JULIAN OF NORWICH c. 1342-1423

OUTLINE

JULIAN
- First woman to write in the vernacular, Middle English
- An anchoress, theologian, and visionary
- Took her name from the Church of St. Julian, Conyngsford, Norwich
- Illness and near-death experience on May 13, 1373.
- Saw sixteen visions of God’s love.
- Wrote a Short Text and a Long Text, sometimes called *A Revelation of Love*, or *A Book of Showings*, a complex and challenging book.
- She uses rhetoric, a painterly eye, and a sense of drama to teach about God’s love.
- Julian seeks to *recreate* for her readers the experience she had of being beloved of God. Her *Book* can repattern consciousness to receive God’s love.
- Margery Kempe is the only person who speaks of Julian in the 14th century.

THEOLOGY
- Although not prolific, Julian writes theology that her predecessors, Anselm, Bernard of Clairvaux, Bonaventure, and Thomas Aquinas would have recognized as comparable to their own. (Denys Turner)
- God’s love for human beings is her theological focus. “Love was his meaning…”
- Julian struggles to demonstrate the consistency of the omnipotent goodness of God with the stark facts of human sin and evil.
- She sees the crucified Christ crowned with thorns, so Christology is her starting point.
- Starting with the Passion of Jesus, she works through a doctrine of the Trinity.
- She develops an epistemology of Revelation=we know God through seeing God in scripture, the Church, creation, and in our own inner life.
- The Incarnation
  1. The Humanity of Christ
  2. The Body of Christ
  3. Theological Significance of Bodies, Personal and Corporate
- Interiority and the Pastoral Dimension
  1. The Interiority of God
  2. The Interiority of Creation
- Human Affect and Its Theological Significance
- Motherhood of God
- A “Soteriology of Mirroring”=we are saved/transformed/healed through seeing ourselves reflected in God

HISTORICAL AND ECCLESIAL BACKGROUND
- 14th century questioning of authority
- John Wycliffe
- The Lollards
- The Great Schism
• Feast of Corpus Christi
• Hundred Years War
• Black Plague
• Memento mori literature and Danse Macabre
• Denigration of the human being, barbaric cruelty, exposure of children
• Anchoritic spirituality

FOURTEENTH CENTURY ENGLISH LITERATURE
• Middle English
• Chaucer, Langland, Pearl-poet, Richard Rolle, Cloud of Unknowing. Bottom line: learn to love; that is all we are put on earth to do.
  Walter Hilton, Margery Kempe
• Use of Rhetoric
• Drama: the Norwich Corpus Christi Cycle
• Medieval Women’s Visionary Literature

PRAYER AND UNITIVE EXPERIENCE
• “One-ing”
• Loving because of having first been loved
• “Beseecching,” “beholding,” “thanksgiving”
• How to pray before, during, and after contemplative union
• Alternation between “well-being and woe”=consolation and desolation. This contributes to spiritual growth.
• The social effects of the experience of union with God=each of us is a minor ecclesia, a small church and, as such, we build up the Body of Christ, the Church.

INTERPRETATION. JULIAN INTERPRETS;
• Scripture, especially the Suffering Servant passages in Isaiah, the parables of The Treasure in the Field and The Pearl of Great Price. The letters of St. Paul.
• Theological tradition. Augustine, William of St. Thierry
• Her own experience, the Parable of the Lord and His Servant=her “Spiritual ABC.”
• She cautiously and artfully negotiates the relationship between her own authority, based on her experience, and that of the Church.

THE BOOK OF SHOWINGS IS EXPRESSED THROUGH KATAPHATIC LANGUAGE AND IMAGERY, BUT IT ESSENTIALLY CONCERNS AN APOPHATIC EXPERIENCE.
• Kataphatic=the via positiva=knowing God through creation, including scripture, images, etc.
• Apophatic=the via negativa=knowing, or not-knowing, God through darkness, absence of words and images
• “I saw him in an instant of time.”
• “I had him and I sought him.”
• “Noughting”= “Being brought low.” Spiritual maturity depends on how we comport ourselves during life’s trials.
• Julian never resolves the contradiction between the omnipotent goodness of God and human sin and evil.

SOCIALITY AND POLITICAL REALITY
• Devotional texts are written in social, political, and ecclesial contexts. In Julian’s case, she was fully conversant with the culture and controversies of her time.
• Julian’s Book contains a political vision.
• Everything in her Book mirrors the Trinity: The visions are ultimately social in meaning as the Trinity is social.
• The message is for her “even cristenes.” It concerns the healing of the human being through God’s love=becoming loving through being loved.
• “The love of God creates in us such a unity that when it is truly seen, no man can separate himself from another.”