conversation. As a consequence, the imagery used to illustrate the Passion, in particular, has a greater immediacy: it invites the reader into the event. Julian also appears to draw upon a common stock of images to describe the events of the Passion. In this way, the written word relies upon representation outside the physical text. Recognizing the limitations of her text, Julian encourages the audience beyond it and into the world of images, dialogue and participation in Christ's redemptive act. Therefore, in offering her vision to the Christian community, Julian expects that what she was shown can be shared. Her audience is already familiar with the nuances in the imagery she uses. The didactic method for approaching imagery in *Showings* as an encounter or conversation allows Julian's audience to participate in her visions through engaging in the sights, sounds and shapes of medieval art, liturgy and architecture. The visions are not deeply private experiences that Julian uses sacramental language to describe and imagery to represent. For Julian, the visions must enter the practice of Christian living in the sacraments which act as a daily reminder of the Passion. By setting the visionary sequence in liturgical time and space, Julian emphasizes the participatory nature of what she was shown as part of the communal activity of Christians. In the next chapter, I will elaborate on the themes of encounter and community by examining the reality of salvation and redemption in Julian's theology of the Incarnation and Passion.

IV

The Body, Theology and the Redemption of Vision

This chapter will consider the body as a redemptive reality in *Showings*. For Julian the redemptive body is not her own body but the body of Christ. Her own body, strictly speaking, is not redemptive but redeemed. That is to say, in *Showings* the sight of Christ's suffering body presents Julian and her audience with redemption and salvation as a reality. These theological concepts are not abstracted, in *Showings* they are *seen* as a revelation of love. In addition to the sight of the Passion from the perspective of Julian and her audience, is the redemptive perspective of Christ himself. In this chapter, I want to argue that *Showings* requires a response to the Christ of the Passion, a reality in the lives of the Christian community, as a perceptual agent. For Julian, it is of equal importance that from a human perspective we know that God wants to be known and that from a divine perspective we have faith that we are known or seen by God. The mode of perception - human and divine - offers redemptive possibilities for the individual. In *Showings*, redemption is pictured in the suffering body of Christ transfigured in joy. It is a picture that challenges the conditional nature of human perceptions whilst safe and secure in faith that what is pictured loves unconditionally in return.

The work in this chapter connects many of the observations that have been made concerning the body in the preceding three chapters. In the material discussed so far, a discernible tension has arisen between the claims of the body and the claims of the soul. The body in some sense is regarded as limiting, prone to error and the victim of temptation. As a consequence, reactions to the body for those in pursuit of spiritual advancement can be quite extreme. The claims of the body and the claims of the soul are often represented as distinct spheres of existence not to be confused.

In Chapter I, for instance, I demonstrated that the tension between the claims of the body and claims of the mind is not a uniquely medieval problem. In the realm of the

senses - particularly vision - from antiquity to the present day, the bodily senses have been relegated in importance to the processes of cognition. The 'correct' view of the world is the mind's eye view. In the same chapter, I also put forward the idea that although the bodily senses may have been suspected of error they did offer the possibility of education and moral reform. Plato, Aristotle, Augustine and Julian each address the use and misuse of the senses in moral language that entails educative development. It would be wrong therefore to assume that these thinkers always spoke about the bodily senses in language that assumed the possibility of error when constructing knowledge claims about the world, beauty or God. As I tried to demonstrate with readings from each thinker, the bodily senses - a fact about the human condition - take on a moral character. How the world or unworldly 'objects' were seen revealed a significant fact about the seer; a fact that could be redeemed and educated. I have argued that it is this process of redemption and education that operates in *Showings* and is set in the context of the life of faith and the development of contrition, compassion and longing. In her visionary sequence, Julian positions her audience before the cross as a daily reminder of a Christian way of living.

Chapter II uncovered further evidence indicating a fear of the body in texts written for anchoresses. This fear of the body, indistinguishable at times from female bodies, manifested itself in a desire for male medieval authors to regulate the religious lives of women. As a consequence, anchoresses were frequently represented as 'solitary heroines' who had no contact with the outside world. For such a solitary individual, the bodily senses were a threat. The carefree gaze of the anchoress was an access point for demonic forces. In addition, the senses presented the possibility of demonic deception thorough visions and voices. Such phenomena were regarded as a bodily affectation resulting from the temptations of the flesh. I sought to challenge the image of an anchoress as having no contact with the world and a target for demonic attacks by showing how Julian presents her own encounters with the devil as a lesson in faith, applicable to all Christians. Julian describes how her visions cease but her faith that she will not be overcome endures. Julian transmits this uplifting message to the

Christian community as a means of learning within a life of faith. To complete Chapter II, I examined modes of anchoritic learning that employ the senses directly. I attempted to demonstrate that looking, listening and loving were activities through which an anchoress could participate in her community, learning with them according to the promptings of a divine didactic initiative.

Chapter III examined the various media that could transmit the visions Julian was shown. I argued that the transmission of *Showings*, outside limited access to a text, would have required the presence of an audience familiar with didactic methods that employ visual and oral techniques. Again, the instruction engages the bodily senses directly. Visual instruction requires the presence of a viewer and the spoken word requires the immediacy of an audience. These methods of engaging the senses were not employed at the cost of spiritual development, as though any such development were something distinct from the daily worship of the Christian community. The sight of Christ, remembrance of the Passion and the reality of salvation history were unmistakably present in liturgical time and daily worship. I attempted to illustrate this by showing how Julian, by setting her visions within a sacramental timeframe, can anticipate the communal act of worship in the Eucharist. The elements of immediacy, instruction (visual, audible, textual and tactile) and community combine in the eucharistic feast. The consumption of Christ's body is a sacramental reaffirmation of the unity in practice and devotion of the Christian community. The same elements of unity and devotion underscore the teaching of Julian's visions.

In Chapter IV, I want to reflect in greater detail on the claims of the body and the claims of the soul. It should be kept in mind that in *Showings* bodily and spiritual claims, from a human perspective, cannot be separated from the body of Christ's Passion and its redemptive significance. Indeed, for Julian the claims of her own body, redeemed from the perspective of the cross, and her spiritual needs are satisfied in the sight of the Passion.

I will present the chapter in four sections. In Section 1, I will provide a general overview of scholarly difficulties in trying to define what 'the body' means. I will

supplement these theoretical concerns with a brief survey of how devotion to the body and the humanity of Christ entered the medieval theological tradition. I will end this section by demonstrating that, in *Showings*, references to the body prefigure the redemptive body of Christ. In Section 2, I will consider how Julian's body language departs in certain respects from Caroline Walker Bynum's acute insights concerning body practices in the late Middle Ages. I do not intend this section to be a direct challenge to Bynum, whose work in this area remains vibrant and authoritative. Rather, I want to pay careful attention to subtle differences between Bynum's observations of bodily theology and Julian's approach to the body; emphasis will be given to the theological implications of these differences. In Section 3, I will introduce the idea that Julian's transference of her bodily claims and spiritual needs onto or into the body of Christ results in a shift of perspective. In an example of a lord and a servant, shown to Julian as a microcosm of the entire visionary sequence, I will demonstrate that a divine perspective is established. In the final section of the chapter, Section 4, I will extend the findings of Section 3 and consider how the process of redemption operates in Julian's anthropology. I will argue that in *Showings* the work of redemption is fulfilled in the joining of the sensual and divine aspects of the human soul. The joining of the soul's sensual and divine aspects is mirrored in the joining of human and divine perspectives; a process I have termed the 'redemption of vision'. I will illustrate how Julian articulates the redemption of vision in the form of the loving regard of Christ as Mother for humanity her child.

The redemption of vision is the natural conclusion to what I have presented in this thesis as the visionary didacticism of *Showings*. At the start of the thesis, I pointed out that vision had educative and moral possibilities. In addition to this I have argued that Julian never questions the idea that she can share the message of her visions with the Christian community. As a revelation of love, the message of the vision is applicable to Julian and the Christian community equally. The shared nature of the vision's message is occupied both in relation to the vision and as members of a community living a life of faith. The central sight of the vision, the Passion, is the exemplar for this form of

instruction. The sight of Christ's suffering, transfigured as joy, is a profound expression of how the human condition is loved and redeemed. The life of faith is the response to this sight, a life described by Julian as developing contrition, compassion and longing for God at its foundation.

1. The Body Problem

In contemporary academic discussions of 'the body', it is no longer clear what that term denotes. Judith Butler articulates this difficulty by stating 'I tried to discipline myself to stay on the subject, but found that I could not fix bodies as objects of thought [...] Inevitably, I began to consider that perhaps this resistance was essential to the matter in hand'.¹ So is it actually possible to define what the body is in any meaningful sense? Surveying academic literature on the body it would appear that no definitive answer can be found. A significant part of the problem is the number of studies devoted to 'the body' in a variety of academic disciplines. The distinctive approaches of each discipline - complete with methodological assumptions - rarely enter into conversation with one another. As a result, the body becomes the subject of numerous mutually exclusive discourses. In philosophy, for example, the body is used to investigate the perennial mind/body problem.² In theology, the body has been used to represent a turn towards discussions of sexual or medical ethics.³ The body is also

¹ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. ix.

² See Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination and Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); For an interesting reassessment of Cartesian 'individualism' set in a medieval context see Sarah Coakley, 'Visions of the Self in Late Medieval Christianity: Some Cross-Disciplinary Reflections' in *Philosophy, Religion and the Spiritual Life*, ed. by M. McGhee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) pp. 89-103.

³ See James B. Nelson, *Body Theology* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992). In his study of 'body theology', Nelson discusses the notion of illness in relation to HIV and AIDS, embryo development in the context of personhood and the ethical complexity of couples making 'reproductive choices'; Lawrence E. Sullivan, 'Body Works: Knowledge of the Body in the Study of Religion', *History of Religions*, 30 (1990), 86-99; Sarah Beckwith, 'A Very Material Mysticism: The Medieval Mysticism of Margery Kempe', in *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology and History*, ed. by David Aers (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1986), pp. 34-57. For a useful overview see Sarah Coakley, 'Introduction: Religion and the Body' in *Religion and the Body* ed. by Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 1-12.

prominent in areas such as feminist theory in conjunction with psychoanalytic and linguistic categories revealing a 'constructed' body; art historians employ the body to explain reception theories, whilst anthropologists use the idea of a 'lived body' for the study of various cultures.⁴ Further references to studies in different academic disciplines could be multiplied.⁵ However, the examples mentioned so far illustrate the great diversity in the use of the term 'body' and the insightfulness of Butler's comment that she cannot fix her mind on what the body is.

The inability to think about the body, as articulated by Butler, results from a tendency to *refer* the body to some conceptual matter. Conceptually speaking, the body is never what we intuitively understand and experience it to be. The body that represents some conceptual interest is no longer the body that 'eats, works and dies'.⁶ In what follows, I want to explore the possibilities for restoring or 'redeeming' our responses to the body. That is to say, I want to argue that Julian understands the body as the body that eats, works and dies. Julian is aware that in moments of suffering or distress we become uncomfortable with embodiment. In such moments, the body requires succour and security. The model for bodily care in *Showings* is Christ's Passion, revealed as suffering transfigured in joy. For Julian, questions about the body point naturally towards the incarnate Christ. It is Christ who represents the body *par excellence* in her visionary sequence. Julian's reflections on the body, including some negative comments, are integrated or re-orientated towards the body of Christ. For Julian her relation to her own body and the body of Christ brings in the question of perspectives. Julian is sure that a human perspective of our bodies as fallen and an impediment to spiritual growth is not how they are seen from the perspective of salvation. Julian's vision describes a shifting of perspectives to catch a glimpse of

⁴ For a feminist critique see Butler, *Bodies that Matter*; for a synopsis of an art historical approach see Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary*, p. 19; Margaret Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1992); for an example of the turn to the 'lived body' in anthropology see Michael Jackson, 'Knowledge of the Body', *Man*, 18 (1983), 327-45.

⁵ See Roy Porter, 'History of the Body' in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. by P. Burke (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), pp. 206-32.

⁶ Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Why All the Fuss about the Body? A Medievalist's Perspective' *Critical Inquiry*, 22 (1995), 1-33 (1).

ourselves from a God's eye view: a mode of perception that is revealed to Julian as the parity of suffering and love in Christ's Passion.

Before examining Julian's body theology in more detail, I want to draw attention to important differences between medieval bodily concerns and what I have introduced as contemporary scholarly categories for the body. In an important article, Caroline Walker Bynum has expertly surveyed some of these differences.⁷ It will be instructive to set out Bynum's main claims to avoid confusing modern assumptions concerning the body with incompatible medieval responses to the body. In her article, Bynum sets out to challenge the pervasive idea that the Middle Ages was profoundly 'dualist'.

The dualist assumption is wrong, Bynum suggests, for three reasons. First, under Aristotelian influence, she argues that the idea of the soul as 'life principle' revised any strict duality between the body as dead matter and the soul as a wholly separate. A two-fold binary of body and soul became a threefold categorization of body, spirit and soul that was used to explain processes of knowledge acquisition and sense perception. Medieval psychology speculated about the intermediary 'powers' that connected the soul to the body and the body to the external world. Such speculation often drew sharper distinctions between the functions of the soul than a distinction between the soul and body.⁸ Second, Bynum argues that the medieval interest in flesh, decay and purification was not a rejection of the body and its functions but an immersion in it. The flesh was, Bynum argues, an instrument of salvation. A flight from the body, she argues, would be implausible in a religion that offered redemption through divinity becoming flesh.⁹ Third, Bynum contends that medieval responses to the body, matter and the flesh defy easy categorization in gendered language. Bynum attempts to restrict this observation to how the body and soul were categorized in the Middle Ages arguing 'Nothing entitles us to say that medieval thinkers essentialized body as matter or essentialized body or matter as female'.¹⁰ It is not Bynum's intention to dispute the

⁷ See Bynum, 'Why All the Fuss about the Body?', pp. 12-19.

⁸ See Bynum, 'The Female Body and Religious Practice', pp. 226-7.

⁹ Bynum, 'Why All the Fuss about the Body?', p. 15.

¹⁰ Bynum, 'Why All the Fuss about the Body?', p. 17.

widespread misogyny in the Middle Ages. Rather, her position rests on the observation that medieval responses to the body were more complex than a reduction to gendered categories will allow.

In *Showings* it is possible to find examples that support each of the claims that Bynum makes. In the first instance, in terms of the visions themselves, Julian does not always make clear distinctions between their bodily and spiritual qualities. Instead, she explains that certain sights revealed to her create an intermediary form of perception between the bodily and spiritual. When Julian is shown the example of a lord and servant, for instance, she states:

The vision was shown doubly with respect to the lord, and the vision was shown doubly with respect to the servant. One part was shown spiritually, in bodily likeness. The other part was shown more spiritually, without bodily likeness.¹¹

Although Julian does include a mode of perception that she describes as spiritual without bodily likeness, she is not necessarily introducing a perceptual hierarchy into the visions. Julian's spiritual sights are not always without some physical significance. In the well-known example of a spiritual sight of God's familiar love, Julian is shown something 'small, no bigger than a hazelnut, lying in the palm of my hand'.¹² Julian says that she is shown this sight and the opening corporeal sight of Christ's bleeding head simultaneously. In a metaphor of God's loving familiarity as our clothing, Julian describes his love which 'wraps and enfolds us, embraces us and guides us'.¹³ The mixing of perceptual modes is extended to the Lady Mary in the first revelation. Julian describes seeing the Lady Mary spiritually in her bodily likeness.¹⁴ Julian's sight of the Lady Mary in the first revelation is the fulcrum for the incarnational imagery that persists in *Showings*. Julian sees her at conception, accepting God's willingness to be

¹¹ *Showings*, p. 267.

¹² *Showings*, p. 130.

¹³ *Showings*, p. 130.

¹⁴ *Showings*, p. 131.

born of a simple creature. Julian then explains that the Lady Mary is above all creation and the only created thing that is above her is Christ's humanity.¹⁵ In the Long Text version of the same sequence, in a passage absent from the Short Text account referred to above, the imagery prefigures the example of a great lord looking on lovingly at his servant.¹⁶ In the Long Text, the reader must wait another forty-four chapters for a full exposition of the example. Nevertheless, the mention of a great lord looking at his servant introduces the shifting modes of perception that represent the familiarity of God's love. The example of the lord's loving familiarity for his servant is, Julian explains, replicated in our relationship to Jesus. In Julian's words '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'.¹⁷ The themes of majesty and familiarity, bodily and spiritual perception integrate in *Showings*. Therefore, it would be a mistake to impose a strict dualism upon the perceptual modes in the visions. Bodily and spiritual seeing inform each other, allowing Julian to represent the familiarity of divine love as an expression of divine majesty.

In the second instance, Julian, as Bynum suggests, uses negative imagery of the body to illustrate points of salvific and redemptive importance, especially the closeness of God's love. In the Sixty-Fourth Chapter of the Long Text Julian states:

And in this time I saw a body lying on the earth, which appeared oppressive and fearsome and without shape and form, as it were a devouring pit of stinking mud; and suddenly out of this body sprang a most beautiful creature, a little child, fully shaped and formed, swift and lively and whiter than the lily, which quickly glided up to heaven.¹⁸

¹⁵ *Showings*, p. 131.

¹⁶ *Showings*, p. 188.

¹⁷ *Showings*, pp. 188-9.

¹⁸ *Showings*, p. 306. For an interesting parallel to this image see *Anchoritic Spirituality*, p. 69. For studies of the medieval fascination with bodily restoration and decomposition see Piero Camporesi, *The Incorruptible Flesh: Bodily Mutation and Mortification in Religion and Folklore*, trans. by Tania Cross-Murray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body: in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: University of Columbia Press, 1995), pp. 279-343.

It is instructive that Julian refers to *a* body and not her body or the body of Christ. What Julian is describing is the clean separation between the pains of this life and the joys of heaven. The bliss of heaven, anticipated in this image, is the elimination of pain. As I understand this passage, Julian's purpose appears to be one of emphasis rather than the adoption of a particular position on embodiment. Although Julian does make an explicit connection between the pit and the body - contrasting the beauty of the child and the body's foulness - the image is meant to reiterate the constant loving regard of God in comparison to our own partial perspective. Thus, Julian adds to the passage above:

And when we fall back into ourselves, through depression and spiritual blindness and our experience of spiritual and bodily pains, because of our frailty, it is God's will that we know that he has not forgotten us.¹⁹

The body is not the cause of pain from which the clean and pure soul must escape. In Julian's theology, as I pointed out in the previous chapter, sin is the cause of pain and suffering. Julian explains that in the human condition, in separation from God, there are occasions when our own blindness causes depression and our frailty, not linked exclusively to the body, causes bodily *and* spiritual pain. The image of the foul body works to assure Julian on two levels. First, no trace of pain, bodily or spiritual, will remain in heaven. Second, that if she did not suffer from spiritual blindness in this life she would see that she is loved now and not forgotten. Following Bynum's remark concerning the redemptive importance of the Incarnation in Christianity of the later medieval period, it would be difficult to sustain the position that God's familiarity and constant care is directed towards a stinking pit of his own creation.²⁰

In the third instance, Julian responds to the body of Christ as a redemptive body and her own body as a body redeemed. However, I do not think that Julian is resisting gender terminology in her body theology. Rather, the reality of redemption is not

¹⁹ *Showings*, p. 307.

²⁰ See Bynum, 'Why All the Fuss about the Body?', p.15.

gender specific. The Incarnation and Passion are expressions of God's familiarity with the human condition as male and female. Julian responds to the body of Christ, described in maternal and paternal language, as an expression of the familiarity that binds and redeems the human condition.

Responses to the body of Christ as a redemptive reality form part of a discernible shift towards Christ's humanity in Christian worship, literature and art in the later Middle Ages. Scholars tend to identify the beginnings of this shift with Anselm of Canterbury at the end of the eleventh century.²¹ Anselm proposed that human beings and the humanity of Christ participate in the process of salvation and redemption. In addition to the contribution of Anselm, scholars often point to the burgeoning sense of self-awareness and introspection in this period.²² The apogee of devotional response to the humanity of Christ was, perhaps, best illustrated in the life of St Francis at the beginning of the thirteenth century and the Franciscan meditative tradition that developed after him in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.²³ However, as Michael Sargent has pointed out, in figures such as Guigo II, Bernard of Clairvaux, William of St Thierry and Aelred of Rievaulx 'The basic exercise of Franciscan meditation was thus already in existence before the birth of the founder of the order'.²⁴ To complete this section, I will give a brief outline of the pre-Franciscan tradition of devotion to and meditation on Christ's humanity, culminating in the full embrace of Christ's humanity in the Franciscan meditative text *Meditations on the Life of Christ*.²⁵ *Showings* and *Meditations* exhibit striking similarities. These similarities help to explain what I have called Julian's response to the body of Christ as a redemptive reality, as well as establishing the human and divine perspectives that characterize *Showings*.

²¹ See R.W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (London: Hutchison, 1953), pp. 219-57.

²² See Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050-1200* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1987). See also John F. Benton, 'Consciousness of Self and Perceptions of Individuality', in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. by R.L. Benson and Giles Constable (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp. 263-95.

²³ For an insightful study of the methods and influence of Franciscan meditation see Denise Despres, *Ghostly Sights: Visual Meditation in Late-Medieval Literature* (Norman, Oklahoma: Pilgrim Books, 1989).

²⁴ Nicholas Love, *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, ed. by Michael G. Sargent (New York: London: Garland, 1992), p. xii.

²⁵ John of Caulibus, *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, trans. by Francis X. Taney, Sr and others (Asheville: Pegasus Press, 2000).

In his treatise of 1098 *Why God Became Man (Cur Deus Homo)*, Anselm rejected the idea that the Devil had rights over human beings, placing Christ's humanity at the centre of salvation and redemption instead.²⁶ The Devil's rights existed, Anselm argued, because human beings had relinquished their fealty to God through original sin. Human beings could be released from the Devil's legitimate claim to them if they returned to God voluntarily, or if the Devil violated the restrictions governing his claim. In taking the life of the sinless Christ, the Devil would violate the legitimacy of his claim over sinners who were unable to return to God voluntarily. Therefore, the Incarnation could be seen as a neat strategic move by God to trick the Devil beyond his rightful claim. In the Incarnation, God could bring about the salvation and redemption of human beings without compromising the Devil's legitimacy or divine justice.²⁷

Having rejected the Devil's rights theory, Anselm argued that human beings and the humanity of Christ have a central role in the process of salvation and redemption. Human beings could repay some of the debt for their disobedience to God but, for the full debt of sin to be repaid, the Son of God became human 'For when death had entered into the human race through man's disobedience, it was fitting that life should be restored through the obedience of man'.²⁸ Anselm repeats the emphasis on the humanity of Christ in his prayers and meditations. Indeed, in the prayers and meditations reflection turns to the human experiences of Christ, his pain and suffering, and our affective responses to the acts necessary for salvation. In the 'Prayer to Christ', Anselm speaks as a firsthand witness who can barely conceive of Christ's suffering:

So, as much as I can, though not as much as I ought,
I am mindful of your passion,
your buffeting, your scouring, your cross, your wounds,
how you were slain for me.²⁹

²⁶ Anselm, *Why God Became Man*, in *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham*, trans. by Eugene R. Fairweather, The Library of Christian Classics, vol. 10 (London: SCM Press, 1956), pp. 100-83.

²⁷ Anselm, *Why God Became Man*, pp. 107-10.

²⁸ Anselm, *Why God Became Man*, p. 104.

²⁹ Anselm, *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 95.

The very fact that Anselm's book is entitled *Prayers and Meditations* is evidence that what were generally considered discrete categories of spiritual practice - prayer being a step beyond meditation - were undergoing a redefinition. The classic fourfold scheme of medieval monastic reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation, exemplified in the Carthusian Guigo II's (d.1188) *Ladder of Monks (Scala Claustralium)*, is harder to separate into discernible steps on the ladder. Guigo, for example, advanced meditation as an end in itself.³⁰ The Benedictine educated, William of St Thierry (1085-1148) moved easily between the practices of meditation, prayer and contemplation. For William prayer was not asking something from God, but offering something to God. William, therefore, differentiates between 'petitionary' prayer that does not seek God with affection and prayer that is clinging and cleaving to God.³¹ As Simon Tugwell has pointed out 'Whichever word is used, what William wishes to recommend is the ascent to God by way of love, which is [...] the 'image' of knowledge which is the closest we can come to in this life'.³² In a letter to the Brothers of Mont Dieu known as the *Golden Epistle (Epistola Aurea)*, William recommends meditation on the life of Christ for those beginning their spiritual development. William explains that the outward actions of 'our Redeemer' are the best and safest way to instruct novices. Although William considers representations of Christ's birth, Passion and resurrection as mediating tools for weak spirits who can only think of the properties of material objects, he adds:

For when Our Lord hath the form of the Mediator, in whom as is said in Job, a man looking upon his likeness shall not sin: that is to say, when he fixeth the gaze of his intention upon Him, by considering the human likeness in God, he forsaketh never the truth, and while through faith he

³⁰ Simon Tugwell has noted that Hugh of St Victor was a major influence in this development. In Hugh's fivefold scheme of reading, meditation, prayer, practice and contemplation the first four elements are 'exercised' with contemplation being the fruit of the exercises. Although reading is advised for beginners and contemplation for the perfect, there is no hierarchical arrangement of meditation, prayer and practice. See Tugwell, *Ways of Imperfection: An Exploration of Christian Spirituality* (Springfield: Templegate, 1985), pp. 114-6.

³¹ See William of St Thierry, *The Epistle to the Brethren of Mont Dieu*, trans. by Walter Shewring (London: Sheed and Ward, 1930), pp. 80-5.

³² Tugwell, *Ways of Imperfection*, p. 117.

severeth not God from man, he learneth at length to apprehend God in man.³³

Perhaps the most celebrated medieval example of devotion to the Christ's humanity is St Francis of Assisi (1181-1226). Ewert Cousins comments that Francis 'More than any other saint or spiritual writer [...] transformed religious sensibility in the direction of devotion to the humanity of Christ'.³⁴ In a biography of Francis's life, St Bonaventure (1217-1274) explains how this devotion to the life of Christ took shape.³⁵ Francis was inspired, his biographer notes, by a Mass of the Apostles and a reading of Matthew 10.9 that encouraged those who would follow the life of the Gospels to relinquish all personal wealth and comforts. Having heard these words, Bonaventure describes Francis saying "This is what I want," he exclaimed. "This is what I long for with all my heart".³⁶ It was a very human Christ - a poor man embodying virtues in the details of his public ministry - that Francis models his religious life on.

Three years before his own death, Francis created a crib for the midnight Mass at Greccio. He instructed his friend John of Greccio to make good with the preparations.³⁷ The specifics of Francis's instructions are significant. He stressed that his desire was to have a bodily sight of the infant "For I wish to do something that will recall to memory the little Child who was born in Bethlehem and set before our bodily eyes in some way the inconveniences of his infant needs".³⁸ Only a year later in 1224, Francis received the stigmata while fasting on Mount La Verna in Tuscany. Francis was shown a vision of a six-winged Seraph in the form of the crucified Christ. At the passing of the vision Francis received the crucifixion wounds. Francis was not only

³³ William of St Thierry, *The Epistle to the Brethren of Mont Dieu*, p. 77.

³⁴ Ewert Cousins, 'The Humanity and the Passion of Christ', in *Christian Spirituality II: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. by Jill Raitt, World Spirituality, 17 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), pp. 375-91 (pp. 380-1).

³⁵ Bonaventure, *Major Life*, in *Francis of Assisi Writings and Early Biographies: English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St Francis*, ed. by Marion A. Habig, 3rd revised ed. (London: SPCK, 1979), pp. 627-787.

³⁶ Bonaventure, *Major Life*, p. 646.

³⁷ Thomas of Celano, *First Life*, in *Francis of Assisi Writings and Early Biographies: English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St Francis*, ed. by Marion A. Habig, 3rd revised ed. (London: SPCK, 1979), pp. 299-302.

³⁸ Thomas of Celano, *First Life*, p. 300.

committed to an outward imitation of Christ, but a personal closeness that enabled him to share in the sufferings and joy of Christ's birth and death. For Francis, sharing in the life of Christ was founded on a way of living centred around renunciation, poverty, humility and overcoming the love of self. It was a way of living that continued with Francis's disciples and developed into a vivid, affective system of meditation.

Denise Despres summarizes the goal of Franciscan meditation as the arousal of remorse in the penitent resulting in a movement of the will towards the development of contrition. The central image that governs this movement of the will is the image of the Crucifixion. In a statement that could act as a summary of this thesis so far, Despres argues, 'Franciscan meditation on Christ's humanity enabled the penitent, educated or uneducated, male or female, to experience the Passion personally and to scrutinize his or her individual response'.³⁹ The element of response is vital in this process. It was not enough to experience the sufferings of the Passion on a personal level. Rather, like St Francis, it was necessary to embody the rigorous self-examination of penance in action. Despres makes this point clear by outlining Elizabeth Salter's three stages for Franciscan meditation on Christ's humanity.⁴⁰ The three stages of Salter's scheme are: sensible recollection, emotional reflection and moral application.⁴¹ Despres explains that sensible recollection is the stage that creates a gospel event in the imagination. Emotional reflection is the non-discursive response of the will becoming aware of its sinful nature. Moral reform is the active response to this growing awareness which culminates in a resolution to reform, a plea for guidance or an expression of love.⁴² It is the goal of moral reform that the author of the *Meditations on the Life of Christ* recommends to the Poor Clare for whom he is writing:

For all that, however, you ought to know that the active life need not precede this contemplation on the life of Christ, because this

³⁹ Despres, *Ghostly Sights*, p. 7.

⁴⁰ Despres, *Ghostly Sights*, p. 6. See also Elizabeth Salter, *Nicholas Love's "Myrrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ."*, ed. by James Hogg, in *Analecta Cartusiana*, 10 (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprach und Literatur, 1974).

⁴¹ Salter, *Nicholas Love's "Myrrour"*, p. 158.

⁴² Despres, *Ghostly Sights*, pp. 6-7.

contemplation is about bodily things, namely, about the activities of Christ according to his humanity [...] This is because in this contemplation we are both cleansed of vices and clothed with virtues, just as in the active life. From that stand point this contemplation concurs with the active life.⁴³

The *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, previously attributed to Bonaventure, comprises a series of devotions structured around the gospel narrative of Christ's life. Authorship and dating of the text is uncertain. In 1385, Bartholomew of Pisa named a 'Brother Johannes de Caulibus' as a member of the Franciscan order at San Gimignano and a writer of meditations on the Gospels.⁴⁴ Luke Wadding supported the identification of Johannes de Caulibus as the writer of *Meditations*, dating the work to 1376.⁴⁵ Wadding's dating places the work within three years of the visions reported in *Showings*. Unfortunately, the lack of clarity over the dating of *Meditations* makes any definitive connection between Julian and this Franciscan meditative text difficult to establish. However, two attractive suppositions can be made to link Julian with a tradition of Franciscan meditation. First, the popularity of *Meditations* during the late Middle Ages is unquestioned. Hundreds of manuscripts survive in Latin and various vernacular translations, influencing mystery plays and the transmission of meditations on Christ's life beyond a monastic audience.⁴⁶ Second, sometime before 1410 Nicholas Love, the Carthusian prior of Mount Grace Charterhouse, began work on an English translation of the *Meditations* entitled *Mirror of the Blessed life of Jesus Christ*.

In a further development that is important for the influence of *Meditations* in late fourteenth-century England, Michael Sargent notes that Love's *Mirror* is in many respects the fulfilment of the spiritual program set out in Walter Hilton's (d.1396)

⁴³ *Meditations*, pp. 176-7.

⁴⁴ See Margaret Deanesley, 'The Gospel Harmony of John of Caulibus, or S. Bonaventure', in *Collectanea Franciscana* 2, ed. by C.L. Kingsford and others, British Society of Franciscan Studies, vol. 10 (Manchester: The University Press, 1922), pp. 10-19. For the dating of the text see Sarah McNamer, 'Further Evidence for the Date of the Pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes vitae Christi*', *Franciscan Studies*, 50 (1990), 247-8.

⁴⁵ See *Mirror of the Blessed of Christ*, p. xvi.

⁴⁶ Love's *Mirror* a reworking of *Meditations* makes reference to the proposed audience for his text as 'man & women & hem that bene of symple vndirstondyng', *Mirror*, p. 10. For an introduction to *Meditations* see John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, pp. 261-2.

Scale and Of Mixed Life.⁴⁷ Love, discussing the advice in *Meditations* concerning active and contemplative forms of living, refers the reader to 'Maister Walter Hilton þe Chanon of Thurgarton'.⁴⁸ In addition, two manuscripts of the *Mirror* contain Hilton's letter *Of Mixed Life*. In an interesting detail, Hilton himself is believed to be the author of *The Pricking of Love*, a middle English translation of *Stimulus Amoris* a meditative tract attributed to the Franciscan James of Milan. The *Stimulus Amoris* instructs its reader in the perfect love of God, climaxing in a dialogue between man's flesh and God the Father. The text exhorts the reader to focus on Christ's Passion and Mary at the foot of the cross. The final eight chapters discuss the intentions of a perfected individual towards God and his neighbour. Given the close connection between Love's *Mirror* and Hilton's own spiritual program, in addition to his identification as the translator of a Franciscan meditative text, it is not unreasonable to assume that Julian could have been influenced by a tradition exhorting meditation on the humanity of Christ, a tradition exemplified in the *Meditations*.

Reading *Meditations* in the context of *Showings*, it is striking that in the Prologue of the former and Chapter i (Short Text) of the latter, St Cecilia features prominently. The description of St Cecilia in *Meditations* could almost act as a summary of Julian's own religious activity:

Among other accounts of the virtues and glories of the most holy virgin Cecilia we read that she always carried Christ's Gospel hidden in her heart. It seems that we should understand that to mean she had chosen certain events from the Lord Jesus' life, as portrayed in the Gospel, that were more devotional for her. And with pure and undivided heart, she meditated on these episodes *day and night* (Ps 2:2), giving them special and fervent attention.⁴⁹

Julian's own reference to St Cecilia and how she came to know the Saint's story is no less significant. In Julian's words 'I heard a man of Holy Church tell the story of St

⁴⁷ See *Mirror of the Blessed of Christ*, pp. xxiii-xxiv.

⁴⁸ *Mirror of the Blessed of Christ*, p. 124.

⁴⁹ *Meditations*, p. 1.

Cecilia, and from his expansion I understood that she received three wounds in the neck from a sword, through which she suffered death'.⁵⁰ The story of St Cecilia is one that Julian hears as an expansion of an original, perhaps more familiar, story of the Saint. Julian uses the iconography of the three wounds to symbolize the unconditional virtues of the spiritual life: contrition, compassion and longing with the will for God. In *Meditations* the reference to the wounds correlates to the wounds of the martyr Cecilia, St Francis and Christ. Drawing on imagery from St Bernard's sixty-first sermon on the Canticles, the martyr is described as 'engrossed with total devotion in the wounds of Christ and remains enmeshed in them by his unceasing meditation'.⁵¹ The author also stresses that, if the martyr thought about his/her own pain above the pain suffered by Christ, s/he would be unable to bear it and would deny his/her faith. Francis, meanwhile, is likened to a mirror for Christ's life, replicating the virtues of that life to the point of receiving the wounds of the Passion:

For as perfectly as he could he [Francis] strove toward him in all the virtues; and finally, with Jesus himself compelling and perfecting him through the impression of the sacred wounds, Francis was totally transformed into him. You see then, to what an exalted height meditation of the life of Christ leads.⁵²

In the shape of Francis's stigmata, mirrored in Christ's wounds and prefigured in the wounds of the martyr, the author of *Meditations* is able to recommend meditation on Christ's life as an end in itself.

Julian's recommendation to meditate on the Passion as an end in itself is not as explicit as that found in *Meditations*. Initially, Julian prays for 'recollection and feeling' of the Passion as the fulfilment of the second wound (compassion) leading to the third wound of longing.⁵³ As part of her request for recollection of the Passion,

⁵⁰ *Showings*, p. 127.

⁵¹ *Meditations*, p. 2.

⁵² *Meditations*, p. 3.

⁵³ *Showings*, p. 129. For commentary on Julian's unconditional request for of the 'three wounds' see Susan K. Hagen, 'St Cecilia and St John of Beverly: Julian of Norwich's Early Model and Late Affirmation' in *Julian of Norwich: A Book of Essays*, ed. by Sandra J. McEntire (New York: Garland,

Julian wishes that 'his [Christ's] pains might be my pains [...] that I might with his grace have his wounds'.⁵⁴ At this point the visions have not begun and Julian's request is focused on the pains of the Passion. However, unlike the model of St Francis who is transformed into Christ, literally into his wounds, Julian follows the model of the martyr who, 'enmeshed' in the pains of Christ replicating her own pains, remains on the brink of being overcome.

In Chapter x of the Short Text, Julian's wish to share in Christ's suffering is fulfilled. Julian describes 'This revelation of Christ's pains filled me full of pains, for I know well that he suffered only once, but it is now his will to show it to me and fill me with its recollection, as I had asked before'.⁵⁵ Julian's description of being *shown* Christ's pain is accurate. Julian's mother tries to close her daughter's eyes, believing she is already dead. The partial obscuring of Julian's sight causes her some distress. Although her sight of Christ's pain increases her own suffering, Julian does not want to be obscured from seeing what she loves. Here visual, physical and emotive responses have theological consequences. Julian's own loving gaze is inseparable from her physical suffering. Indeed, Julian's physical suffering and Christ's pain are also inseparable 'in all this time that Christ was present to me, I felt no pain except for Christ's pain'.⁵⁶ Through sharing in Christ's suffering, Julian is taught a specific theological lesson. She is taught that Christ's pain is our salvation and redemption. Julian learns that sharing in Christ's pain, visually and physically, is not, as in the case for Francis, a transformation into Christ but a participation in what she calls 'a great unity between Christ and us'.⁵⁷ In this sequence the perspectives of redeemer and redeemed are maintained. The unity that Julian describes is the fixing of the human condition in salvation history. Julian is shown that in Christ's salvific act pain does not

1998), pp. 91-114. Hagen overlooks the point that, for Julian, the three wounds are always requested unconditionally. Although Cecilia is not mentioned in the Long Text, this omission does not support Hagen's thesis that reference to the female martyr in the Short Text is evidence of a personal religious conviction that is universalized in Julian's longer account. Hagen, however, does make many useful observations connecting Julian's desire to teach with the Franciscan meditative tradition.

⁵⁴ *Showings*, p. 129.

⁵⁵ *Showings*, p. 142.

⁵⁶ *Showings*, p. 142.

⁵⁷ *Showings*, pp. 142-3.

overcome his love. The salvific message is reinforced in the figure of Christ's mother. Christ's mother, contrasting the actions of Julian's mother, is not spared the sight of her son's suffering. The Lady Mary is described as looking on with a compassion that secures her unity with her son because 'the greatness of her love was the greatness of her pain'.⁵⁸

Julian adds repose to the scene of a mother looking on at her son's suffering.⁵⁹ Mary responds to the reality of salvation and redemption, she does not suffer in isolation. Indeed, Mary exemplifies the reality of salvation and redemption exponentially: the more she suffers the more she loves and *vice versa*. The economy of salvation is underscored two chapters later when Christ's suffering turns to joy. Julian is asked whether she is satisfied with the suffering of the Passion. Having replied that she is well satisfied, Julian is told 'It is a joy and a bliss and an endless delight to me that ever I suffered my Passion for you, for if I could suffer more, I would'.⁶⁰ The work of salvation and redemption is undertaken in suffering. In saying that if he could suffer more he would, Christ assures Julian that the work of salvation and redemption was done well.⁶¹ It is not necessary for this work to be undertaken again. The willingness of Christ to suffer more teaches Julian that salvation and redemption are not static events but responsive acts that continue to function in the life of faith. Thus Julian is led to understand that whereas suffering will cease, love endures in the acts of the Passion 'For his pains were a deed, performed once through the motion of love; but his love was without beginning and is and ever will be without end'.⁶²

Julian therefore responds to Christ's humanity as a salvific and redemptive reality. This must be the case for Julian to be able to look at Christ's suffering with love, a mode of perception made available to her through the Passion, which is a triumph over pain and suffering. Julian sets her body theology within the transformative potential of Christ's body. Following Bynum, this exchange is not, strictly speaking, a gendered

⁵⁸ *Showings*, p. 142.

⁵⁹ Contrast with *Meditations*, p. 254.

⁶⁰ *Showings*, p. 144.

⁶¹ *Showings*, p. 144.

⁶² *Showings*, p. 144.

response, if only because Julian does not locate transformative potential within herself, in her own body, but in the body of Christ. As I have said above, Julian's body is a redeemed body in as much as it is an object of Christ's loving regard. Christ's suffering would continue but it is transfigured as joy, which underscores the reality of salvation and redemption. Julian's body theology is strongly relational. Left alone, Julian admits that moments of inadequacy and depression about the human condition occur. Significantly, this is not how the human condition is seen from the cross. What appears to be a sight of hopeless human suffering is revealed as an expression of unconditional love that makes salvation and redemption a reality. These are very subtle exchanges between the perspective of the human condition and the perspective from the cross in Julian's body theology. In the next section, I want to show how these subtleties resist some of the broader claims of Bynum's thesis. In so doing, I intend to demonstrate the theological significance of Julian's presentation of Christ's body as a redemptive reality.

2. Christ's Redemptive Body: Points of Departure from Caroline Walker Bynum

In many respects, what I have been describing above as Julian's body theology has already received comprehensive treatment in several studies by the historian Caroline Walker Bynum.⁶³ Bynum's work on medieval attitudes to the body and embodiment has pioneered ways of assessing the bodily asceticism of medieval women within a devotional framework, as well as fixing women's bodies as instruments for accessing the divine. Her studies describe a variety of bodily ascetic practices exercised by religious women who wanted to be closer to a loving God. Unsurprisingly, Christ's suffering humanity plays a large part in helping to support Bynum's thesis that, in ascetical practices, the female body could act as a means of accessing the divine.

⁶³ I will focus on three works which appear in Bynum's *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991): 'The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages: A Reply to Leo Steinberg', pp. 79-118; "'...And Woman His Humanity': Female Imagery in Religious Writing of the Later Middle Ages", pp. 151-79; 'The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages', pp. 181-238.

Bynum emphasizes identification with the humanity of Christ to modify the assumption that female acts of bodily mortification were internalized expressions of body hatred, shaped by ideas of the female body as lustful, emotional and disorderly.⁶⁴

The purpose of this section will be to demonstrate that Julian does not fit neatly into Bynum's model for medieval women who accessed the divine or imitated Christ through the body. Part of the problem concerns the sources that Bynum uses. Bynum tends to base her conclusions on hagiographical material that emphasizes the strong penitential activities of medieval women in the form of food deprivation, self-inflicted suffering and illness. Bynum turns naturally to these themes because she wants to challenge the assumption that penitential asceticism was the result of body hatred and not a desire to imitate Christ. It is when dealing with these concerns in the accounts of women like Marie D'Oignies, Angela of Foligno and Catherine of Siena, amongst others, that Bynum formulates many of her groundbreaking ideas. However, it is not clear that all of these ideas apply to Julian. Bynum does discuss Julian, but she has a tendency to select themes from Julian's theology (illness, suffering and the motherhood of Jesus) that appear in the biographies of other medieval women religious, without putting these themes in their fullest theological context in *Showings*. In consequence, Bynum, at times, misses the redemptive significance of Christ's body as a remedy for suffering and desolation, a remedy that is shown to Julian in her visions. Julian's body is not the means of accessing this redemptive reality. It is the sight of Christ's body that loves and suffers equally, and transforms suffering to joy, that reveals the reality of redemption to Julian. This sight also reveals to Julian the need to overcome her own suffering and despair. Bynum accurately observes *imitatio* motifs in several accounts of the penitential activities of medieval women religious, but it is not clear that these motifs give an accurate account of Julian's body theology.

To make this point clearer, in what follows, I will demonstrate how the movement in Julian's redemptive theology is *to* or *into* the body of Christ. Julian's own bodily suffering and the suffering she anticipates in the body of her fellow Christians is

⁶⁴ Bynum, "...And Woman His Humanity", p. 152.

redeemed in Christ's suffering humanity. In *Showings*, the sight of Christ's suffering does not serve emotive or experiential ends only. Christ's suffering is the action of salvation and redemption. It is the possibility of suffering transfigured as joy. The interplay of distance/intimacy, perceiver/perceived and redeemer/redeemed not only expands the insights of Bynum's more subjective categories it also distinguishes Julian from a mode of female piety that celebrates identification with Christ in descriptions of intensely private experiences. Because Bynum wants to establish an idea of womanhood that is not defined by male categories, found in medieval texts and imagery, her emphasis falls naturally on the individual. That is to say, although a male dominated medieval society may have identified women with their lustful bodies, Bynum argues that women did not identify themselves in that way. Thus Bynum states 'Women say less about gender, make less use of dichotomous gender images, speak less of gender reversal, and place more emphasis on interior motivation and continuity of self'.⁶⁵ Whereas Bynum's project is an attempt to illustrate the 'interior motivation and continuity of the self' in women's penitential practice, the contrasting movement in *Showings*, with little or no emphasis on ascetical practice, is outward, towards the unity of the Christian community and into the redemptive body of Christ.⁶⁶ Julian defines identification in terms of community in the unity of God's loving gaze and an indwelling in Christ's perforated body.

To begin, I will summarize some of Bynum's main claims concerning the diverse symbolism of embodiment in the later Middle Ages and its association with the idea that embodiment presented the possibility for religious women to access the divine. Before attempting to establish the redemptive emphasis in Julian body theology, I want to show how some of Bynum's observations complement aspects of Julian's approach to the body. Considering the female body in the period from 1200 to 1500, Bynum claims:

⁶⁵ Bynum, "...And Woman His Humanity", p. 156.

⁶⁶ For a discussion of Julian's silence concerning ascetic practices see Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich*, pp. 149-61.

Compared to other periods of religious history and other world religions, medieval spirituality – especially female spirituality – was particularly bodily; this was so not only because medieval assumptions associated female with flesh but also because theology and natural philosophy saw persons as, in some real sense, body as well as soul.⁶⁷

According to Bynum, the psychosomatic unity of the person as body and soul, spirit and flesh was the dynamic through which the religious women reached out for God through tears, bleeding, fasting and flagellation. In return, God offered gifts that were written into the woman's body (stigmata, spiritual pregnancy, corporeal visions). With regard to visionary women, mirroring the visual schema in *Showings*, Bynum makes the important observation that in the matrix of corporeal longing and gifts of grace, the locus of divine access or *impress* integrated the activities of the body, heart and soul. Bynum demonstrates the integration of the physical and spiritual in the erotic poetry of the mid-thirteenth-century beguine Hadewijch.⁶⁸ Hadewijch describes the visions she received as 'tokens of love' offered between lovers.⁶⁹ The closeness that Hadewijch speaks of between herself and God, her lover, culminates in mutual consumption:

And in all these tokens which I felt between Him and me, according to the usages of love, just as lovers use between themselves [...] finding most of their close communion one with another, each one as it were tasting all, eating all, drinking all, consuming all the other.⁷⁰

Bynum argues that the interaction of the corporeal and incorporeal is replicated in visions shown to many religious women, which do not make clear distinctions between the mind's eye and the eyes of the body.⁷¹ As I have attempted to show already, although Julian does go to some length to categorize her visions as either bodily or spiritual, she also describes an intermediary category of vision (spiritual in bodily

⁶⁷ Bynum, 'The Female Body', p. 183.

⁶⁸ Bynum, 'The Body of Christ', p. 86.

⁶⁹ Petroff, ed., *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, p. 189-200.

⁷⁰ Petroff, ed., *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, p. 194.

⁷¹ Bynum, 'The Female Body', p. 191.

likeness) in which she sees the Lady Mary, as well as spiritual sights in which she sees an object the size of a hazelnut and the unity of all the visions symbolized in the first revelation of a bleeding crown of thorns.⁷² In a vivid example that brings to mind the medieval ABC lyric discussed in Chapter 3, Section 2, Bynum describes a vision received by the French Carthusian Marguerite of Oingt (d.1310). In the vision, Marguerite sees herself as a withered tree irrigated by a torrent of water that represents Christ. Once nourished by Christ, Marguerite is able to read the names of the five senses (sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch) on her flowering branches.⁷³ As Bynum observes 'It is hard to imagine a more pointed way of indicating that the effect of experiencing Christ is to "turn on" so to speak, the bodily senses of the receiving mystic'.⁷⁴

Beyond the enlivened body of the female visionary as the site for divine access and sensory participation, Bynum observes that the body of Christ himself was accessed as female.⁷⁵ Bynum notes that medieval texts and art saw the Church (*ecclesia* – a feminine noun) as Christ's body, his bride and as nursing mother. Referring directly to Julian's motherhood of Jesus theology, Bynum makes the acute observation that its use transcends the simile. Like the mothering of the Lady Mary in *Showings*, her son's mothering is central to the saving and creating acts of the Incarnation. In the Fifty-Seventh Chapter of the Long Text, Julian combines the motherhood motifs of Jesus and his mother in a mutual indwelling and re-birth:

So our Lady is our mother, in whom we are all enclosed and born of her in Christ, for she who is mother of our saviour is mother of all who are saved in our saviour; and our saviour is our true Mother, in whom we are endlessly born and out of whom we shall never come.⁷⁶

⁷² See *Showings*, pp. 130-1. For the incorporation of the entire visionary sequence in the crown of thorns see *Showings*, p. 175.

⁷³ Bynum, 'The Female Body', p. 192.

⁷⁴ Bynum, 'The Female Body', p. 192.

⁷⁵ Bynum, 'The Female Body', pp. 93-102.

⁷⁶ *Showings*, p. 292.

In addition to the motherhood of Jesus theme, Bynum adds three associations that link medieval ideas of femininity with Christ's body. First, Bynum draws on the theological tradition, established in patristic times, that male and female are to one another as flesh is to spirit. Hildegard of Bingen describes the same association in the phrase 'man represents the divinity of the Son of God and woman his humanity'.⁷⁷ Second, medieval writers used images of conception theory formulated by Aristotle and Galen to assign active roles to males and passive, nurturing roles to females. Both Aristotle and Galen regarded the woman as providing flesh to the developing human being with the male providing the active principle or form. Third, Bynum refers to Christ's own conception as linking his flesh with womanhood in the medieval mind. Without an earthly father the Virgin's humanity, the clothing of Christ, is represented as the sinless vessel that offers the saving flesh of God to creation.

It is not my concern to dispute Bynum's detailed survey of the complexity of symbols associating embodiment - particularly the suffering humanity of Christ - with female piety. Rather, I want to build on Bynum's observation that, in the image of Jesus as Mother, at least one aspect of Julian's theology represents a salvific reality that transcends simile or symbolism. The principal reason Bynum does not build on this observation herself, I think, is the tendency for her religious symbolism (bleeding, feeding, crying etc) to take on subjective predicates. Because these bodily actions are the means of imitating Christ's *suffering*, Bynum, at times, appears to assign them a primary psychological character. This move is reasonable because it captures Bynum's understanding of the human being as a psychosomatic unity, as well as offering an accurate model for how many medieval women described 'experiences' of intense identification with Christ. Interestingly, Bynum names Julian as an example of this individualism in medieval female piety:

⁷⁷ For source referencing and commentary see Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, p. 336, fn. 47 and fn. 48 respectively. For a full discussion of the motherhood of Jesus tradition see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

It is striking to note that, however fulsome or startling their imagery, men write of “*the* mystical experience,” giving a general description that may be used as a theory or yardstick, whereas women write of “*my* mystical experience”, speaking directly of something that may have happened to them alone. This is true even when, as in the case of Hildegard of Bingen and Julian of Norwich, a highly sophisticated theology is elaborated over many years as a gloss on visionary experiences.⁷⁸

The individualistic nature that Bynum finds in female religious experience fails to capture Julian’s persistence in offering her visions as a means of educating the Christian community. I have said enough already concerning the communal activity of Julian as an anchoress and the various visual, oral and tactile means that she may have used to transmit her visions to her fellow Christians. In what follows, I want to demonstrate that whilst ‘*my-ness*’ is certainly a feature of some religious experiences reported by medieval women, as Bynum accurately observes, it is a feature of visionary experience that Julian challenges in an effort to point all Christians to the redemptive body of Christ.

In Chapter xx of the Short Text, Julian explains her great desire to be delivered from the world. Julian wishes to be delivered from the world because of the woe it contains and the pain of God’s absence that she experiences, a pain she fears will overcome her. In response, God talks and ‘reasons’ with Julian. She is told to be patient and that suddenly she will be taken out of all pain and suffering. She is then asked rhetorically and firmly ‘Why should it grieve you to endure for a while, since that is my will and to my glory?’ To which she replies:

It is God’s will that we accept his commands and his consolations as generously and as fully as we are able; and he also wants us to accept our tarrying and our suffering as lightly as we are able, and to count them as nothing. For the more lightly we accept them, the less importance we ascribe to them because of our love, the less pain we shall experience from them and the more thanks shall we have for them.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Bynum, ‘The Female Body’, p. 190.

⁷⁹ *Showings*, pp. 160-1.

In the exchange between God and Julian, it is noteworthy that Julian's initial desire to be delivered from the world is extended to the repetitive use of 'we'. The lesson of patience and endurance that Julian is taught - rationally, not in the experience pain - is inclusive of the Christian community. Julian learns that in choosing God above her own exclusive experience of suffering and pain she has chosen love. In making this choice, out of love, Julian is taught that she is chosen in return:

I was truly taught that any man or woman who voluntarily chooses God in his lifetime may be sure that he too is chosen.⁸⁰

Julian recommends this lesson to 'every soul' for them to think that God's salvific activity was centred on them alone. This seeming individualism serves two purposes for Julian. First, it addresses the theological point that God's love would save one person, if there were only one person to save. Second, the act of God's love towards the individual releases them from a focus on their own suffering and pain, justifying a loving response in return. In a noteworthy passage, Julian explains:

And therefore if a man be in so much pain, so much woe and so much unrest that it seems to him that he can think of nothing at all but the state he is in or what he is feeling, let him, as soon as he may pass it over lightly and count it as nothing. Why? Because God wants to be known; and because if we knew him and loved him we should have patience and be in great rest.⁸¹

For Julian the human perspective, the pain that the human condition experiences, conditions the world human beings experience. In the sequence of visions, Julian is shown and taught that Christ's experience of suffering is synonymous with love. This is not the same as 'interpreting' suffering as love. For Julian, if salvation and

⁸⁰ *Showings*, p. 161.

⁸¹ *Showings*, pp. 161-2.

redemption are realities, then suffering *is* love. It is this understanding of suffering and love that generates the perpetual efficacy of the Passion. In Julian's theological language, Christ is always ready to suffer for his love of humanity although, theologically, having suffered once, his redemptive work is complete. Again it is worth stressing that Julian is not denying the body in these passages, she is describing its redemption. Christ shares perfectly in humanity through the equality of his suffering and love. The grammar of salvation and redemption requires this equality for the salvation and redemption of the human condition to be complete. Julian is taught the completeness of these acts in words spoken to her by Christ:

How could it be that I should not do for love of you all that I was able? To do this does not grieve me, since I would for love of you die so often, paying no heed to my cruel pains [...] The love which made him suffer it surpasses all his sufferings, as much as heaven is above earth; for the suffering was a noble, precious and honourable deed, performed once in time by the operation of love.⁸²

In Julian's theological thinking the work of salvation and redemption could not have been done better: the Passion 'performed once in time' is complete. The notion of completeness is precisely the point that is missed when attention is given to subjective experiences. Julian is not denying the great suffering of the human condition. Rather, as a theologian, she is stressing a shift of perspective away from the individual's suffering, to the completeness of salvation in which love transcends all suffering. Julian consistently discusses suffering in the context of love with each acting as a guarantee of the other. The intention of the Passion is love which results in wilful suffering, and both have been done as well as God could have devised them. Thus, the message of Julian's theology is a joyous one 'let our delight in our salvation be like the joy which Christ has in our salvation'.⁸³ For Julian, the body is not a means to the divine, it is already the locus of divinity shared by Christ and redeemed in salvation.

⁸² *Showings*, pp. 217-8.

⁸³ *Showings*, p. 219.

Bynum is correct to stress the importance of the body but not at the risk of blurring theological language with psychological predicates.

This blurring of the theological and psychological is illustrated in Bynum's bold claim that the notion of women's self definition as physical is not merely an imitation of Christ but access to the divine.⁸⁴ According to this claim it is not even clear where the language of salvation and redemption fits in. However, the language that Bynum fails to account for is central to Julian's spiritual development. For Julian, in metaphorical language, there is no movement without the act of salvation and redemption. In a decisive sequence in *Showings*, Julian is led into the wound in Christ's side:

With a kindly countenance our good Lord looked into his side, and he gazed with joy, and with his sweet regard he drew his creature's understanding into his side by the same wound; and there he revealed a fair and delectable place, large enough for all mankind that will be saved and will rest in peace and in love.⁸⁵

This passage is the culmination of a number of central themes in *Showings*. Julian's initial, fearful sight of the bleeding, disintegrating face of Christ is now focused on just one wound in Christ's side. Christ's face is now kindly, not bloodied. Prior to Julian being led into Christ's body, she had proclaimed Christ as her heaven, refusing a sight of the Father, to remain with the Passion scene as her heaven. The reason for her choice is pragmatic. In 'well-being and woe' Julian is taught to choose only Jesus as her heaven.⁸⁶ In a sense then, the steadfastness of the individual defines participation in the process of salvation and redemption. For Julian, it is not enough to be saved, one must believe it in the face of adversity and be patient and endure. A useful analogy is the sense we have of our own mortality. Mortality introduces a certainty into the human condition, yet it is never 'experienced' as a certainty. Coming to terms with

⁸⁴ Bynum, "...And Woman His Humanity", p. 172.

⁸⁵ *Showings*, p. 220.

⁸⁶ *Showings*, p. 212.

mortality involves a process of coming to see others and ourselves differently. Certain items, once thought indispensable, may appear unnecessary. As Julian explains, the dynamic of salvation and redemption operates between its certainty and our misperception of it:

And so by this meek knowledge, through contrition and grace we shall be broken down from everything which is not our Lord. And then will our blessed saviour cure us perfectly and unite us to him. This breaking and this curing our Lord intends for men in general, for he who is highest and closest to God may see himself sinful and needy along with me.⁸⁷

From Christ's perspective - the perspective of salvation - all has been done well. However, in the human perspective there is a flux between seeing clearly and periods of blindness that mask the certainty of Christ's redemptive actions. In a neat summary Julian says 'We do not fall in the sight of God, and we do not stand in our own sight'.⁸⁸ According to Julian, the completeness of salvation and redemption is captured in her understanding that we do not fall in God's sight; it is our own perspective that distances the redeemed human condition from God. Bynum's model appears strongly individualistic by comparison. The individual's perspective is the very means of accessing the divine. As I have said above, the details of Bynum's research are both cogent and elucidating. My intention has been to add to the fundamental findings of Bynum's research and demonstrate a deconstruction of psychological categories in Julian's understanding of Christ's suffering as the guarantee and cure for the suffering of the human condition. In the next section, I will elaborate on the idea of a shift of perspectives from the human to the divine in *Showings*. This shift is captured in an example of a lord and servant, shown to Julian as a microcosm for her entire visionary sequence.

⁸⁷ *Showings*, p. 333.

⁸⁸ *Showings*, p. 339.

3. Establishing a Divine Perspective

In the previous section I argued that Bynum's subjective categories for an imitative religious experience of the suffering Christ cannot fully account for Julian's theology of salvation and redemption. For Julian, it is important that our own perspective in the human condition and the sight of Christ's redemptive body are not exclusive. Julian's theology of salvation and redemption challenges the idea that Christ's suffering can be reduced to a private religious experience. Rather, in *Showings* Christ's suffering is revealed as the reality of salvation and redemption. In other words, Julian understands that only Christ's humanity is capable of suffering selflessly for love and transfiguring suffering to joy in his Passion. Therefore, to remain in suffering, from a human perspective, therefore, questions the efficacy of Christ's redemptive activity. However, Julian understands that, from a human perspective, pain and the suffering it causes are deeply debilitating and can lead to a profound sense of isolation. This sense of an isolating human perspective requires the redeeming capacity of a divine perspective. Julian assures her fellow Christians that the divine perspective never isolates human suffering but looks on with the greatest compassion. This is not a disembodied mode of perception, or worse a divine perspective that collapses into *schadenfreude*. In the Incarnation and Passion, the divine perspective is embodied and participates in human suffering. Julian herself experiences the paralysing grip of suffering firsthand through her illness. In extreme pain and suffering, she is led to understand that dwelling on her condition is a form of blindness. Julian does not deny suffering. Rather, she understands that in the compassion and closeness of the divine perspective she never suffers in isolation.

In what follows, I want to demonstrate how Julian establishes a divine perspective in a vision she is shown of a lord and a servant. This particular vision demands our attention because it is revealed to Julian as the hermeneutic key for the entire visionary sequence. In discussing the vision, I will show how the interplay of human and divine

perspectives creates a 'Theo-drama' of the sort discussed by Hans Urs von Balthasar.⁸⁹ Having plotted the theo-dramatic characteristics of the divine and human perspectives, I will provide a general theological context for approaching the example of a lord and servant. In the final part of the section, I will turn to the example itself and demonstrate how the interaction of the lord and servant establishes a divine perspective. Importantly, the divine perspective should not be thought of as a detached point of view. The divine perspective reveals the love that informs Julian of our salvation and redemption in the Incarnation and Passion of Christ. It is Christ's embodiment that guarantees the entrance of the divine perspective into human history. The entrance of the divine perspective is a relational act. The Incarnation and Passion is God's relational act which redeems the individual from isolated suffering.

In a recent publication, Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt has expertly applied Balthasar's concept of 'theo-drama' to aspects of *Showings*.⁹⁰ Before turning to Bauerschmidt's analysis, it is important to make a distinction between dramatic influences that may be apparent in *Showings* and the dramatic character of Julian's theology itself. The former occupies the category of presentation in the way that Julian chooses to illustrate particular aspects of her theology. This category of presentation can be extended to include literary motifs such as allegory, metaphor, rhetoric and so on. The latter, the dramatic character of Julian's theology, demonstrates the way in which the theological claims Julian makes are exercised in a Christian life. In other words, to say that a theological claim has a dramatic character is to presuppose the interplay of the human and divine, each shaping the perspective of the other. As Bauerschmidt notes, referring directly to the reciprocity shown between the lord and servant of Julian's vision:

In Bakhtin's terms, the reciprocal gift exchange of the lord and servant is a "drama without footlights" that draws into the exchange all who look

⁸⁹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, trans. by Graham Harrison, 5 vols (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990-1998).

⁹⁰ Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, *Julian of Norwich and the Mystical Body Politic of Christ* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1999).

upon it, that can in fact only be *seen* by those who accept a role in the drama.⁹¹

Bauerschmidt's understanding of the requirement to participate in Julian's visions picks out what I have been describing as the need to set *Showings* in the life of faith. That is to say, the visions and their theological import would not be *seen* by anyone who refused to play a part.

The requirement for both human and divine interplay has important theological consequences. According to Balthasar the concept of 'theo-drama' posits the presence of an eternal God as *the* actor in space and time-bound human history. Each sphere, human and divine, shares in the dramatic exchange, neither one subsuming the other. The relatedness of humanity and divinity does not result in a power struggle in which human freedom competes with claims made upon it from above. Instead, human freedom is defined as the willingness to take a part in the drama. According to Balthasar, the individual displays, in microcosm, the antinomies of this dramatic exchange: spirit-body, male-female, individual-community. However, as Bauerschmidt points out 'the answer to the tension between these structuring antinomies is not the victory of one over the other, or a "mean" between two extremes, but a reconciling redemption by the "atoning" incarnation of Christ'.⁹² Christ as actor is what Balthasar calls a 'blueprint' for the meeting of antinomies without degradation to either or an exchange that results in an inferior middle.⁹³

In the Incarnation, Balthasar describes Christ 'plumbing the dimensions of "world" and "flesh" to the very bottom' in order to bring the corporeal back to God without 'spiritualizing' it.⁹⁴ The theo-dramatic encounter of divinity and the flesh transfigures the realm of the corporeal without deprivation. As I have explained already, the antinomies must be kept intact for the dramatic encounter to take place at all. In this drama Christ is the blueprint, the archetype for the life of faith. Importantly, as

⁹¹ Bauerschmidt, *Mystical Body Politic*, p. 187.

⁹² Bauerschmidt, *Mystical Body Politic*, p. 165.

⁹³ Balthasar, *Theo-drama*, vol. 2, 1990, p. 364.

⁹⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-drama*, vol. 2, 1990, p. 364.

Bauerschmidt explains, to be a 'theological person' according to exchanges of theodrama is to be *in Christ*.⁹⁵ This is not an association that is accomplished through a certain type of subjective experience but a particular way of living according to Christ's life. As Bauerschmidt notes:

The mission, the task of discipleship by which one is "in Christ", is unique to each individual, yet when one receives this unique mission, one is "simultaneously de-privatized, socialized, made into a locus and bearer of community".⁹⁶

Furthermore, Bauerschmidt observes that, what Balthasar talks of as the 'de-privatization' of the individual in following their mission, is mirrored in the paradox of Julian's confinement to a cell and commitment to reveal a revelation of love to the Christian community. Julian's commitment to community and the life of faith fixes her in the drama. As a recipient of a revelation of love, Julian does not occupy an all-seeing perspective. As I have argued throughout the thesis so far, Julian's viewpoint is indistinguishable from her fellow Christians who are shown the visions as they were shown to her. Julian's viewpoint, the de-privatized viewpoint she shares with the Christian community, dramatically engages in the redemptive viewpoint of the cross, keeping both viewpoints intact. Indeed, the life of community and mission defined in Christ are necessary elements of the drama that guarantee Julian's perspective is not subsumed in an all-seeing viewpoint. In this way, Julian can recommend keeping the visions and responding to them in the life of faith exercised as a community. To respond at all is to participate in the community's life of faith, a life that cannot be defined according to a private or all-seeing worldview. I think Balthasar anticipates the requirement of a response as a participation in the life of faith and community when he says 'In this play all the spectators must eventually become fellow actors, whether they

⁹⁵ Bauerschmidt, *Mystical Body Politic*, p. 168.

⁹⁶ Bauerschmidt, *Mystical Body Politic*, p. 168. The final quotation is from Balthasar, *Theo-drama*, vol. 3, 1992, p. 271.

wish to or not'.⁹⁷ Bauerschmidt endorses this observation in his own reading of *Showings* as theo-drama when he states:

Julian's thought is fundamentally 'dramatic' in Balthasar's sense because it is framed by antimonies which are neither static points of paradox nor stable levels of meaning but dynamically related poles that create possibilities that can only be resolved dramatically [...] These antinomies rather define a sphere of action, a 'stage' in which the redemption of the world is played out. Only such a theo-dramatic reading of Julian can account for the interplay of temporal and eternal perspectives without collapsing one into the other.⁹⁸

A similar reluctance to collapse human and divine perspectives underscores Julian's revision of the theological context that surrounds the example of a lord and servant. The example is revealed to Julian as an answer to a specific visual concern.⁹⁹ Afflicted by the sinful state of the human condition, Julian desires some method of overcoming the blindness that results from sin, as well as greater insight into how God sees human beings in sin. Julian is sure that God is a loving God, and does not blame human beings for sin. Julian is assured that God does not blame human beings for sin because she cannot see any wrath in God. In the Forty-Eighth Chapter of the Long Text Julian claims 'I saw no wrath except on man's side, and he forgives that in us, for wrath is nothing else but a perversity and an opposition to peace and to love'.¹⁰⁰ In this statement Julian neatly articulates how human and divine perspectives appear to come into conflict. The divine perspective is all love and incapable of wrath or anger and therefore incapable of blame. The human perspective, blinded to this love, sees its sinful condition as shameful and blames a loving God. The perspectives are kept intact. Blame remains on the side of the human perspective, whilst the divine perspective loves constantly. Forgiveness therefore is not the result of a divine judgement but the

⁹⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-drama*, vol. 2, 1990, p. 58.

⁹⁸ Baureschmidt, *Mystical Body Politic*, p. 172.

⁹⁹ The editors Colledge and Walsh have observed that the example of a lord and servant is an illustrative story of the type that may have been used by a preacher. See *Showings*, p. 257, fn. 222.

¹⁰⁰ *Showings*, p. 262.

necessary consequence of an all-loving perspective that does not blame. As Julian explains a little later in the same chapter, our failing and blaming are allowable because of the all loving and merciful perspective of the divine:

Mercy and love allows us to fail to a certain extent; and in as much as we fail, in so much we die. For we must necessarily die inasmuch as we fail to see and feel God, who is our life. Our failing is dreadful, our failing is shameful, and our dying is sorrowful. But yet in all this the sweet eye of pity is never turned away from us, and the operation of mercy does not cease.¹⁰¹

A simple comparison with the influential Augustinian understanding of sin reveals the distinctive quality of Julian's approach to how humanity is seen in its sinful condition. As Denise Baker notes, following an Augustinian paradigm, medieval Church practices of penance and yearly confession retained the idea that a judging God administered punishment for sin.¹⁰² God's punishment of sinners is just, according to Augustine, because of the guilt and weakness that the human condition inherited from Adam and Eve. Augustine's understanding of sin and punishment is described in language of conflict and struggle in which our efforts at moral development are hindered by an inherited defect in human nature. In *The City of God*, Augustine describes this inherited defect as a consequence of the Fall of the first man:

In the punishment of that sin the retribution for disobedience is simply disobedience itself. For man's wretchedness is nothing but his own disobedience to himself, so that because he would not do what he could, he now wills to do what he cannot. For in paradise, before his sin, man could not, it is true, do everything; but he could do whatever he wished, just because he did not want to do whatever he could not do.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ *Showings*, p. 262.

¹⁰² See Baker, *Julian of Norwich's Showings*, pp. 83-106.

¹⁰³ Augustine of Hippo, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. by Henry Bettenson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), Book Fourteen, Chapter 15, p. 575.

Julian's observation that wrath is on the side of the human condition has a resonance in Augustine's notion of the individual's internal conflict caused by the Fall. However, whereas Julian focuses on the restorative potential of an all-loving divine perspective, Augustine conceptualizes sin within the destructive forces of struggle and conflict. In Julian's theodicy restoration replaces retribution. Although Julian recognizes that it is possible that an individual may be turned against themselves as a consequence of wrath and blame, she refuses to legitimize the isolation that it causes with the idea of just punishment. For Julian, the divine perspective that looks on the changeable human condition is not changeable itself. Our moral depravity, or changeability, is met with unchanging love, which can restore the human condition to a state of equanimity. In Julian's theology of salvation and redemption conflict is on the side of the human condition and God's unchanging love is its restoration. In Augustine's theodicy conflict is on both the side of humanity at war within itself and also on the side of God as the retributive judge of human transgressions.

For Julian the existence of the human condition is rooted, immovably, in love. In the Forty-Ninth Chapter of the Long Text, having stated again that she cannot see any wrath in God, she adds 'For truly, as I see it, if God could be angry for any time, we should neither have life nor place nor being'.¹⁰⁴ Julian's conviction that humankind is not blamed for sin is challenged by her acceptance of Church teaching that the blame of sin 'continually hangs upon us'.¹⁰⁵ Julian describes how the opposition of her failure to see wrath in God and her faith in the teaching of the Church causes a state of blindness and unrest. Fearing that she will remain ignorant of how the human condition is seen in sin from a divine perspective, Julian says that she does not want her sight of the Lord's presence to pass. The juxtaposition of perspectives is demonstrated in Julian's comment 'For either I ought to see in God that sin was all done away with, or else I ought to see in God how he sees it'.¹⁰⁶ As Julian's anxiety increases, she feels compelled to ask God for some resolution:

¹⁰⁴ *Showings*, p. 264.

¹⁰⁵ *Showings*, p. 266.

¹⁰⁶ *Showings*, p. 266.

I cried within me with all my might, beseeching God for help, in this fashion: Ah, Lord Jesus, king of bliss, how shall I be comforted, who will teach me what I need to know, if I cannot at this time *see it in you?*¹⁰⁷

The Lord's answer is described at length in the Fifty-First Chapter of the Long Text as 'a wonderful example of a lord and a servant' for which Julian is given 'sight' to understand.¹⁰⁸ The example is an answer to the visual ambiguity presented by sin which threatens the unity of the vision and the Church.¹⁰⁹ Early in *Showings*, Julian identifies herself fully with the Christian community in the participation of love.¹¹⁰ Love is also the foundation of the revelation itself, a de-privatizing factor that necessitates Julian's presentation of the visions to the Christian community. Sin, however, threatens this unity by causing gaps to open up in her visionary field.

Julian's confusion is warranted given the rich detail and theological depth of the example. Her instruction to look upon all the example's attributes, divine and human, connects with the 'double aspect' (spiritual with and without bodily likeness) in which the example is revealed. Given the abstract nature of Julian's petition to see that God has dealt with sin or to see how God perceives sin in the human condition, it is surprising that her answer comes in the form of the picturesque figures of a lord and servant. Nevertheless, Julian begins her exposition by describing the sight of the two figures in bodily likeness. She describes seeing the servant stand before the lord ready to do his will, whilst the lord looks on at his servant 'lovingly and sweetly and mildly'.¹¹¹ The servant is then sent out to enact the will of his loving lord. Eager to please, the servant sets off at great speed. Julian then describes how in his haste the servant falls into a dell. The fall renders the servant helpless and at the mercy of his physical suffering. Commenting on the spectacle of the fallen servant, Julian observes

¹⁰⁷ *Showings*, pp. 266-7, my emphasis.

¹⁰⁸ *Showings*, p. 267.

¹⁰⁹ Julian describes the visual ambiguity of sin and the ontological significance of that ambiguity when she states 'But I did not see sin, for I believe that it has no kind of substance, no share in being, nor can it be recognized except by the pains which it causes'. See *Showings*, p. 148.

¹¹⁰ See *Showings*, p. 134.

¹¹¹ *Showings*, p. 267.

that the greatest pain the isolated servant felt was a lack of consolation ‘the greatest hurt which I saw him in was lack of consolation, for he could not turn his face to look on his loving lord, who was very close to him, in whom is all consolation’.¹¹² Instead of looking on his lord, the servant, consumed by his own suffering, remains alone.

Julian inspects the demeanour of the servant and is amazed that he could suffer his fall so meekly, adding that she cannot see any fault in the servant nor can she see any blame imputed by the lord. Julian explains that the servant’s fall is the result of his good will and great desire, not the result of any lack. As I have explained above, Julian conceptualizes lack in visual terms as a lack of consolation due to the servant’s inability to look on the face of his lord who is all consolation. At this point Julian says that the example disappears suddenly. Although God continues to lead Julian’s understanding to the end of the entire visionary sequence, Julian notes that, at the time the example was first shown, she did not fully understand it. For nearly twenty years after the first showing of the example, she is instructed inwardly to scrutinize every detail of the appearance and countenance of the lord and servant.¹¹³ The result of this process of insightful meditation is recorded in the remainder of the Fifty-First Chapter of the Long Text. Significantly, through meditating on the example, Julian is led to understand the dual identities of the lord and servant.

Julian now describes how she refocuses on the outward appearance, inward qualities and location of the lord and servant. It is tempting to speculate that, here, Julian is offering a form of meditative instruction to her audience. David Freedberg, for example, argues that the double aspect of bodily/spiritual and inward/outward motifs was a recurring feature of medieval meditation practice.¹¹⁴ Referring to meditation as ‘visualization’ or meditation on recollected images, Freedberg comments:

He who meditates must depict mental scenes as the painter depicts real ones [...] The meditator imitates Christ (for example) just as the painter

¹¹² *Showings*, p. 267.

¹¹³ *Showings*, p. 270.

¹¹⁴ Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, pp. 162-4.

does his model; and he does so precisely because Christ is made man like ourselves.¹¹⁵

In the example of the lord and servant, Julian provides her audience with a rich pallet of colour, texture and detail to 'paint' what she was shown. She describes seeing the lord sitting in rest and peace and she understands that this figure is God. The servant standing before the lord is Adam who represents the fall of all men 'one man was shown at the time of his fall, so as to make it understood how God regards all men and their falling. For in the sight of God all men are one man, and one man is all men'.¹¹⁶

In the relationship between God and Adam, Julian describes learning how God sees humanity in sin. She repeats the teaching that precedes the example, explaining that because there is no consolation in pain it causes the sufferer to blame and blame, in return, creates a sense of being punished. Julian, therefore, is shown how pain caused by sin creates a sense of isolation without consolation. However, in the isolated state of the human condition, Julian is also shown that 'our courteous Lord comforts and succours'.¹¹⁷

Having described the lord seated, alone, Julian then describes the lord's comely appearance:

His clothing was wide and ample and very handsome, as befits a lord. The colour of the clothing was azure blue, most dignified and beautiful. His demeanour was merciful, his face was a lovely pale brown with a very seemly countenance, his eyes were black, most beautiful and seemly, revealing all his loving pity, and within him there was a secure place of refuge, long and broad, all full of endless heavenliness.¹¹⁸

Each colour is assigned a divine virtue: blueness signifying the dignity and beauty of the seated lord, his pale brown face signifying his mercy and the blackness of his eyes

¹¹⁵ Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, p. 162.

¹¹⁶ *Showings*, p. 270.

¹¹⁷ *Showings*, p. 271.

¹¹⁸ *Showings*, p. 271.

signifying pity.¹¹⁹ Julian also refers to a place within the body of the lord that offers security and refuge. Freedberg notes that meditative texts often focus in on particular details such as looks, garments and colours to create a feeling of intimacy in the viewer.¹²⁰ In Julian's exposition intimacy is achieved in the loving regard of the lord for his servant, which Julian describes as a 'beautiful mingling':

And the loving regard which he kept constantly on his servant, and especially when he fell, it seemed to me that it could melt our hearts for love and break them in two for joy. This lovely regard had in it a beautiful mingling which was wonderful to see. Part was compassion and pity, part was joy and bliss.¹²¹

Pity in the loving regard of the lord is revealed to Julian as earthly and the bliss of his regard as heavenly. The compassionate regard of the lord is for Adam 'his most beloved creature'; the joy and bliss for the falling of the lord's beloved Son.¹²² The servant has a double significance in the example; double both in identity and in how that identity is perceived. Julian explains that outwardly the servant is dressed like a labourer in clothing that contrasts the lord's colourful appearance 'his clothing was a white tunic, old and worn, dyed with the sweat of his body'.¹²³ Julian describes her amazement that the servant could stand before his lord in such a shabby state of dress. Inwardly, however, Julian sees an equal foundation of love between the servant and lord. The foundation of love in the servant caused his great haste to do the lord's will 'having no regard for himself or for anything which might happen to him'.¹²⁴ The appearance and response of the servant reveals his dual identity to Julian. Through her examination of the divine and human aspects of the servant, Julian learns that he is

¹¹⁹ Later in her exposition, Julian assigns the colours specific virtues: blue (steadfastness), brown and black (holy solemnity). See *Showings*, p. 272.

¹²⁰ Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, p. 167.

¹²¹ *Showings*, p. 271.

¹²² *Showings*, p. 271.

¹²³ *Showings*, p. 273.

¹²⁴ *Showings*, p. 273.

both the second person of the Trinity or 'Son' and the 'servant' Adam who is Christ's humanity.

The servant's dual identity does not represent a breach between Christ's divinity and his humanity. Rather, the dual identity of the servant aids Julian's understanding of the relationship between the Fall of humankind and Christ's Incarnation. It is revealed to Julian that 'When Adam fell, God's son fell; because of the true union which was made in heaven, God's son could not be separated from Adam, for by Adam I understand all mankind'.¹²⁵ The dell the servant fell into is assimilated as the womb of the Lady Mary in the action of the Incarnation. Although Christ's embodiment is spoken of as causing him mortal pain, Julian is clear that Christ's suffering does not denigrate the flesh. Describing the tunic that represents the flesh of Adam and the Son, Julian adds 'The white tunic is his flesh, the scantiness signifies that there was nothing at all separating the divinity from the humanity'.¹²⁶ The symbolism of the tunic leads Julian to reflect further on Christ's humanity and his body that the saved will inhabit. It is revealed to Julian that the saving act of Christ's Incarnation and Passion is all Christ's humanity 'for he is the head and we are his members'.¹²⁷ Julian explains that membership of the body of Christ is achieved by longing and desiring. Longing and desiring are given specific analogues in the desire of the servant, as Son and Adam, standing before the lord longing to do his will. Julian also assigns longing and desiring a visual referent:

The longing and desire of all mankind which will be saved appeared in Jesus, for Jesus is in all who will be saved, and all who will be saved are in Jesus, and all is of the love of God, with obedience, meekness and patience, and the virtues which befit us.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ *Showings*, p. 274.

¹²⁶ *Showings*, p. 275.

¹²⁷ *Showings*, p. 276.

¹²⁸ *Showings*, p. 276.

I do not think the repeated instances of appearances and visual detail are accidental in the example. The moral condition of humankind that will inhabit the body of Christ is exemplarized in Christ's saving humanity. His saving humanity, the historical Jesus, is the analogue for the virtues that befit the human condition. This lesson is not delivered to Julian in sententious tones; it is *shown* to her in the desire and longing of the servant who shares an equal foundation of love with the lord. The lord, in turn, looks on his servant with compassion and pity, joy and bliss. Julian describes the double aspect in the divine perspective as a 'beautiful mingling' that sees humanity without lack as both Christ and Adam. The divine perspective is more than perceptually related to humanity. The compassion of the lord's sight of Adam is the foundation of the Incarnation and Passion so that when Adam fell Christ fell. The divine perspective is a relational capacity that restores the potential fissure between an isolated human perspective that blames and punishes itself and a distant 'all seeing' God's eye view. The relational nature of the divine perspective opens up the possibility of self-assessment and moral development where blame and a sense of being punished are redeemed. The example of the lord and servant, therefore, re-establishes the unity of human and divine perspectives that are threatened by sin. The example is also the re-establishment of the unity of the vision itself. The gaps in Julian's visionary field are closed in the teaching of the example in the form of three consolations:

The first is the beginning of the teaching which I understood from it at the time. The second is the inward instruction which I have understood from it since. The third is the whole revelation from beginning to end which our Lord of his goodness freely and often brings before the eyes of my understanding. *And these three are so unified, as I understand it, that I cannot and may not separate them.*¹²⁹

The example of a lord and servant acts as a restorative meditation for Julian. The divisiveness of sin is corrected in the unity of the visions and the closeness and

¹²⁹ *Showings*, p. 269, my emphasis.

consolation of the lord's loving regard. Moreover, by identifying Adam as all humanity, and all humanity as Christ, the divine perspective is truly mingled. It is neither human nor divine exclusively. In the figure of Christ, the divine becomes perceptible in humanity and in the figure of the on-looking lord humanity becomes perceptible to the divine. Considering the human perceptual capacity, Margaret Miles captures the double nature of such a perception wonderfully in her comment that 'physical vision which fails to recognize the spiritual aspect of its *own* functioning fails also to 'see' its object accurately in that it fails to take into account an essential feature of the object – its life'.¹³⁰ To see an object without life is to suffer the type of blindness Julian associates with sin. That is to say, it is to see an object from an isolated perspective that is locked within private wants and needs. In a sense then, Christ as the redeemer of sin allows humanity to see again, to see life apart from an isolated perspective.

4. The Redemption of Vision

How the human condition is perceived from a divine perspective, part in pity and compassion and part in joy and bliss, is mirrored in Julian's understanding of personhood as both sensual and substantial. Strictly speaking, for Julian, sensuality and substantiality are qualities of the soul. That is not to say that Julian has a dualistic anthropology that distances the body. As Roland Maisonneuve has observed:

The words 'ground, substance, sensuality' cannot be understood except in the conceptual unity which links them. They encompass total man, trinitarian man: *soma, psyche, pneuma*.¹³¹

What is sensual in human personhood, as the term suggests, is that which identifies us as embodied human beings. That is to say, the sensual part of the soul is that aspect of

¹³⁰ Miles, 'Vision', p. 139.

¹³¹ Roland Maisonneuve, 'Visionary Universe', p. 90.

the human condition which perceives itself, the world and others. What is substantial in human personhood designates the divine perspective. The substantial part of the soul is obscure from a human perspective but it is an endless joy and bliss to God. That this joy and bliss is hidden explains why the divinity looks on at the human condition with compassion and pity.

The dislocation of our 'sensuality' and 'substance' is remedied in the Incarnation and Passion. In Christ's salvific and redemptive act, personhood that loves and suffers equally is revealed to Julian. In order to love and suffer equally, Christ had to unite the sensual and substantial aspects of personhood. That is to say, Christ had to unite that which identifies embodied humanity with that which was loved from without beginning. Julian understands the reunification of our sensuality and substance as the work of redemption. It is the process that reveals an unconditionally important part of human personhood. Following Maisonneuve's comment that, for Julian, 'the human eye is a means of penetration into God', I have called the synthesis of our sensual or sensory nature with our substantial nature, 'the redemption of vision'.¹³² It is the revelation to humankind of an irreducibly valuable aspect of personhood in us and in our perception of others. Julian describes the 'work' of redemption as the love of a nurturing Mother Christ. The Mother Christ gives birth to redeemed personhood, united in sensuality and substance. Christ as mother does not blame her child for the pains of redeeming human personhood. Rather, Christ as Mother responds to the needs of her child's dislocated personhood by suffering the pains of the Passion for love alone, as an example of redeemed personhood.

Describing the soul as both sensual and substantial is not original to Julian, although she does employ these terms in a novel way. An instructive comparison can be made between Julian and her contemporary Walter Hilton's use of sensual and substantial terminology to describe different aspects of the soul. In the theological thinking of Hilton, following an Augustinian tradition of assigning the soul higher and lower faculties, the organization of the soul has implications for how human beings

¹³² Roland Maisonneuve, 'Visionary Universe', p. 90.

perceive themselves and how in a fleshly, sinful condition human beings can perceive God.¹³³ According to Hilton, the bodily senses, bound to the flesh, must be abandoned in order to see God in the highest faculty of the soul which is reason. For Julian, by contrast, the Incarnation and Passion is the realization of bodily and spiritual equanimity. However, she recognizes that because of sin human subjects must endeavour, through failure and despair, to maintain this equilibrium. For this reason, the divine perspective that loves sinful humanity is vital to Julian's redemptive project. It assures Julian that her own efforts to re-establish an equilibrium between the sensual and substantial aspects of the soul must not be overcome by what she perceives as failure and despair.

In the *Scale*, Hilton explains that the soul in the image of 'His sone Jhesu' is a mirror in which God can be seen.¹³⁴ However, sin has distorted the soul's visual capacity, a distortion that Hilton describes as a form of blindness. Hilton contrasts the blindness of the soul distorted by sin to the light of understanding achieved through reforming the image so that:

Yif it were that the ground of synne were mykil abatid and dried up in thee, and the soul were clensid and reformyd lightli to the ymage of Jhesu, thanne yif thou drowgh into thisilf thyn herte thou schuldest not fynde nought [...] but thou schalt fynde light of undirstondyng bi Hym, and no merkenesse of unknowynge.¹³⁵

Reforming the soul has epistemological consequences for Hilton. The cleansed soul is free from its distorting blindness or 'merkenesse' (darkness) and capable of finding the

¹³³ For comprehensive coverage of the Augustinian organization of the soul in relation to Julian's anthropology see Denise N. Baker, *Julian of Norwich's Showings*, pp. 107-35 and her article, 'The Image of God: Contrasting Configurations in Julian of Norwich's *Showings* and Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*', in *Julian of Norwich: A Book of Essays*, ed. by Sandra J. McEntire (New York: Garland, 1998), pp. 35-60. See also J.P.H. Clark, 'Image and Likeness in Walter Hilton', *The Downside Review*, 97 (1979), 204-20; For the impact of Hilton's writing on a devout laity see Vincent Gillespie, 'Idols and Images: Pastoral Adaptations of the *Scale of Perfection*' in *Langland, the Mystics and the Medieval English Religious Tradition: Essays in Honour of S.S. Hussey* ed. by Helen Phillips (Cambridge: Brewer, 1990), pp. 97-123.

¹³⁴ *Scale*, p. 200. For a clear expression of Hilton's idea that the soul is visually receptive see *Scale*, p. 206, ll. 1967-8.

¹³⁵ *Scale*, p. 91.

light of understanding. Julian also employs strikingly similar language to that of Hilton. In the Forty-Seventh Chapter of the Long Text she states:

Man is changeable in this life, and falls into sin through naivete and ignorance. He is weak and foolish in himself, and also his will is overpowered in the time when he is assailed and in sorrow and woe. And the cause is blindness, because he does not see God; for if he saw God continually he would have no harmful feelings nor any kind of prompting, nor sorrowing which is conducive to sin.¹³⁶

From a human perspective, both Julian and Hilton present sin as that which distorts what can be *seen*. The difference between Julian and Hilton, a difference that becomes apparent in their respective anthropologies, is that the former retains a loving divine perspective that looks on sinful humanity with pity and compassion and, in Christ, with bliss and joy. Because Hilton's visual language lacks the reciprocating love of a divine perspective, he is forced to subordinate the body - that which is most susceptible to the distorting affects of sin - to the individual's mind or spirit. In Hilton's anthropology, the movement away from the body and worldly temptation is unmistakably inward.

Hilton is sure that, to attain true sight of the image of Jesus, the mind must be free from its bodily attachment and the bodily senses in particular. Having explained that the soul is not a body but an unseeable life, Hilton goes on to say:

Than if thou wolte fynden it, withdrawe thy thought from al bodili thyng outward and fro mynde of thyn owen bodi also, and from all thy fyve wittes as mykil as thou maist; and thenke on the kynde of a reasonable soule goostli.¹³⁷

In this passage, Hilton is not warning against the body as a body, but the fallen state that the body is in. This is an important point because the soul is not affected by physicality as such. Rather, the soul is distorted by the influence of sin. Hilton locates

¹³⁶ *Showings*, p. 260.

¹³⁷ *Scale*, p. 205.

sin, the cause of blindness, in the inability of the soul to rise above the temptations of the flesh. Therefore, Hilton sees the total transcendence of the soul from the flesh as a necessary part of correcting the distortions caused by sin. To make this correction possible, Hilton sets up a dichotomy between the perceptory faculties of the body and the perceptory faculties of the soul, with the latter being unsoiled by the distorting influences of the former. When Hilton describes the reformation of the soul in 'feelynge' (experience), he locates this process in the reasoning aspect of the soul which is independent of the bodily senses. He explains 'For thou schalt undirstonde that the soule hath two manere of feelynges: on withoute of the fyve boldli wittes, anothis withinne of the goostli wittes, the whiche aren propirli the myghtis of the soule. mynde, reson and wille'.¹³⁸ Hilton goes on to say that through grace the faculties of the soul (mind, reason and will), not the bodily faculties, are reformed in feeling. Reformation in ghostly feeling corrects the distortions to the image of Jesus caused by sin. Hilton describes the undistorted image as the clothing of 'a newe man, that is schapen aftir God in rightwisenesse, holinesse, and soothfastnesse' independent of the 'oolde man' that remains attached to the world.¹³⁹ It is tempting to think that Julian may play on this passage from the *Scale* in the way in which she re-clothes Christ in Adam's ragged and torn tunic in the lord and servant example. Christ readily wears the tunic that represents Adam's flesh. Moreover, through his labour as a servant, Christ is able to re-present Adam's tunic to God. Julian describes the tunic now worn by Christ as clean and more appealing than the clothing of the Father:

Adam's old tunic, tight-fitting, threadbare and short, was then made lovely by our saviour, new, white and bright and forever clean, wide ample and fairer and richer than the clothing which I saw on the Father.¹⁴⁰

The old and the new remain in the realm of the flesh for Julian. Adam's flesh, his threadbare tunic, is redeemed by Christ's servitude in his Incarnation and Passion.

¹³⁸ *Scale*, p. 211.

¹³⁹ *Scale*, p. 211.

¹⁴⁰ *Showings*, p. 278.

Adam is not the 'oolde man' that must be overcome in a movement out of world and the flesh. For Julian, the movement is the reverse. It is Christ that comes to humanity, the flesh, to fulfil the work of redemption.

Hilton, however, is clear that the distorting influence of the flesh requires a movement towards the true aspects of the soul (mind, reason and will) independent of the body. Hilton further divides the soul into faculties of 'sensualité' and 'reson'.¹⁴¹ Sensuality is described as the 'fleschli feelynge' occasioned by the five bodily senses, which requires the supervision of reason. Where the five bodily senses are not controlled by reason, sensuality is, according to Hilton, sinful. Hilton also distinguishes a male and female function in reason. The former is the function of the soul which knows and loves God. The latter, inferior function of the soul is that which has knowledge and governs earthly things. Hilton concludes that it is in the higher, male function of reason that the individual is 'propirli the ymage of God' and given knowledge of Him, the virtues and good living.¹⁴² To remain in sensuality is to negate all the properties applicable to the higher function of reason and despoil the fair image of God.

In a footnote, Tarjei Park points out that Hilton's division of reason into higher (male) aspects and lower (female) aspects is a direct lifting from Augustine.¹⁴³ Park adds, however, that whereas Augustine distinguishes between an internal and external self, Hilton distances himself from the physical altogether. For Augustine, differentiation between male and female is at the level of material substance not the faculties of the mind. Denise Baker, however, has contested the consistency with which Augustine maintains the unity of male and female faculties of the mind.¹⁴⁴ She argues forcefully that Augustine equivocates between a metaphorical identification of female with lower reason and a literal identification of femaleness that is constituted solely by the lower reason. Referring to Book Twelve, Chapter 12, of *The Trinity*, in

¹⁴¹ Scale, p. 159.

¹⁴² Scale, p. 159.

¹⁴³ See Park, 'Reflecting Christ', p. 27, fn. 9. For Augustine's distinction see *The Trinity*, p. 345.

¹⁴⁴ Baker, *Julian of Norwich's Showings*, p. 127.

which Augustine identifies Eve as a literal embodiment of temporality and physicality. Baker states 'The historical Eve, deceived by the serpent, lured Adam into eating the forbidden fruit, just as the feminine part of the mind, the lower reason, in contact with the body, seduces the higher or masculine reason to sin'.¹⁴⁵ Both Park and Baker acknowledge that Augustine's lack of clarity led to the consistent identification of the female with corporeality in the medieval West.¹⁴⁶ Thus, sensuality, strictly a function of the soul governing the body, became rooted in the flesh and the opportunity for sin.

Julian's understanding of personhood is a reversal of the gendered and hierarchical faculties of the soul found in Hilton and Augustine. Although Julian uses similar language to describe the faculties of the soul as both worldly and Godly, she does not assign either faculty a gendered identity. Instead, she assigns the image of mothering to the action of Christ who unifies these faculties.¹⁴⁷ Therefore, Julian's anthropology does not consider isolated cases of individuals who rise above their bodies or fall into the grip of fleshly sin. Instead, Julian sets our rising and falling within the work of redemption itself. In Julian's redemptive theology, Christ's motherhood occupies the sensual nature of humankind that is turned to the world. The dwelling point of divinity, according to Julian, is not that which is continually attached to God, but the soul's point of contact with the corporeal world of human beings.

Julian does not introduce the language of 'substance' and 'sensuality' explicitly until the Fifty-Fifth Chapter of the Long Text. In the preceding three chapters, she prepares for the introduction of these technical terms by broadening the application of the perceptual relationship of the lord and servant set out in the Fifty-First Chapter. Total trust in God's love and acceptance of the human condition's weakness caused by sin are the prominent themes in these preparatory chapters.

¹⁴⁵ Baker, *Julian of Norwich's Showings*, p. 127.

¹⁴⁶ See Park, 'Reflecting Christ', p. 27, fn. 9; Baker, *Julian of Norwich's Showings*, p. 192, fn. 53.

¹⁴⁷ See Ritamary Bradley, 'Perception of Self in Julian of Norwich's *Showings*', *The Downside Review*, 104 (1986), 227-239, (229-30). See also, Sandra J. McEntire, 'The Likeness of God and the Restoration of Humanity in Julian of Norwich's *Showings*', in *Julian of Norwich: A Book of Essays*, ed. by Sandra J. McEntire (New York: Garland, 1998), pp. 3-33.

In contrast to Hilton, Julian's commentary on sin as a weakness does not encourage her to establish a dualistic conception of personhood. Instead, Julian counsels on the effects of sin, demonstrating that she accepts sin as a fact of human living.¹⁴⁸ Explaining that in this life we cannot keep ourselves completely from sin, Julian maintains that if through the blindness that sin causes we should fall, we must quickly rise 'and go on our way with God in love, and neither on the one side fall to low, inclining to despair, nor on the other side be too reckless, as though we did not care'.¹⁴⁹ We must rise with full trust in God because of the variance between human ways of seeing and God's way of seeing, as Julian goes on to say 'For God sees one way and man sees another way. For it is for man to meekly accuse himself, and it is for our Lord God's own goodness courteously to excuse man'.¹⁵⁰ The variance in human and divine perspectives once again reveals Julian's ongoing concern that our way of seeing is susceptible to the type of crippling despair from which it may not be possible to rise.

To assuage her doubts, Julian is shown that God's way of seeing is secured in a bond between the created soul and its creator. Love is the operation that guides God's creation of the soul 'For before he made us he loved us, and when we were made we loved him'.¹⁵¹ Julian describes the bond that she is shown between God and the soul as a precious 'knot' ensuring that, although we may fall, we were loved from without beginning and can therefore never be lost.¹⁵² The knot that secures the soul's identity in God leads Julian to understand and rejoice that 'God dwells in our soul; and greatly ought we to rejoice that our soul dwells in God'.¹⁵³

The mutual indwelling of God and the soul informs Julian's understanding of the soul as a sensual and substantial unity. In the Fifty-Fifth Chapter of the Long Text, Julian reports that she saw 'very surely that our substance is in God, and I also saw that God is in our sensuality, in that same instant and place in which our soul is made

¹⁴⁸ This point is made explicit when it is revealed to Julian that, 'Sin is necessary'. See *Showings*, p. 225.

¹⁴⁹ *Showings*, p. 281.

¹⁵⁰ *Showings*, p. 281.

¹⁵¹ *Showings*, p. 283.

¹⁵² *Showings*, p. 284.

¹⁵³ *Showings*, p. 285.

sensual, in that same instant and place exists the city of God'.¹⁵⁴ It is the second person of the Trinity 'our Lord Jesus' that inhabits our sensuality. Jesus inhabits our sensuality in order to unite it to our Godlike substance. What appear to be highly abstract concepts in Julian anthropology are intimately connected with the economy of salvation and redemption. In the figure of Jesus, sensuality and substance achieve perfect equilibrium. The pain Jesus suffered by becoming sensual is equal to the love, without beginning, which caused him to fall with Adam. The Incarnation and Passion had to occur for the reformation of the sensual and substantial aspects of the soul to be possible, because it is only Jesus that was able to bear the pain of both in equal proportion to his love.

Julian combines the images of equilibrium and reformation with the saving activity of Christ as 'perfect man':

For in the same time that God joined himself to our body in the maiden's womb, he took our soul, which is sensual, and in taking it, having enclosed us all in himself, he united it to our substance. In this union he was perfect man, for Christ having joined in himself every man who will be saved, is perfect man.¹⁵⁵

In the very next paragraph, Julian describes this 'perfect man' as our true Mother. She explains that the work of motherhood is exclusively Christ's because it is only the second person of the Trinity that was joined to creaturely sensuality in order to restore personhood. The restoration of personhood is not a static event in Julian's motherhood theology. Julian describes the mother's service as 'nearest, readiest and surest: nearest because it is most natural, readiest because it is most loving, and surest because it is truest' adding 'No one ever might or could perform this office fully, except only him'.¹⁵⁶ The repetition of the comforting words 'nearest, readiest, surest' assures Julian that the motherhood of Christ suffers for love and our bliss. This assurance is

¹⁵⁴ *Showings*, p. 287.

¹⁵⁵ *Showings*, p. 292.

¹⁵⁶ *Showings*, p. 297.

important for Julian because she recognizes that sin that causes the human condition to suffer is the cause of Christ's suffering. In the service of Christ's motherhood, one is reminded of Julian's conviction that the human condition is not blamed for sin. Christ does not blame the human condition for the sin that causes his suffering in the same way that a mother does not blame a newly born child for the pains of labour. Of course, the child is the cause of the mother's pain, but the child cannot be blamed for the pain caused. Julian combines these insights in a wonderful redemptive metaphor of gestation and birth:

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 last he died. And when he had finished, and had born us so for bliss, still all this could not satisfy his wonderful love.¹⁵⁷

Christ's motherhood is truly redemptive because the pain suffered for love alone eliminates any possibility of blame. With great precision, Julian assimilates the point of Christ's greatest suffering with the bliss that redeemed personhood is born into. The perceptual analogue to this image of redemptive rebirth is the scene of the servant blinded by his own suffering. The servant's perspective is not limited by any intrinsic failure of personhood. The greatest suffering of the servant is caused by his inability to see the consoling face of the lord. This tension of suffering, which causes blindness, and the consolation in the lord's gaze is resolved in Christ's motherhood. The point of Christ's greatest suffering is also the point at which personhood is redeemed in the uniting of sensuality and substance. That is to say, it is the point at which, unable to turn himself, the servant, no longer overcome by suffering, is turned to see his lord who sees him, born of Christ, as a joy and bliss.

¹⁵⁷ *Showings*, p. 298.

The idea of relatedness, or reciprocation, also pervades Julian's assimilation of the human and divine in a redeemed human perspective. The relation of a mother to her child captures the ideas of vulnerability and security that inform Julian's understanding of redemption. Here redemption extends its theological application. As a practice, redemption is a way of relating to others as irreducibly valued. Suffering the death of self-fulfilment is a daily redemptive activity that necessitates suffering for love. Like the mother who is fulfilled in the happiness of her child, Julian encourages her audience to see the irreducible value in others, to seek fulfilment in the love and happiness of others and, in so doing, relieve the burden of self fulfilment. To explain this point, Julian returns to the figure of the loving mother and her child:

The kind, loving mother who knows and sees the need of her child guards it very tenderly, as the nature and condition of motherhood will have. And always as the child grows in age and in stature, she acts differently, but she does not change her love.¹⁵⁸

It is the unchanging love of Christ's motherhood that reveals the mutability of our own attempts at loving. This discovery is part of our everyday experience of relatedness. It is part of the regret we may feel when we are forgiven for taking advantage of a friend's unflinching trust. It is not only our regret at the details of our own actions, but the realization of a capacity for trust in another that is not, itself, contingent upon the frequency of its betrayal. Thus, it is the condition of our own existence that reveals the lesson of divine mother love, however incapable we are of practising it. In the language of parenting, Julian describes the human condition as that of a child:

But often when we are failing and our wretchedness is shown to us, we are so much afraid and so greatly ashamed of ourselves that we scarcely know where we can put ourselves. But then our courteous Mother does not wish us to flee away, for nothing would be less pleasing to him; but

¹⁵⁸ *Showings*, p. 299.

he then wants us to behave like a child. For when it is distressed and frightened, it runs quickly to its Mother.¹⁵⁹

An awareness of the human condition's dependence and capacity to respond to this love is manifest in the redemption of vision. The redemptive force of Julian's theology does not point away from the condition of being sensual human beings. For Julian, her fellow Christians must come to see others and themselves as the Mother Christ sees them. To love, then, is to perceive others independently of wishes and desires that are products of an individual perspective. The equilibrium of sensuality and substance achieved by the work of Christ's redemptive motherhood reveals a way of seeing others as the full realization of all needs, wants and desires. Indeed, the work of motherhood reverses the projection of individual wants, needs and desire onto others, revealing instead a mode of responding to the wants, needs and desires of others that is 'nearest, readiest and surest'. The mother's fulfilment is in the child itself. In return, the child, helpless by itself, is fulfilled by the mother's love.

The service of Christ's motherhood represents, for Julian, a way of seeing that otherwise would remain impossible. As I understand Julian, it is in this sight of the Incarnation and Passion, the work of Christ's motherhood, that the meaning of the visions is shared. The visions are a vehicle for the sight of humanity as it is seen by Christ, so that even during the degradation of his own suffering, in Christ humanity is understood as only love can understand. During the Crucifixion, it is Christ who prays for the human condition. His tormentors are seen through the eyes of love which reveal, as J.R Jones has put it 'not the hard pitiless monsters that they seemed but as the pitifully bemused and misguided human souls that they are'.¹⁶⁰ The sharing in Julian's visions is the development of the capacity to see with the eyes of love. At the conclusion of *Showings* it is revealed to Julian that what she was shown and the realization of love are inseparable. Julian's vision is the realization of love that allows

¹⁵⁹ *Showings*, p. 301.

¹⁶⁰ J.R. Jones, 'Love as Perception of Meaning', in *Religion and Understanding*, ed. by D.Z. Phillips (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), pp. 141-53 (p. 153).

the possibility of seeing life in others. In the words revealed to Julian in the final chapter of the Long Text:

What, do you wish to know your Lord's meaning in this thing? Know it well, love was his meaning. Who reveals it 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.¹⁶¹

Conclusion

In this chapter, I began by showing how our ideas about the body have become confusing. In academic discourse the body has been used to represent a variety of mutually exclusive concepts. As a consequence, the body we intuitively know has become foreign to us. In terms of Julian's redemptive theology, I have tried to demonstrate that the body that we know has been restored. Importantly, our bodily condition may not please our own perception of it, but, for Julian, from a divine perspective manifest in the Incarnation and Passion of Christ the human condition is loved. In Section 1, I set these observations in a medieval meditative tradition that centred on the humanity of Christ. In so doing, I wanted to demonstrate that Julian, in many respects, concurs with Bynum's thesis that, in the Middle Ages, personhood was a unitary, not dualistic, entity. In Section 2, I examined Bynum's elucidating commentary on female bodily practices. In this section, I attempted to show that, strictly speaking, in Julian's thinking it is the body of Christ not our own body, or our experience of it, that redeems. Julian's redemptive theology, therefore, challenges any form of subjective association with Christ's suffering for love. For Julian is it vital to recognize that redemption is realized in Christ's suffering and love, a service only he is capable of exercising. In Section 3, I examined the language of perspectives that Julian employs to illustrate the reality of redemption and the blindness that suffering and sin can cause. I set this discussion in the example of a lord and servant as a 'theo-drama'.

¹⁶¹ *Showings*, p. 342.

The idea of theo-drama is well suited to Julian's interplay of human and divine perspectives. The idea of a dramatic encounter of human and divine perspectives also demonstrates the participatory nature of Julian's vision: how it requires the actions of the faithful to make sense of the immutable love of the divine and the changeable nature of our own perspective. In the final section, Section 4, I wanted to demonstrate that Julian's unified anthropology is made possible by the redemptive work of Christ's motherhood. For Julian, our lower sensual nature is not policed by our higher reason. Rather, our sensual individual characteristics must be united with that aspect of ourselves which is Godlike. This re-orientation of ourselves deconstructs a private worldview. Instead, it creates a perspective of human personhood that is irreducibly valuable. For Julian, the irreducible value of human personhood is exercised in the unflinching love of a mother for her vulnerable child. The relatedness of love that does not alter, and vulnerability that is susceptible to hurt, blame and despair, is the foundation of Julian's theology of redemption. The work of Christ's motherhood is the realization of a relatedness that does not exploit vulnerability. The redemption of the soul's sensual nature, occupied by Christ, allows for the possibility of seeing human personhood as irreducibly valuable. In the same way that Christ suffered and loved equally in his Incarnation and Passion, Julian exhorts her fellow Christians to suffer the renunciation of self-fulfilment and seek true fulfilment in answering to the wants, needs and desires of others. Not to be blinded by our own perspective is the redemption of vision.

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to establish the didacticism of a series of sixteen visions shown to the anchoress Julian of Norwich. The account of the visions, in *Showings*, is addressed to the Christian community for their edification and spiritual guidance. The didactic devices that Julian uses to address the Christian community enable her audience to engage with the account of the visions as a means of moral development, within a life of faith. Approaching Julian's visions as a means of teaching is an attempt to offer a new approach to the study of medieval spiritual writing. This thesis set out to demonstrate that not only was Julian active in the Christian community as a source of guidance and pastoral care, her interaction with her fellow Christians was founded upon the sharing of a vision. The pictorial quality of the *Showings*, the sights, sounds and colour of the visionary sequence offer an audience of variable education a means of accessing the theological lessons of God's love. In contrast to previous studies of Julian that have abstracted her theological message from the vivid series of images that Julian describes, this thesis has argued that no such abstraction can be made. In a new approach to Julian, my study has attempted to set out the study of visionary experience as a didactically significant event, and to highlight a form of instruction with which Julian's audience would be familiar.

The detail of the sixteen visions that Julian describes illustrates God's love and closeness. The focus of the visionary sequence is Christ's Passion. It is this sight that Julian sets before the Christian community as the reality of salvation and redemption, mirroring the crucifix that was the stimulus for her visions to begin. The visions cannot be enjoyed cinematically; the sight of Christ's suffering and loving requires a response from the viewer. The Passion is revealed to Julian as a relational act of love through which God wants to be known. To seek an understanding of Julian's visions outside this sight of the Passion would be a mistake. The images that Julian describes are not accidental to her theological message, neither are they to be relegated below a 'pure' experience that lies at the core of her visions. This thesis has attempted to demonstrate

that Julian responds to the visions as a source of teaching which must be shared with the Christian community. Julian is sure that the visions she receives are an answer to the needs of the Christian community; it is these needs that determine the meaningfulness of the visions.

A great deal of groundwork was required to support the above claims. The introduction and chapters to this thesis have attempted to look at Julian in a way that has received only passing treatment in scholarly studies to date. The introduction set out the need to re-think the identification of Julian as a 'mystic'. It was found that suppositions concerning mystics and mystical experience count against a study of Julian's theology as visual or didactical. The contributions of Denys Turner, Grace Jantzen and Nicholas Watson were used to establish a methodology for critically examining the concept 'mysticism' and the appropriateness of that concept for a study of Julian. It was concluded that the terms 'mystic' and 'mysticism' should be set aside in order to conduct a full study of Julian's visions, and her purpose for addressing the Christian community in the language of a visionary experience. To date, studies of Julian that have proceeded with the unquestioned identity of Julian as a mystic tend either to stifle the visual detail in *Showings* or fail to address the didactic potential of the visions.

Chapter I examined possible causes for a downgrading of the visual over and against the mystical. It was argued that from antiquity the relationship between the role of the bodily senses and the role of the cognitive faculties set a precedent for relegating the visual. Having demonstrated that the prelude to Julian's visions acts as a means of engaging the visual receptivity of an audience, it was shown that the bodily senses and the spiritual senses are integrated in an educational programme in *Showings*. Supporting evidence for this claim was found in the seminal work of Rudolf Arnheim, who argued that our understanding of the world does not rely on a mind's eye-view, but involves a way of seeing that is creative, intuitive and thinking. The accounts of perceptual activity in Plato, Aristotle and Augustine, supported the idea of the senses, particularly vision, requiring education as a means of moral reform. The final section

of the chapter, showed how Julian balances the conditional request for a bodily vision against her unconditional request for the development of contrition, compassion and longing in her religious life. It was concluded that Julian encourages the use of the visions in the development of the unconditional elements of the life of faith. Julian understands that although visions are not necessary for the development of virtues, they can be employed didactically as an object lesson in God's love and closeness.

Chapter II attempted to support the findings of the first chapter by demonstrating that, as an anchoress, Julian was didactically engaged in her community. It was found that the domesticating tendencies of the identity 'mystic', denoting someone with no socially significant role, reappeared in the identification of the medieval anchoresses. Comparing motifs from anchoritic literature with *Showings*, demonstrated that whereas images of demonic attack and a threatening external world serve to isolate the anchoress in the guides written for her, Julian uses similar images to teach the Christian community that in faith they will not be overcome. The introduction of the St Katherine story was presented as a model of the solitary who is taught by God and seeks to transmit this teaching. The pedagogic identity of Katherine, who, like Julian, is taught by a divine didactic initiative, was used to challenge the idea of the anchoress as a 'solitary heroine'. It was argued that to insist on the solitariness of medieval anchoresses, given examples of women like Julian who clearly wish to communicate with the Christian community, risks mistaking the regulative ideals of the anchoritic guides for descriptions of anchoritic living. It was found that some regulative ideals expressed in the anchoritic guides implicitly associated 'suspicious' women, with the affections of the body such as visions and voices. In a further example of downgrading the visual, according to regulative principles, visionary experiences were regarded as an almost exclusively female/bodily phenomenon, whilst mysticism remained a male/intellectual preserve. In response to the suspicions raised by bodily women and visions it was shown that Julian's instruction on the value of her visions is quite distinctive. In keeping with the didacticism of the visions, as a repository of Christian teaching, Julian does not discuss the truth or falsity of the visions. Instead, the value of

the visions is determined by the need of the recipient. In this way, Julian teaches her audience to discern the value of the visions for themselves. The final section of the chapter introduced further findings that support the didactic role of the anchoress. In addition, I introduced three modes of learning - implicit in the anchoritic guides - that resonate in the didacticism of *Showings*. The modes of looking, listening and loving are not esoteric practices, but activities that presuppose participation in the Christian community.

Chapter III extended the study of the way in which Julian's audience learns from the visions. It was found that Julian's identity as an author cannot be compared with modern ideas of authorship. In the Middle Ages the textual world extended into the world of oral exchange and vivid imagery. This claim was supported with examples of medieval writers that recommend meditation on didactic imagery for the purposes of theological instruction. Importantly, this recommendation is made because of the assumed accessibility of images as opposed to the relative inaccessibility of texts. Medieval audiences were acquainted with didactic techniques that combined oral, visual and written tropes. A particularly good example of Julian's anticipation of such an audience is her reference to the teaching of the visions as an 'ABC'. The method of ABC learning was not only an established didactic technique in the Middle Ages, it was a means of learning that was intimately connected with the Crucifixion and the 'reading' of Christ's wounds. This chapter also highlighted the dialogic, oral quality of *Showings*. Following Walter Ong, it was found that Julian's account of her visions retains the spoken voice. As a consequence, Julian is able to maintain greater immediacy with her audience. The spoken voice in *Showings* offers comfort to Julian and the Christians she is addressing. The oral features of Julian's presentation support the claim that the audience for *Showings* was one that could engage with mnemonic, alliterative and repetitious features of a text as a listening audience that may have sought out a community anchoress for spiritual guidance. The final section of the chapter examined Julian's sacramental language in relation to the Eucharist. It was demonstrated that the sacramental imagery and language in the visions had a life

outside a text or series of private experiences. It was found that, for Julian, the visions must enter the practice of Christian living in the sacraments, which act as a daily reminder of the Passion. By setting the visionary sequence in liturgical time and space, Julian emphasizes the participatory nature of what she was shown as part of the communal activity of Christians.

Chapter IV was an attempt to integrate the themes of the introduction and the previous three chapters in a discussion of the body. It was found that the competing claims of the body and the mind or soul were recurrent themes in the presentation of Julian's visionary didacticism. It was established that the claims of the body and soul are integrated in Julian's theology of redemption. Supporting evidence for this claim was found in Caroline Walker Bynum's attempt to challenge assumptions of dualism in the Middle Ages. In the meditation tradition of the medieval period, for instance, the humanity of Christ, his physical suffering and wounded body, became the focus of attention. It was shown that there are several similarities between *Showings* and the practice of meditating on Christ's humanity; particularly the instruction and recommendation for moral reform that accompanied meditation in the Franciscan tradition. The following section established the distinctiveness of the redemptive theology in *Showings*. Julian consistently refers to Christ's body as a redemptive reality. In contrast, her body, from a divine perspective, is a body redeemed. It was found that Julian's redemptive theology did not fit neatly into Bynum's more subjective categories that are based on an ascetical imitation of Christ. The question of how the human condition is seen from a divine perspective was addressed in a discussion of the example of a lord and his servant. Following Balthasar's theory of 'theo-drama' it was argued that Julian establishes a divine perspective in *Showings* by demonstrating that the isolated suffering of the servant's perspective is remedied in the perspective of the lord who looks on with compassion and pity. In the examination of the example, it was also demonstrated that the lord is not a detached spectator but a participant or 'actor' in the salvation and redemption of the human condition. The servant whose perspective needs to be remedied is both Adam and the incarnate Christ.

The debilitating potential of an isolated human perspective is answered in Christ's Incarnation and Passion which was suffered for love alone. It was shown that the redemption of a human perspective is given explicit treatment in Julian's image of Christ residing in the sensual part of the human soul. In contrast to Hilton's more divisive anthropology, it was argued that Julian understands the work of redemption as a 'knot' that ties humanity's sensual and substantial nature. The work of redemption is carried out by Christ's motherhood. The image of Christ's motherhood is a further example of how Julian's didacticism and pastoral care combine. The mother (Christ) nurtures and comforts her child (humanity) in moments of despair and isolation. Thus, it was argued, Julian offers a re-evaluation of the human condition that is profoundly based on an education of the senses to see something irreducibly valuable in the human condition.

This thesis has demonstrated how the visions of Julian of Norwich can be reassessed as a means of instructing a late medieval Christian audience. Approaching Julian's visions as a form of didacticism marks a point of departure from studies that have proceeded without questioning her identity as a mystic. The findings of this thesis have shown that Julian did not devalue the imagery of her visions, but presented it to the Christian community for their edification. The writings of female visionaries remain misunderstood where they continue to be examined according to accepted notions of mysticism. The material above has attempted to distance Julian and *Showings* from the world of the mystical, and to place both firmly in the context of medieval religious instruction.

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