About the external circumstances of the life of Julian of Norwich very little is known. In May 1373, when she received her famous 'revelation of love',1 after suffering a severe heart attack,2 she was thirty and a half years old.3 At the time, she appears to have been living at home as a laywoman.4 We first hear of her as an anchoress in 1394, and thereafter there is spasmodic evidence of her being still alive up to 1416, including Margery Kempe's account of the 'holy dalliance' she had with Julian, to whom she had been sent for spiritual advice.5 We know neither when Julian became an anchoress nor when she died.

Of her inner development we know rather more, thanks to her own writings. At some stage before she was thirty she tells us that she 'desired three gifts by the grace of God'.6 These gifts indicate clearly that at that time Julian's piety was of an affective, devotionalist kind. The first gift was 'mind of the passion', a commonplace of affective piety; in particular she wanted to have more 'feeling in the passion of Christ', and to this end she desired 'a bodily sight', so that she could more easily identify herself with those who were actually present on Good Friday and suffered with Christ.7

Secondly, Julian desired to fall seriously ill at the age of thirty. This is undoubtedly intended as a form of bodily imitation of the passion of Christ.8 Julian's motive is the same as that which prompted Suso to attach a wooden cross to his back, with sharp needles in it to pierce his flesh.9

Thirdly, Julian desired three wounds, inspired, as she tells us, by hearing the story of St Cecilia, who received three wounds in her neck.10 The three wounds she wanted were contrition, compassion and 'wilful longing to God'. It may be remarked that these wounds coincide exactly with the three things which James of Milam regarded as the essential factors conducing to contemplation.11

Julian's third desire remained with her continually, but the other two, she says, 'passed from my mind'.12 This probably reflects a movement away from 'carnal love' of the humanity of Christ towards something supposedly more elevated. It is interesting that when Julian is propped up in bed after her heart attack and the
intellectual inquisitiveness and educated know-how']—66 the ‘contemplative’ life, on the other hand, is a safe, simple life which is not exposed to any such hazards.77

Julian is well-mannered enough not to make fun of other people’s intellectual abilities, but she turns against herself the conventional ‘contemplative’ suspicion of intellectual curiosity. She had, as she tells us, often wondered why God did not prevent sin, but now she accuses herself of folly and pride because of this attitude of questioning God’s wisdom.66 God has shown us our Saviour and our salvation, and we should be content with that, and not pry into God’s ‘privy counsels’.20 True to her own precepts, Julian accepts the answers that the Lord gives her and does not pursue her questioning any further.

She also declares that there was nothing in any of the showings which disturbed her or drew her away from the teaching of the holy church.30 Her orthodoxy is quite untroubled.

That, no doubt, was where Julian intended to leave the matter, but the matter was not prepared to be left there. The revelation continued to exercise her mind, and some fifteen years after the revelation of 1373 she seems to have finished a new, much longer, version of her book, and even then she felt that she had only made a beginning.31 It was not until 1393 that she completed the Long Text.32

The most significant development that occurred between the completion of the Short Text and the writing of the Long Text is that Julian freed herself from the ‘contemplative’ straitjacket and came to terms with herself as an intelligent woman with a probing and insistent mind. She is still prepared to accuse herself of ‘folly’ in wondering why God did not prevent sin, but she no longer accuses herself of pride; and the foolishness for which she blames herself seems to reside more in the grumbling attitude with which she asks her question than in the question itself.33 And it is noticeable that this time she is much less easily satisfied by the Lord’s assurances, and pursues her questioning much further and far more rigorously.

She is still well aware that we must respect God’s ‘privities’, but she is also convinced that God intends us to seek knowledge. If something is, for the moment, meant not to be revealed to us, then God shows it to us precisely as something still ‘closed’; that is to say, we do not have to be shy of probing, because God himself shows us where the line is drawn beyond which we are not going to get any answers.34

Julian is as determined as she ever was not to be unfaithful to the doctrine of the church, but she is no longer able to claim simply

The ‘contemplative’ evidently aspires to ‘pass unto God by contemplation’; the vision of Christ is a necessary preliminary to this, but it is only proposed to us as something to look at ‘if we cannot ‘look into’ the Godhead.21

Julian’s self-presentation in the Short Text exploits several ‘contemplative’ commonplace. She insists that she is not to be regarded as a ‘teacher’; ‘I am a woman, lewd [uneducated], feeble and frail’.22 This may be regarded as a typical ‘modesty formula’,23 but it should be noticed that the implications of such formulae were not in fact totally modest. By denying his or her own authority, the writer could lay claim to a much greater authority, on the pretext of simply passing on a teaching received from someone else.24 In particular it could be claimed that it is characteristic of God to use unlearned people to be the bearers of his message.25 People are led to abandon ‘the common doctrine and counsel of holy church’ by their ‘pride and curiosity of kindly wit and letterly cunning [natural

priest offers a crucifix to look at, she does not want to look at it, because ‘me thought I was well, for my eyes were set upright into heaven’. She consents to look at the cross only for the purely medical reason that she thought it would involve less physical strain to look straight ahead than to go on looking upwards.15 Later on the tension between her ‘upward’ piety and the continuing vision of the passion precipitates a crisis: Julian wanted to look away from the cross but did not dare to do so for fear of fiends.16 But then she realises that there is nothing between the cross and heaven which could do her any harm, so either she has to look up or she has to find another reason for continuing to look at the cross. She very deliberately refuses to look away, choosing Jesus, in all his pain, as her heaven.17 This is a decisive move, even if it is only long afterwards that Julian appreciates its full significance: the ‘upward’ movement towards God, towards heaven, is redirected towards the suffering humanity of Christ. That is where heaven must be sought.

Probably within a few years of her showings Julian wrote the first version of her book, the Short Text.18 She was still far from having absorbed the meaning of her revelation, and in particular she still viewed herself and her readers from within a distorting perspective which she later abandoned. She appears to have thought of herself as a ‘contemplative’, and she certainly addresses herself to people ‘that desire to live contemplatively’.19 And she seems to have a conventional enough notion of what it means to ‘live contemplatively’. Contemplatives are people who are not ‘occupied wilfully in earthly business’, and who gladly ‘nought [despise] all thing that is made, for to have the love of God that is unmade’. They seek that spiritual repose which can only be had when the soul is ‘noughted for love’.20

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that the showings posed no problems to her faith. There are several very serious problems, and she does not shirk them.35

Since writing the Short Text Julian has become much more confident of her own intellectual powers, and she no longer has any ideological anxieties about using them. As she now sees it,

By three things man standeth in this life, by which three God is worshipped and we be sped, kept and saved. The first is use of man's kindly [natural] reason, the second is the common teaching of holy church, the third is the inward gracious working of the Holy Ghost, and these three be all of one God ... and all are sundry gifts, to which he will that we have great regard and accord us thereto.36

Reason, which is grounded in God,37 far from being in any way opposed to faith, is one of the sources of our faith.38 This means that when the showings are over and the revelation is entrusted to faith for its preservation,39 there is no justification for excluding from faith a genuine intellectual effort to appropriate and explore the doctrinal significance of the showings.

It is noticeable that Julian no longer considers it necessary to insist that she is not a teacher, nor does she now describe herself as a 'lewd woman', writing only because God wants her to. She says that the revelation was 'to a simple creature unlettered',40 but she does not say that she is still unlettered at the time of writing. Whatever kind of education she has picked up since 1373,41 there is no mistaking the new tone of authority with which she writes. She can no longer simply claim to be passing on someone else's teaching; it has become her own teaching.

In the Short Text Julian never makes it clear quite what the relationship is between her revelation and the public teaching of the church, except to claim that there were no problems. In the Long Text she admits that there are problems, but nevertheless insists that the content of the revelation is identical with that of 'the faith, neither more nor less'.42 The revelation is an elucidation of the public doctrine of the church, and as such it could only be addressed to the church as a whole. Granted the prevailing usage of the word, it is unlikely that Julian still thought of herself as a 'contemplative', and she seems to have lost interest in the elitist pretensions which such a word made possible,43 but in any case she evidently realises that her task is to present a vision of christian truth which, if it is true at all, must be true for everybody.

The fineness of Julian's method can be seen at once in her rehandling of the first showing. The vision begins with the sight of the crucifix bleeding, but what strikes Julian most is the astounding readiness of God, 'who is so reverent and so dreadful', to be intimate ('homely') 'with a sinfull creature living in this wretched flesh'.44 It is just this intimacy which will be our supreme joy in heaven, but in this life we normally know about it only by faith; it is only by a special gift of grace that we can sometimes begin to perceive it more directly.45

The meaning of the revelation as a whole (and Julian always treats the sixteen showings as constituting one revelation) is love,46 but the particular nuance which is brought out in the first showing (which Julian takes to be foundational for all the rest) is that the love is question is the utterly preposterous love between God, who is all great, and creatures who are, in themselves, almost nothing. Julian's attention is drawn to our Lady, whose 'wisdom and truth [fidelity]47 are clearly exemplary for us: by them she appreciated with wonder 'the greatness of her maker and the littleness of herself'.48

In the course of the first showing,49 Julian tells us,

He showed a little thing, the quantity of an hazelnut, lying in the palm of my hand, as me seemed, and it was as round as a ball. I looked thereon with the eye of my understanding and thought, 'What may this be? And it was answered generally thus, 'It is all that is made.' I marvelled how it might last, for me thought it might suddenly have fallen to nought for littleness. And I was answered in my understanding, 'It lasteth and ever sharle, for God loveth it, and so hath all thing being by the love of God.50

The implications of this vision of the littleness of all that is made are, of course, highly ambiguous. In the Short Text the exposition is tilted fairly unambiguously in one direction: since we can never have real bliss until we are 'so fastened to (God) that there might be right nought that is made between' God and us, it follows that we should 'nought all thing that is made for to have the love of God that is unmade'.51 This moral still stands in the Long Text, but there it is complemented by a much greater emphasis on the other side of the picture: God loves all that is made, and his love is immediately at work in all of it. We must not be impressed by creatures in themselves, but equally we do not have to turn aside from them in order to meet God's love. In a splendidly down to earth passage which evidently shocked one of the pious copyists, Julian illustrates the way in which God's love 'cometh down to us to the lowest part of our need' by reminding us of how our bodies digest food and then eliminate the residual waste matter: and 'it is he that doeth this'.52 Later on, in her famous comments on divine motherhood, Julian makes it clear that ordinary human motherhood is not just an image of divine love, it is a real part of the operation of divine love.53
The subtle attitude we should adopt towards creatures is illustrated in a section which Julian added to her account of the first showing in the Long Text. Reflecting on contemporary forms of prayer, Julian comments that we tend to have insufficient confidence in God’s goodness, and so we approach him in a wheeling manner, as if we had to persuade him to be well-disposed towards us by reminding him of the passion or of our Lady or whatever. But God is already well-disposed towards us, and we should do him better worship by going straight to the point; we ought to ‘pray to himself of his goodness’. ‘Means’ are not needed. But at the same time all the means which people use are good and we are right to use them, but we should understand that they are not ways of procuring God’s favour, they are precisely gifts of his favour. Wherefore it pleaseth him that we seek him and worship him by means, understanding and knowing that he is the goodness of all.

A full presentation of Julian’s doctrine would require a detailed exposition of each of the showings in turn, which is unfortunately beyond the scope of this book. At the risk, therefore, of oversimplifying and overschematising her teaching, we must concentrate on some of the salient points contained in the final version of the Long Text, ignoring both the pedagogical excellence of the way in which the successive showings progressively build up and refine Julian’s Christian vision and several interesting elements in that vision.

Julian came to see that the divine intimacy, revealed in the first showing, is the fundamental fact which underpins our whole life.

I saw that God began never to love mankind; for right the same that mankind shall be in endless bliss, fulfilling the joy of God as regards his works, right so the same mankind hath been in the foresight of God known and loved from without beginning in his rightful entreat.

Whereas our bodies were made from ‘the slime of the earth’, our souls are made ‘of nought that is made’.

And thus is the kind [nature] made rightfully oned to the maker, which is substantial kind unmade, that is God. And therefore it is that there may be nor shall be right nought between God and man’s soul. And in this endless love man’s soul is kept whole, as all the matter of the revelation meaneth and showeth. In which endless love we be led and kept of God, and never shall be lost. . . . And right the same that we shall be without end, the same we were treasured in God and hid, known and loved, from without beginning.

Julian, like St Thomas, has a strong doctrine of the complete efficacy and all-pervasiveness of God’s creative act. God does every-

thing that is done, even what is done by creatures. And because his will is unchanging, this means that creatures must indefinitely attain to their foreordained goal. In the case of human beings Julian goes even further:

For the great endless love that God hath to all mankind, he maketh no departing in love between the blessed soul of Christ and the least soul that shall be saved. For it is full easy to believe and trust that the dwelling of the blessed soul of Christ is full high in the glorious Godhead; and truly, as I understand, in our Lord’s meaning, where the blessed soul of Christ is, there is the substance of all the souls that shall be saved by Christ.

In God’s purpose, humanity is first and foremost the humanity of Christ. And in some sense we were all made at once, in the humanity of Christ, inseparably united to God in him, endlessly loving him and enjoying him. This means that in all the elect there is an indefectible ‘godly will’, which never swerves from God. This is what we really are, our ‘substance’, and it unfailingly does God’s will. Ever more it doeth that it was made for: it seeth God and it beholdest God and it loveth God. Thus, in one sense, we must say that ‘we are more truly in heaven than on earth’.

If we view everything simply from the point of view of God’s act, which cannot help but be effective, then we have to conclude that ‘everything that is done is well done’. And, from this point of view, it is tempting to infer that it is only a ‘blind judgment’ on our part to reckon that some things are not well done. But Julian realises that this would be oversimple: sin is a real damage and it is the church, not just our blindness, which judges some deeds to be evil. Although Julian accuses herself of folly in wondering why God did not prevent sin at the outset, she comes to see that it is absolutely imperative to have an answer to the question of how God sees sin, of how it is possible to hold together the divine satisfaction with all that is done (‘All is well’) and the inescapable recognition that all is not well.

Julian is aware of the metaphysical proprieties involved in any discussion of sin. She knows that ‘sin hath no manner of substance or any part in being’. But it cannot be denied that sin is an important part of our lives, as we actually experience them. Julian’s contention is that sin is known precisely in the pain that it causes. This is, in fact, how God sees sin: he sees our sin simply as pain in us. Julian could not see any hint that God blames us for our sins (and therefore, as she shrewdly points out, it would be quite wrong for us to blame God for our sins). In one sense, this is a necessary doctrine: granted that God is unchanging, if there were any wrath in him at all, then that would entail an eternal and ceaseless anger,
and this would be incompatible with our being created out of love. So Julian concludes, ‘If God might be wroth [for a moment], we should neither have life nor stand nor being’. But in that case, what becomes of forgiveness? ‘Our soul is oned to him, unchangeable goodness, and between God and our soul is neither wrath nor forgiveness in his sight.’

Julian solves this particular problem by relocating wrath: it is not in God, it is in us: it is we who are not always ‘in peace and love’, even though objectively ‘peace and love are ever in us’. Using the word ‘forgive’ in a way which is no longer current in modern English, Julian says that there is no wrath in God for him to ‘forgive’ (i.e. forgo, give up), it is our wrath which he ‘forgets’ (that is to say, forgiveness and mercy work in us to dispel our own inner disquiet at ourselves).

But this does not really deal with the essential difficulty: if God does not blame us, why should the church blame us, why should we blame ourselves? And even if we reinterpret the discussion of sin so as to turn it into a general discussion of ‘all that is not good’, including all the pain of all God’s creatures, what is the point of all this pain?

This life is undeniably painful. But if we could see God clearly, then there could be no pain, no disorder, no sin. If we undergo pain and fall into sin, it is in some way because God does not show himself clearly to us. Or rather, it is because he shows himself to us in a particular way: if he were to show us ‘his blissful cheer [countenance] ... all thing should be to us joy and bliss’, but because he shows us ‘cheer of passion, as he bare in this life his cross, therefore we be in disease and travail with him as our kind asketh’. Reflecting on the darkness of the second showing, Julian understood that the darkness was ‘a figure and a likeness of our foul black death which that our fair, bright blessed Lord bare for our sin’. There is a certain circularity here: it is our death which Christ bore on the cross, yet somehow it is only because he shows himself under the modality of passion that there is any death for him to bear. The problem of sin and pain actually turns out to be the problem of this life as a whole. Julian’s brooding on the difficulty of reconciling God’s judgment that ‘all is well’ with the church’s judgment that all is not well leads her to a much broader observation, that it is seemingly a necessary facet of life in this world that we should not see God clearly the whole time: it is not just God’s attitude to sin that we need to discover, it is God’s view of this life as such.

It is made clear that our acceptance of the terms of this life is something to do with God’s glory and the increase of our own bliss and, even before she cracks the difficult fourteenth showing, Julian is able to suggest various ways of making sense of this. There is, first of all, a commonplace ascetic comment: we can learn humility from our feebleness and sinfulness. Also there is some ‘property of blessed love that we shall know in God, which we might never have known without woe going before’. Julian echoes St Paul in asserting that the reward that awaits us in heaven far transcends anything we might have deserved by any amount of ‘pain and travail’ on earth. And we are rewarded specifically for all our pains, including the pains caused by our sins – Julian rather daringly says that in heaven sin will be a glory, not a shame.

Julian is quite clear that the puzzle over our own pain, including sin, can only be resolved by reference to the passion of Christ. She sees that in principle all pain is enfolded in his passion. There is no separation between the pains he suffered in his own body on the cross and the pains which he continues to suffer in his members until the end of the world. ‘For every man’s sin that shall be saved, he suffered; and every man’s sorrow, desolation and anguish he saw and sorrowed, for kindness and love.’ His humanity is ‘all mankind that shall be saved’ and there is a real ontological link between his suffering and the suffering of all of his creatures, so that our whole life in this world can be viewed in this light: ‘Thus was our lord Jesus pained for us, and we stand all in this manner of pain with him and shall do till that we come to his bliss.’

This means that the essential penance which we undertake ‘with mind of his passion’ is, quite simply, this life: ‘for I tell thee, ho whosoeuer thou do, thou shalt have woe... and then shalt thou truly see that all thy living is penance profitable’.

The problem, then, is why there is this whole dimension of pain, Christ’s and ours. It is true that Christ’s pain is caused by our sin, but it is also true to say that it is only because he shows us ‘cheer of pain’ that we are in pain. We cannot make sense of any of it unless we can discover precisely the role of all this pain in God’s intention. As Julian came to see very clearly, there are only two possibilities: either sin (and pain) are simply brought to nothing in God’s eyes, or in some way they do enter into the divine perspective. At first Julian was prepared to accept that this whole life, from the point of view of eternity, is simply ‘nought’, but later she was not satisfied with this. If this life really comes to nothing, then life is simply a waste of time. In the Long Text Julian assures us that this is not so: nothing will be lost, time is not wasted.

The answer that Julian eventually receives is based on a rather opaque little story of a lord and a servant. This was the part of the fourteenth showing which she was slowest to understand, but when she did understand it, it provided the key to all the rest. In the story, she saw a lord sitting in a barren wilderness, with a single
servant standing to one side, waiting to hurry away to fulfil his master’s bidding. When the time came, the servant rushed off, eager to accomplish his task, and fell, doing himself a serious hurt. The worst pain of all was that he could no longer see his master looking at him with unchanging love, tinged now with pity. The lord, meanwhile, plans to give the faithful servant a special reward because of what he has suffered.109

Julian understood at once that this must be an allegory of the fall of Adam, but she saw that there were some points which did not fit Adam as a single individual.109 She was forced to accept that there is a double meaning in the servant: he is not only Adam, he is also Christ. And, because of the union established at the very beginning of creation between the soul of Christ and the souls of all the elect, Christ cannot be separated from Adam. So Julian has to say, ‘When Adam fell, God’s Son fell . . . Adam fell from life to death, into the vale of this wretched world, and after that into Hell; God’s Son fell with Adam into the vale of the maiden’s womb.’102 The fall of Adam and the Incarnation are essentially one and the same story.

Julian appears to accept what is sometimes taken to be the Scotist view, that the Incarnation was always intended by God.103 But at the same time there is not the slightest hint in Julian of any notion of a possible Incarnation which would not at the same time be a redemption, any more than there is anything said about the fall except in the perspective of redemption.104

In the terms of the story of the lord and the servant, the fall occurs precisely because of the servant’s eagerness to carry out his master’s will. As applied to Adam/Christ, this means that Adam’s fall is exactly coincident with the mission of the Son of God. And, although the imagery gets rather confused, it seems clear that the mission of the Son of God could not be accomplished without some sort of fall. The servant is sent to fetch a treasure which is on the earth, he is sent to dig something out of the earth which his master wants, he is also, it seems, to achieve something which will enable the lord to take his seat in his glorious palace, instead of sitting on the barren earth.105

It is the last part of the servant’s mission which is most clearly explained: the Father’s chosen dwelling place is the human soul, and this only becomes fit to be his dwelling place as a result of the Son’s redeeming work.106 Our souls are presented to the Father, united with the humanity of Christ, at the Ascension.107 It is also, presumably, our souls which are the ‘treasure in the earth’ which is to be prepared as a food fit for the lord’s table.108

But this food has to be dug out of the earth. It cannot be fetched without a ‘fall’. At the level of substance, we are never separated from God, but God wants us to be more than substance: we are meant to be ‘double’, sensuality as well as substance.109 And it is in this sensuality that God wishes to dwell.110 ‘Sensuality’ does not just refer to our body; Julian, following normal usage, talks about our soul as ‘sensual’.111 Sensuality means our whole life, as lived within the terms of the body, the terms of this world. Whereas our substance is indestructible, sensuality is precisely the sphere within which we ‘fail’.112 Sensuality would be impossible without some separation from the clear beholding of God, because, as Julian has already explained, if we could see God clearly we should not be subject to the limitations of sensuality. It is because of this unavoidable element of failure associated with sensuality that it is necessary to talk about ‘mercy and grace’, which ‘restore’ sensuality ‘by process of time’.113 Time is of no concern to substance, it is only sensuality which has a history, and this history represents a genuine ‘increase’.114

The reason why Christ suffers and we suffer is that the intended dénouement would not be possible without this kind of story to lead up to it. Julian’s doctrine is reminiscent of that of St Irenaeus: God could have made Adam perfect all at once, but if he had done so he would not have created Adam, he would have created something else.115 And the reason why we have to go through the laborious business of living in the flesh, of living in this world, is that God’s purpose is precisely the ‘salvation of the flesh’.116 Julian is making much the same point, only she is more courageous than Irenaeus, in regarding sin as an inevitable part of the story. Sin is ‘necessary’,117 because without it there would not be sensuality. Sin enters into the divine perspective, it is not ‘wasted’, because what God wants is precisely saints who have been sinners.118 This life, sin and all, does have a real significance, even sub specie æternitatis, because our final bliss and the worship we bring to God depend on our being precisely this kind of creature.

In the light of this doctrine the significance of Julian’s choosing Jesus as her heaven becomes much more apparent: choosing Jesus as our heaven, precisely in his pain, is right for us because our heaven is one in which there must be no separation between our substance and our sensuality.119 This life is a responsibility which we must not shirk.120

But if sin is a necessary part of this life, if sin is to be ‘worship’ to us in heaven, should we not therefore go out and sin for all we are worth? Julian’s theology seems to bring her to precisely the problem which St Paul was forced to deal with.121 And she has an excellent response to it. The inference that we should positively cultivate sin is wrong for the simple reason that we do not want to go out and sin. Whether we are consciously aware of it or not, we
do not like sin. Sin is the 'sharpest scourge' with which we are afflicted. Because of the limitations of our sensuality, there is a 'beastly will' in us, which cannot help but will evil; our wills are oppressed, so that sometimes we cannot help but sin. But sin is a constraint upon our godly will, not something that we could or should choose for its own sake. In Julian's view, we need to be comforted in face of our sins; and the basic comfort is the assurance that even if we do nothing but sin, we still cannot thwart God's purpose. And this is true of frequent, grievous sins and even of mortal sins. None of them can stop God loving us or accomplishing his purpose.

The eternal contentment which is expressed in 'All is well' is imaged in time by the assurance that 'All shall be well', and, as Julian realised, this has to be taken at its face value: all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well; not the least thing will be forgotten. But it is precisely here that Julian discovers a seemingly insuperable difficulty: our faith teaches us that some people may be damned, so how can all be well?

Julian tries for all she is worth to get an answer to this question, but she gets little except the assurance that there is a deed which the Trinity will do at the end of time which will make it plain that God can and will make all things well. What this deed is will not be known until it is done; until then, it is known neither in heaven nor on earth. In the meantime, nothing is revealed about damnation, and it is therefore not a subject about which our minds can be profitably occupied, for lack of data. There is, however, a single hint dropped: in heaven there is 'no more mention made of them (the damned) before God and all his holy ones of the devil'. We are referred back to the fifth showing, where Julian saw the powerlessness of the fiend. She saw that God 'scorns' the devil, but she also saw that there was no wrath in God towards him. The sight made her burst out laughing, and she realised that such laughter is quite proper, but yet she noticed that she did not see Christ laughing. The point seems to be that God does not react to the devil at all. If we apply this to the damned, then it seems that at least one way of trying to cope theologically with damnation has to be ruled out: damnation does not enter into the picture of salvation at all, hell is not part of the same scenario as heaven, so we do not have to imagine the saints somehow enjoying the sight of hell. It is, I think, evidence of Julian's rare tact as a theologian that she is content to accept that what is revealed to us is a doctrine of salvation; we simply do not have any way of making damnation intelligible, however much we have to accept that it is a possibility.

If this is true, then it follows that we cannot work on any assump-

The doctrine of substance and sensuality allows Julian to reinterpret ontologically the devotionalist aspirations with which she started. Mind of the passion and bodily identification with the passion are generalised to include the whole of our earthly life as such: simply by accepting the limitations of life in this world, we are sharing in the passion of Christ, and it is in learning by faith to see God at work in all of it that we learn to recognise the Trinity in the passion. Similarly the three 'wounds' are all found to be ontologically grounded in the act of God and in the love of God, 'continued' by grace into our own natures. Contrition is a fact: by virtue of our godly will, which is kept in Christ, we do not like sin and our own sins pain us. Compassion is a fact: by virtue of the penalty of our lives we do 'stand' in the passion of Christ. Longing for God is an inescapable condition of our natural will, and it is inseparable from the 'thirst' which Christ has to draw us wholly into bliss.

The essential qualities which devotionalism sought to feel turn out to be essential facts about us, but, precisely because we cannot perceive our substance in this life, except by faith, we shall not normally be able to feel them. In the seventh showing Julian was taken through a rapid oscillation of feeling, from extreme consolation to total desolation, and the changes were so rapid that they could not be ascribed to any change in her; as she says, there was no time for her to have committed a sin between the consolation and the desolation. The purpose of this exercise was to emphasise the point that God keeps us equally securely whatever we feel like, in weal and in woe. It is precisely because we attend to our own feelings (our own perceptions, our own subjective experience) that we make life such a misery to ourselves.
But Julian's doctrine is more subtle than we might have expected. She does not say that our perceptions, our feelings, are of no significance at all. It is 'the feeling of pains in sorrow and mourning' which we are told not to 'follow'. The feeling of consolation is genuinely a revelation of the state of affairs which pertains at the level of our substance, and does not need to be spurned or distrusted. The important thing is that we appreciate by faith that the shift in our own feeling does not in any way mean that we have somehow lost God's love or his safe-keeping. The facts are more important than our feelings, but our acknowledgment of these facts is already, in an obscure way, due to the clear vision which our substance already enjoys.

Thus Julian, reflecting on the very dark vision which constituted the second showing, comes to see that even our seeking of God presupposes some kind of self-revelation on his part. There is no essential discontinuity between seeking and seeing. When we do not see, we must appreciate that in some sense we do see. 'He will that we believe that we see him continually, though that we think that it be but little.'

In the last analysis, the all-important thing is faith, not 'feeling'. 'Above the faith is no goodness kept in this life, as to my sight, and beneath the faith is no health of soul.' Julian has no doctrine of any progression leading from faith to feeling, such as Hilton's notion of 'reformation in faith and feeling'. What is constant is the objective reality, which we know about by faith, and it is on that that we must take our stand. By special graces we may sometimes see more clearly, we may have some 'feeling' which makes God's love and our own inseparable union with him less opaque to us; but such special graces are, in the nature of the case, unpredictable and cannot be used as evidence of progress, any more than the lack of them can be taken as evidence of spiritual immaturity.

Julian has come a long way from her initial devotionalism and she has broken completely with the elitism of the 'contemplatives'. But precisely because she is now taking her stand on the common doctrine of the church, she offers us a vision which will make sense of any kind of Christian life. Her break with affective piety allows her to be more, not less, sympathetic towards human emotions. She proposes to us a way of 'enjoying God' which does not oblige us to do violence to the necessarily erratic nature of our emotions. Where affective piety can make sense only of some emotions, Julian's doctrine can cope with them all. Just as creatures have to be 'noughted' if they are to be properly appreciated, so the only fruitful way to take emotions seriously is to take them lightly. By taking her stand on faith and on the understanding of doctrine, Julian can cope with any kind of subjective experience of the Christian life which may occur. She was remarkably unflustered by Margery Kempe, for instance. Her theological vision gives us space within which to be human, within which to accept the insufficiencies as well as the sufficiencies of life. In her view, we do not need to flee from the ordinary terms of our existence in this world in order to accept and rejoice in our salvation, because our redemption is a redemption of this life, not a redemption from it.

Bibliography and Abbreviations

Editions of Julian
Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, ed., A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich. Toronto 1978. References are given to this edn, by chapter no. (which is transferable to other edns) and by page and line nos.


Reference is made in some of the notes to the MSS of L1, whose readings can be found in the edns cited: Parisinus (Paris, B.N. Fonds anglais 40), and the two Sloane MSS (British Library, Sloane 2499 and 3705). The task of producing a coherent critical text remains to be done; basically Colledge and Walsh is an edn of Parisinus, and Glassco is expressly an edn of Sloane 2499.

Editions of Tauler

Colledge and Ciantar: John Tauler, Spiritual Conferences [selected texts], tr. Eric Colledge and Sister M. Jane [Ciantar]. St Louis, Mo. 1961.

Abbreviations

LT Julian's Long Text.
ST Julian's Short Text.

Notes

1LT 1–2 (281:2, 285:3–4).
2For the diagnosis, see Colledge and Walsh, p. 69.
3LT 3 (289:3).
4During her sickness her mother is at her bedside, with some others: ST 7 (224:14), 10 (234:29). The priest who is sent for to give her the last rites is called 'my curate [my parish-priest]': ST 2 (208:23). Colledge and Walsh, p. 44, argue that this does not exclude the possibility of her being a nun, possibly a Benedictine at Carrow; but there are no grounds for supposing that she was a nun (cf. Glassco, p. vii), and even though it is true that