“Love is our lord’s meaning”: Spiritual formation in Julian of Norwich and Desmond Tutu

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Abstract
This article journeys to a medieval century, to a remote figure, and to distant historical events that might mirror Desmond Tutu’s (1931–2021) context—possibly shed light on his spirituality. It is suggested that Desmond Tutu’s devotion and vision may invoke a unique Christian who remains influential among Anglicans/Episcopalians: Julian of Norwich (c. 1342/3–c. 1416). A child during a plague, an adult during civil strife, and a schooled theologian during her final years, Julian exhibited an embodied spiritual discipline echoing, perhaps, the “prayer and work” of Desmond Tutu. The Revelations to Julian began with the torment of crucifixion and ended with the disclosure of their purpose as “love” (Rev. 86: 14). How Julian engaged with the God of these “shewings” might recall two “prisoners of hope” who, in their own challenging contexts, believed that ultimately “alle shalle be wele” (Vis. 13: 61; Rev. 27: 28).

Keywords
behoveliness, blame, double-optic, love, sin

Introduction
Birth incurs unasked for risk. But in sentient and reasoning beings, unasked for risk asks about risk. For to be born with the capacities to perceive and to think grants to human subjects the possibility that one has inherited the traditio of an inaugural creative act in which primordial being, whom Christians call, God, embarked, possibly somewhat rashly, upon rather less than predictable a venture when generating a creaturely world by speaking it into existence: “And God said . . .” (Genesis 1). To acknowledge this sense of uncertainty—and, not inappropriately, to include a Middle English meaning of aknowen as, “to confess”¹—that is, to admit to knowing that there may be perils in the

¹ Beryl T. Atkins, “The Contributions of Lexicography,” in Challenges in Natural Language Processing, ed. Madeleine Bates, Ralph M. Weischedel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 37–75, 62.
futures of such a project—provides questions about its purpose. And to live in a creaturely world, to participate in it, and to ponder about meaning in its ultimate sense engenders inquiries about both inceptive intention and final objective. Indeed, “fro the time that it was shewde”—from the time of the original visions—Julian of Norwich “desyerde oftentimes to witte what was oure lords mening,” and the “wit,” the knowledge, of that meaning was granted to her in a later disclosure when, “fiteen yere after and mor, I was answered in gostly understanding” (Rev. 86: 11–13). \(^2\)

The answer provided to Julian was so reassuring and definite: “Wit it wele, love was his mening”; and the “What,” the “Who,” and the “Wherfore” that “shewed it the[e]” was “Love” (Rev. 86: 13–15). If this meaning seemingly remains immediately obvious to later Christians, then, before summarily appropriating it, a certain restiveness about its pertinence may arise. Not only do the revelations emerge in a situation of great personal bodily suffering and mental anguish, as Julian stands on the threshold of death:

> when I was thrittye wintere alde and a halfe, God sente me a bodelye syekenes in the whileke I laye thre dayes and thre nights, and on the ferthe night I toke alle my rightinges of haly kyrke, and wened nought tille have liffed ille daye (Vis. 2: 1–3; Rev. 3: 1–3\(^3\)),

but her examination of them ensues in a natural environment of the random desultoriness of the indiscriminate scything of her “evencristene/evencristen” (Vis. 6.1; Rev. 8: 31) by disease and plague through periods of murrain, crop failure, and floods, and in a political climate of turbulence, protest, unrest, and violence, which includes theological ferment about ecclesiastical duties, rights, and obligations. Thus, between 1373, when she experienced the sixteen “shewinges,” and 1388, some fifteen years later, Julian puzzles and speculates about the intention of these bestowals. In spite of the climactic fluctuations and wider religious and political volatility, Julian’s certitude that God’s love founds the reason for the revelations may be the basis upon which, over the following years until 1393, she is able to probe God’s human presence in a world pervaded by disobedience and sin. The result of this pressured inquiry, it may be proposed, liberates incarnational presence both from transactional political economics, and also from its embeddedness in the specific revelations, so as to narrate a coherent, if inflected, account that, with Anselm, too attempts to answer: *Cur Deus Homo?* Her exploration and analysis of this late unveiling reflects a persistence that refuses simply to accede to theological orthodoxy. Rather, she prays this lesson into narrative form\(^4\) in content that is theological instructive, and that may be evident to her more proximate “evencristen” and to those of later centuries.

\(^2\) The literature on Julian increases at an exponential rate. To prevent the notes from overwhelming the content of the article, only those texts referred to directly will be cited.

\(^3\) All citations are taken from Nicolas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins, eds, *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*. A Vision showed to a Devout Woman and A Revelation of Love (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006). *Vision* is cited as “Vis” followed by the section/s and the line/s; *Revelation* is cited as “Rev” followed by the chapter/s and the line/s.

\(^4\) See Denys Turner’s deft exploration of Julian’s narrative mode of theologizing: *Julian of Norwich, Theologian* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011).
Context

Little is known and much is speculated about Julian. However, it is relatively certain that the “visions” occurred on the 8th or the 13th of May in 1373, and that there were two later disclosures, in 1388 and 1393. But her birth (c. 1342–1343), her name, her lineage, her religious status, her marital status, whether she was a mother of children or a nun, when she entered the anchorhold, when she died (c. 1416)—au fond, who she was—remain obscure. In contrast, her social, ecclesiastical, and environmental context is less a matter of speculation.

The result of the teaching of John Wyclif (1330–1384) and his followers from the mid-1370s would have required Julian’s insistence upon faithful belief, especially over the next forty or more years, because the impact of the Wyclif controversy reached far beyond the university lecture halls. A logician and philosopher at Oxford, Wyclif’s more public profile may be traced to a 1374 royal commission that considered the legitimacy of the right of the papacy to English financial revenues, although the priest’s influence on the proceedings and its outcome may be doubted. Pursuing a more radical line in his lectures and preaching engagements after 1376, Wyclif called for, inter alia, a “complete overhaul, structurally and doctrinally,” of the ecclesiastical establishment, its “hierarchical styles of authority, clerical models of priesthood, and certain popular devotions associated with indulgences and money,” and that, in matters of doctrine and morality, sola scriptura should arbitrate, but it was to be a bible that was readable in the vernacular. The catalog of Wycliffite challenges rapidly expanded into a movement of disciples, supporters, and sponsors known as “Lollardism.” Various, his followers, who included scholars and prominent nobles with direct access to the royal court, appropriated, developed, and broadened his views, although not all of the subsequent theological positions and objectives were sanctioned by Wyclif.

The response by the clerical hierarchy was swift, signaling not merely their duty to maintain theological orthodoxy but also, quite possibly, a residual fear that the arguments and convictions of the Lollards would resonate with, at least some, commonly held lay beliefs. In fact, an indication of their awareness of the effect of the Lollard causes upon the faithful may be evidenced by the hastily convened series of ecclesiastical tribunals

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5 See Watson and Jenkins, Writings, 387.
6 Nicolas Watson, “The Composition of Julian of Norwich’s Revelation of Love,” Speculum 68, no. 3 (1993): 637–83.
7 For a lively “biography” of Julian that speculates about her life, but not without scholarly care, see Veronica Mary Rolf. Julian’s Gospel. Illuminating the Life and Revelations of Julian of Norwich (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2013).
8 A long life for this period. One scholar proposes that she died as late as 1429, when in her mid-eighties, see Philip Sheldrake, Julian of Norwich: “In God’s Sight.” Her Theology in Context (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2019), 24.
9 Antony Black, Political Thought in Europe 1250–1450 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 79.
10 Andrew E. Larsen, The School of Heretics. Academic Condemnation at the University of Oxford. 1277–1409 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011), 128.
11 Sheldrake, Julian, 31.
and trials, the first of which required Wyclif to appear before the Archbishop of Canterbury, Simon Sudbury, and the Bishop of London, William Courtenay (a previous chancellor of the University of Oxford), early in 1377, and it constituted “a formal investigation into charges of heresy.” Without necessarily doubting the sincerity of the religious convictions of Wyclif’s more powerful supporters, the political and economic issues embedded within them—jurisdictional and fiscal—were not insignificant. At the behest of the younger brother of Edward III, John of Gaunt, theologians from the four mendicant orders of friars accompanied Wyclif, together with Gaunt himself and the Earl of Northumberland, Henry Percy. This hearing was interrupted by protestors and no result ensued. Between 1377 and 1381, Pope Gregory XI issued five bulls in an endeavor to detain, and extract a confession from, Wyclif, and to limit the influence of Lollardism, and among the addressees were the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London, the King, and the Chancellor of the University of Oxford. Subsequently, Courtenay, who succeeded Sudbury at Canterbury, convoked a council at Blackfriars in London in 1382, at which ten of Wyclif’s teachings were declared unorthodox and fourteen erroneous: Wyclif “agreed that some of the items were heretical, but denied having actually maintained them.” In the years that followed, the partisans to Wyclif’s cause, rather than Wyclif himself, continued to be hounded and compelled to renounce their convictions, while the progenitor retired to Lutterworth, where he died in 1384.

The exertions to silence Wycliffite Lollardism by the bishops and the pope, and the promulgation of the reports and findings of commissions and councils such as Blackfriars (also known as the “earthquake council,” owing to the occurrence of one during the hearings) appeared rather to spur its dissemination. The pursuant trials and resistance concerning matters of ecclesiastical governance, canon law, and theological dogma widened and increased, ultimately leading to the posthumous condemnation of Wyclif’s teaching during the Council of Constance (1414–1418). Political/ecclesiastical conflict and unrest ensued in an environment of ruinous inconstancies, unpredictable natural disasters, and

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12 Larsen, *School of Heretics*, 128.

13 Henry Ansgar Kelly, “Trial Procedures against Wyclif and Wycliffites in England and at the Council of Constance,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (1998): 4–6, 10: Among the chancellors of the University of Oxford serving during this period were William Barton (or Berton), who instituted an investigation of Wyclif’s Eucharistic theology in 1381 (Larsen, 2011: 149), and Robert Rigg (or Rygge), who was found susceptible to the heretical views of Wyclif, Philip Repingdon (or Repyngdon, chancellor in 1397 and 1400), and Nicholas Hereford (chancellor in 1382).

14 Larsen, *School of Heretics*, 129; Kelly, “Trial Procedures,” 9.

15 See Kelly, “Trial Procedures,” 20–21: Between 1409 and 1411, under an order from the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Arundel, the University of Oxford again returned to Wyclif’s works, which led to the condemnation of a significant number of propositions. The Pope, John XXIII (Baldassare Cossa, pope from 1410 until 1415, during the Great Schism in the Western Church, which began in 1378 and lasted until 1417), was informed, and Wyclif’s books were burned in accordance with a papal decree of February 2, 1413. In 1415, the subsequent Council of Constance (1414–1418) refuted “45 of his theses that had previously been condemned by the University of Paris (beginning with the 24 propositions condemned at Blackfriars), along with a list of 260 collected by the University of Oxford.”
Further local outbreaks of plague trailed the desperate scything of the population by Black Death (1348–1349), which itself re-exposed a perennial faultline in the Christian faith about the providence and love of God rather starkly. In this regard, increasing numbers gathered in bands of wandering flagellant pilgrims who, by their visual physical self-laceration and through their dramatized sketches, cast blame upon the Church—its wealth and luxury, its nepotism and simony—and the world—its sin and lack of true repentance—for rejecting the ways of God. As the politics of discord escalated in the aftermath of Black Death and other periodic calamities from the mid-1300s, the price of labor escalated because, in a situation of scarcity, labor recognized its power to demand an increase in wages, which was resisted by the farmers and the merchants. The latter were supported by the Church whose polity, practices, and theological justifications pervaded the civic realm. Officially, its own vested interests were inextricable from those of the monarchy, and together they wove a brocade of patronage and propaganda that trapped the citizenry in subservience to clerical power in an alliance that periodically returns to assume power. This bonded network of monarchy and church intervened in the rising conflict between landowners and labor, as workers acted upon their increasing leverage to negotiate, indeed, to demand, economic and social changes.

Norwich, the second city to London, was a conduit of European trade and the export of woolens, worsteds, and kerseys, but the plague-induced shortage of labor threatened manorial income and the crown’s taxation revenues that had followed the agricultural expansion, urban growth, the development of market networks, town and regional fairs, the formation of labor guilds, and an increase of merchant intervention during the latter thirteenth century and the first half of the fourteenth century. Miller’s careful scrutiny of the period through until Black Death in 1348–1349, and just after the birth of Julian (c. 1342/3), demonstrates that this expansion did not include an investment in productive equipment, showing that the increase in wealth was extremely narrow and largely dependent upon rental income in the towns rather than upon agricultural output. Therefore, what might appear as growth and expansion owing to increased output during this period lacked the possibility of sustained growth without the labor to produce it and the population to consume it. The increase in woolen exports in the years leading up to Black Death was followed by “scarcely perceptible” increases in the early years of the next decade, and although the statistics of the period do not always demonstrate a wider

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16 On the issue of causes, see Robert E. Lerner, “Fleas: Some Scratchy Issues Concerning the Black Death,” The Journal of the Historical Society VIII, no. 2 (2008).

17 It ought to be noted that flagellant practices were not unique to the period. For the wider context of similar millennial or chiliast movements, and not merely as condemnatory but as inspiring of hope, see Robert E. Lerner, “The Black Death and Western European Eschatological Mentalities,” American Historical Review 86, no. 3 (1981): 533–52. With regard to notions of bodily mortification, see Stefan D. C. Reynolds, Attitudes to the Body in Fourteenth-Century English Mystical Literature (Unpublished PhD, Heythrop College, University of London, 2013).

18 Edward Miller, “The English Economy in the Thirteenth Century: Implications of Recent Research,” Past & Present 28 (1964): 21–40.

19 Howard Levi Gray, “The Production and Exportation of English Woollens in the Fourteenth Century,” English Historical Review 39 (1924): 16–21.
growth in wealth, Hatcher\textsuperscript{20} rightly questions their later compilation (what was subsequently included or excluded as additional provisions), and, somewhat convincingly, observes that “with remarkable speed the Ordinance of Laborers was enacted in June 1349,” and then followed by the Statute of Laborers in 1351, which was required because the first measure had failed to suppress the demand for “excessive wages.” Fearing a decline in wealth through the increase of labor costs, these laws set upper wage limits and forced workers to accept imposed terms in contracts. With echoes of a more proximate century inflected rather with racial epithets, the chronicled accounts of the period also reveal the local nobility bemoaning the ambitions of the workers and their claim of increased reward and improved terms of service. Natural disasters of “murrains of cattle in 1348, 1363, and 1369; and a series of bad harvests: 1369 was the worst in fifty years,”\textsuperscript{21} and severe epidemics recurred. In 1362, twenty percent of Norwich’s population died in an outbreak of plague, most of whom were children,\textsuperscript{22} “[w]hen Julian was nineteen . . . and in 1369 there was yet another severe outbreak,”\textsuperscript{23} a reminder of the fragility of the body in a continuingly threatened present context.

These unpredictable inconstancies fired a tumultuous politics that could not be separated from the contested ecclesiastical issues, all of which churned the previous security of ordered class relations and culminated in the Peasants’ Revolt of June–July, 1381; again, with pressing moral questions about increasing “rationalization” and unemployment during a worldwide epidemic. The institution of “a punitive new tax of one shilling, imposed on all men and women over the age of sixteen”\textsuperscript{24} was its immediate trigger. From Kent, Wat Tyler and his men marched on the Archbishop of Canterbury. Archbishop Sudbury was killed, while in Norwich, “[p]roperty was looted, monasteries ransacked, and even churches pillaged”;\textsuperscript{25} Norwich Castle was occupied, and a tenacious hierarchy refused concessions, among whom, Henry Despenser, the Bishop of Norwich, was one of the most prominent. The punishment of protagonists was public, visual, and audible—spectacles from which no person was immured: indeed, even an anchoress residing at St. Julian’s Church would have heard the screams of those incinerated in a pit just obscured from the line of sight from her cell.\textsuperscript{26}

\textbf{God and/in the World}

If such a context adumbrates a past that, in some respects, is also a resonantly continuing present, then theological questions about God making this world and its creatures, and God’s presence and action in the world cannot be—ought not to be—avoided. These dilemmas were no less pressing upon a solitary as they (more acutely) were

\textsuperscript{20} John Hatcher, “England in the Aftermath of the Black Death,” \textit{Past & Present} 144 (1994): 10–11.
\textsuperscript{21} Grace Jantzen, \textit{Julian of Norwich} (London: SPCK, 1987), 8.
\textsuperscript{22} Sheldrake, \textit{Julian}, 19.
\textsuperscript{23} Jantzen, \textit{Julian}, 8.
\textsuperscript{24} Alister E. McGrath, \textit{In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture} (New York: Anchor, 2001), 21.
\textsuperscript{25} Jantzen, \textit{Julian}, 9.
\textsuperscript{26} Jantzen, \textit{Julian}, 11.
upon a politically engaged priest and later prelate. As tempting as it may be to prescind paradox, the first woman to write in clearly recognizable English resisted the temptation. Rather, in a profound and personal way, she worried about the fact of being human in the world; of human engagement and duty, and of moral worth and moral blame. Julian pressed her inquiry about orthodox Christian teaching and, as applicable to a later, engaged and active priest and bishop, she resolutely persisted in praying herself to some searching, and always provisional and revisable, answers. For Julian, there were convictions that, owing to the visions, preoccupied her; as, more proximately for Desmond Tutu, there were beliefs about God’s providence that required examination in a quotidian climate of the non-recognition of human persons, of the rejection and diminishment of their God-given humanity and worth. In both environments and for both pilgrims, separated by over half a millennium, the presence of a God in whom a final and consummate love might be claimed appeared rather difficult to sustain—perhaps less immediately so with regard to the vagaries of nature, but more terrifying and harrowingly so with regard to purposeful human intentions, theological justifications of feudal disparity and of a “master race,” and deplorable inhuman yet humanly performed deeds. Surely, a final condemnation, a literal medieval conflagration of the wicked and the evil and their eternal torture, seems to be—nay, is—just? And yet, for an anchoress and a bishop, not only could this not be right and just; it also would entail anthropomorphizing God, reducing God to humanity’s rather persistent need of victims and, more theologically significant, it would not entail praying a life that seeks to reflect, to become, God’s life in the world, and that divinizes every human thought, word, and deed.27

Thus, with some anxiety, Julian worries about human deeds and whether sinful human actions are worthy of blame: “that we sin grevously all day and be mekille [much] blamewurthy” (Rev. 50: 7). Blame for proven guilt requires retribution and, owing to the “event” of Adam’s disobedience, the “first man,” the “blame of oure sinnes continually hangeth upon us” (Rev. 50: 10–11). But this doctrine that the church teaches and Julian believes contrasts with “my merveyle” (Rev. 50: 10). For what is revealed to her is not a wrathful God punishing human persons for their sin.28 Although humanity exists in its sinful state; nevertheless, in this very sinful state, and in the very acts of transgressing God’s purposes, God’s telic wish of human fulfillment in the final meaning of love (Rev. 86) is devoid of God’s judgment and condemnation: “I saw our lorde God shewing to us no more blame then if we were as clene and as holy as angelis be in heven” (Rev. 50. 12–13).

27 Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu, Made for Goodness. And Why This Makes All the Difference (London: Rider, 2010), 131; Michael Battle, Desmond Tutu. A Spiritual Biography of South Africa’s Confessor (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021), 135.

28 For the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the wider society during the early period of South Africa’s transition to a democracy, retributive or restorative justice was, and, to some extent remains, a contentious issue. For arguments for, and critiques of, the TRC’s stance (and the relation to Ubuntu), see, inter alia, Desmond Tutu, No Future without Forgiveness (London: Rider, 1999), 34–36; Battle, Desmond Tutu—Confessor, 170–77; Charles Villa-Vicencio, Walk with Us and Listen. Political Reconciliation in Africa (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2009), 105, 131–32, 145.
In this startling claim that is at the center of Julian’s *aporia*—a conundrum inherent in the Christian doctrine of God—resides a comprehensive or universal hope that permeates her reflections on the shewings. This perplexity is not absent from the secular experiences that she takes into the anchorhold, but it is more severely challenged by the extremes of human brutality and violence in situations of civil insurrection, because blame for, and condemnation of, inhumane strategies, policies, and actions contradict an informed and informing conviction that “alle shall be wele, and alle maner of thinge shall be wele” (Vis. 13: 61; Rev. 27: 28–29). Julian, however, unlike many others, is not content to deny her “wit”—her need to know; or, at least, to know more. Thus, she petitions God to inform her how blame for sin has been excluded from the visions and, more pressingly, she requests for an explanation *sub specie Dei*. For the revelations trouble her keenly because they disclose what is contrary to Christian catechesis, which teaches that humanity participates in the Fall, and that Adam’s sin of disobedience subsequently is enfleshed in all human persons. Therefore, with her conscience wracked and her reason addled, she cries: “‘A, lorde Jhesu, king of blisse, how shall I be esede? Who shall tell me and tech me that me nedeth to wit, if I may not at this time se it in the?’” (Rev. 50: 31–33). She is answered by “teching inwardly . . . twenty yere after the time of the shewing, save thre monthes” (Rev. 51: 73) in as graphic, if less bloody, a form as that shown in the first revelation in a “wonderful example of a lorde that hath a servant” (Rev. 51: 1–2).

The opening lines of Chapter 51 themselves evince the passing of the years and demonstrate a sophisticated theological engagement that permits interpretive complexity to pervade the disclosure. The analogies in the parable engender revised inward “seeing”—meditative accounts that include allegorical, tropological, and analogical modes in “the down-to-earthness of the medieval period, its vulgarity, the language itself with its flat, sat-on vowels and its ability to move in a blink to the religious, the mystical, the compassionate.”29 For there is a complexity to theological truth and, in the very characters of this parable, single vision gives way to optic substrata that are essential to its comprehension. In the more literal and realist fictional account, Julian “sawe two persons in bodely liknesse, that is to sey, a lorde and a servant” through which “God gave me gostly understanding” (Rev. 51: 6–7). The scene is restful and affectionate, a seated lord and a servant standing before him. Owing to the loving relationship, the errand upon which the lord sent his servant was so eagerly embarked upon that “in gret hast for love to do his lordes wille . . . he falleth in a slade, and taketh ful gret sore” (Rev. 51: 11–12), unable to “helpe himselfe by no manner of weye” (Rev. 51. 14).

The injury that the servant suffers is the singular human deformity of the Fall. Distance and separation replace proximity and harmony: “he culde not turne his face to loke uppe on his loving lorde, which was to him full nere” (Rev. 51: 16–17). Indeed, in the very nearness of the lord, of the one who is able to render aid, abides the bruised *hubris* of human obduracy and self-absorption—immured in bodily pain, the servant nurses his helplessness with

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29 Bernard MacLaverty, *Midwinter Break* (London: Vintage, 2017), 43.
self-pity. Who is to blame for this human calamity? No one, because “only his good will and his gret desyer was cause of his falling” (Rev. 51: 31). The vision in realistic bodily form gives way to an “inwarde, more gostly” (Rev. 51: 35) one with an awareness that fallenness was preceded by utterly willing love and unquestioning obedience. This prior commitment of the servant, and this bond of trustful consonance between the two characters, determines, in fact, overrides any experience of guilt and the consequent imputation of blame. But, unsurprisingly, Julian herself “falls” perplexed. She reaches for understanding, because, yes, this fallen servant is Adam; and yet, if the servant is Adam, then why is it inwardly, more spiritually, sensed by her that the vision is “by no manner be directe to singel Adam” (Rev. 51: 58)? Julian is disconsolate because she realizes that the portrayal contradicts the orthodox doctrine that humanity is blameworthy. Therefore, as much as she wills to know, “in that time I stode mekille in unknowinge” (Rev. 51: 58–59). The lesson of her life’s wrestling with this problem is itself instructive because real difficulty should be neither rejected summarily nor ignored, but rather waited upon: she “sawe and understode that every shewing is full of privites” (Rev. 51: 61–62); that they contain mysteries before which one must pause in patient endurance.

Attentive waiting, meditating, and ruminating upon God’s meaning by allowing a multi-focal optic to complexify her seeing produced a more holistic apprehension of the “teching inwardly” (Rev. 51: 73–74) in 1393, after the long nineteen years and nine months since the initial visions of May 1373. If love is Love’s meaning (Rev. 86), and Julian already has accepted this as the purpose of the revelations in 1388, then Love’s love must remain perdurant; for, if not, it is not the creative love of Love’s inceptive speech act: “Let there be . . .” (Genesis 1). But this realization was not without its difficulty in Desmond Tutu’s later tortured South African nation, just as it was for Julian’s troubled England of the fourteenth century.

Owing to the late discernment of the meaning of this vision, Julian interprets the lord as God, and the servant initially as Adam—Adam as the representative of each human person. Thus, crucially, the servant in the parable is “how God beholdeth alle manne and his falling” (Rev. 51: 88), because the Fall, if it stains humanity’s Edenic condition, then, for Julian, it distorts human knowing: the servant “was stoned in his understanding” (Rev. 51: 90). With comprehension “stunned,” reason is scarred and fails to pursue what is true because its ultimate concern is less than focused on the Being who capacitates human persons with the impetus to truth. The ability to reason rightly is distorted not merely by inattention, but by not attending to Love’s drawing, Love’s calling, as observed, so many years later, in T. S. Eliot’s “Little Gidding V”:

With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling
We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring

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30 The literature on South Africa with reference to the impact of apartheid on all spheres of life, especially during the latter part of the twentieth century, is too substantial to be cited, and may be sourced without difficulty (cf. n. 2).
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.31

Indeed, the τέλος is the ἀρχή, and the ἀρχή the τέλος: God is both creator and consummator. But, for Julian, and possibly somewhat unusually, the will is not impaired.32 The “wille” of the one who falls—each human person—is “kepte hole in Gods sight” (Rev. 51: 91). For, pace Paul (and Augustine), in more Platonic terms, if one wants and desires to do the good, then one’s will remains pure in intention. In the parable, the servant, Adam as each person, wants to, rushes to, fulfill the lord’s command; but, again, pace Paul and Augustine, each person’s ability to enact a will that foundationally wills obedience, is deflected by inattentive looking—by not meditating upon and contemplating the one who fashions the human person as one who is “made for goodness”—that is, made for “Godness.” And to behold this Truth and yet to cease to meditate upon and to contemplate it distorts the mind’s ability to know its own good. Here, again, in each of Julian’s and Desmond Tutu’s contexts, reasoning about what it means to be fully human was warped; it produced conceptions of the human person that were distorted. Recall that Julian also apprehended the truth of this vision sub specie Dei: God knew what each person really, singularly, wanted, willed, and desired because God’s creative fiat was predicated by “and it was very good” (Genesis 1).33 God, “oure curteyse lord . . . is . . . loving and longing to bring us to his blisse” (Rev. 51: 101–102; 124–125).

Thus, eternity’s perspective, gifted here to Julian, comports the dual sight of compassion and pity, of happiness and joy, where the former, “of the fader was of the falling of Adam, which is his most loved creature,” and the latter, “of the falling of his deerwurthy son, which is even with [equal to] the fader” (Rev. 51: 114–116). Both sets of compassionate and passionate attributes are united in God’s accompanying presence. Therefore, the human person in this damaged state is not discarded. Instead, “[t]he merciful beholding of his lovely chere, fulfilled all erth and descended downe with Adam into helle, with which continuant pitte Adam was kepte fro endlesse deth” (Rev. 51: 116–118), and concludes as Julian’s “understanding was led into the lorde, in which I saw him heyly enjoye for the worshipful restoring that he will and shall bring his servant to by his plentuous grace” (Rev. 51: 134–136). In her “doubil undertanding, one without, another within” (Rev. 51: 139), Julian observed both the outward “ragged and rent . . . ‘unsemely clothing for the servant that is so heyly loved to stond in before so wurshipful a lord,’” and also the “inward: in him was shewed a ground of love, which love he had to the lorde that was even like to the love that the lord had to him” (Rev. 51: 144–148; emphasis added).

For Julian, as for Desmond Tutu, perhaps one could suggest that Christian faith, to recast Julian’s phrase above, was grounded love, because it responded to, and attempted to enact, the primary inward source of the outward creation and its creatures. In different ways and “closer apart” by some six-hundred years, each attempted to recover this founding biblical and Christian claim, and to convince others of its truth as they

31 Julian is quoted directly in Part III of this final of the Four Quartets.
32 This claim of Julian’s was noted by Desmond Tutu in Tutu and Tutu, Made for Goodness, 134.
33 Tutu, No Future without Forgiveness, 112; Tutu and Tutu, Made for Goodness, 5–14.
themselves were convinced by it, because neither could nor would abjure their shared conviction that ineradicable inceptive Love signally made—created *ex nihilo*—what was good. From nothing, only goodness resulted. Therefore, at this midpoint in Julian’s long explanatory account of the parable, the servant is “newed” and there is a “new beginning for to traveyle” (*Rev.* 51: 155): human failure is to be rescued by love’s “grettest labour and the hardest traveyle that is” (*Rev.* 51: 163–164). The servant now assumes the toil of earthly work in order to convert the *humus* of creation into a humanity that stands “full wurshiply before the lorde” (*Rev.* 51: 170), the one who created what is good (Genesis 1). And there Julian sees that the servant, the human person, the Adam, is *the* man, the divine in human form, the Christ: “In the servant is comprehended the seconde person of the trinite, and in the servant is comprehended Adam: that is to sey, all men” (*Rev.* 51: 179–180).

The single-visioned sight of the servant’s utterly willing and alacritous undertaking of the lord’s command and yet who, in this very eagerness (one may say), is wounded mortally, is recast by the blended nature of the disclosure. The servant is Adam: the servant is Christ (*Rev.* 51: 179–180). Because Julian is convinced that the “shewings” themselves are “behovely,” she is herself obligated to assert this late and now unveiled meaning, and she does so in strikingly apothegmatic terms:

When Adam felle, Godes sonne fell. For the rightful oning which was made in heven, Goddes sonne might not be seperath from Adam, for by Adam I understond alle man. Adam fell from life to deth: into the slade of this wretched worlde, and after that into hell. Goddes son fell with Adam into the slade of the maidens wombe, which was the fairest doughter of Adam—and that for to excuse Adam from blame in heven and in erth—and mightely he feched him out of hell (*Rev.* 51: 185–191).

Although there is a concession to the church’s teaching at the end of this concise summary of Christian redemption; nevertheless, Julian’s “oning” conflation of Adam and Christ, of humanity and the incarnate God, answers her puzzlement about “no blame.” Indeed, there can be no blame where the sinless is the scapegoat. The Trinitarian framing of the *Revelation*, less evident in *A Vision*, invokes a Christology that itself is an anthropology. It is a *logos* of *theos*—a narrative account of Trinitarian perfection—that, simultaneously, is a *logos* of *anthrōpos*—a narrative account of human imperfection, but one made perfect because “oure good lorde shewed his owne son and Adam but one man” (*Rev.* 51: 195). Furthermore, Julian cannot “see” or locate the fault, cannot attribute “blame” to humanity—sinful humanity—because “oure good lorde Jhesu taken upon him all oure blame, and thherefore oure fader may nor will no more blame assigne to us than to his owne derwurthy son, Jhesu Crist” (*Rev.* 51: 197–199). Thus, the servant is the “sonne,” who stands as Christ before the Father, but already wearing “Adams kirtel, alle redy to sterte and to runne” (*Rev.* 51: 211 & 212).

Although one could interpret “all mankinde that shall be saved” (*Rev.* 51: 217) restrictively as *some* whom God *will* save, the identification of the servant, the Son, and Adam appears uncompromising, because Julian does seem to wish, if not to believe, that what this courteous, compassionate, and loving God wants is the salvation of all, and that what God wants, God wills and accomplishes. Thus, Julian’s account synthesizes two
visionary experiences—in bodily and spiritual forms—so as to compose a dual-stranded and double-plotted narrative that coalesces to unite the Son who is Christ the servant, the servant who is Adam, the Trinitarian Son who is the servant and Adam, if Adam also is the servant, and Adam who is each human person (Rev. 51: 179–180; 195). And, in spite of sin’s behovelness, it tells of a humanity “longing and desyering” (Rev. 51: 222) filial recognition by the Father, who is God, as an implicit and ineradicable need that, toujours déjà, always already, has been fulfilled: “Jhesu is all that shall be saved, and all that shall be saved is Jhesu” (Rev. 51: 225–226).

Such a fundamental conviction recovers a God who does not, and will not, blame, because blame is “blame for . . .,” but here there is no “for-ness.” However, “sin is behovely.” With regard to its “beholliness,” the crux remains: if there is sin, if sin is present, if human persons sin, surely there is culpability, there is blame. In the “A.B.C.” that endeavors to explain “some understanding of oure lorde mening,” “privites”—secrets—“be hid” (Rev. 51: 229–231). Thus, the more recognizable catechetical account that concludes the exposition remains one not only undergirded by a foundational belief that the disclosure resists the “for-ness” of humanity’s blame, but also by concealments of its fertile futurities. The images of both orders of “seeing” are conflated rather than severed. The lord in the parable is God the Father and the servant is God the Son in a synthesis of lord and Father and Father and lord, of servant and Son and Son and servant. Thus, the “sterting” of the servant to fulfill the lord’s command “was the godhed, and the renning was the manhed” (Rev. 51: 236–237). Likewise, in the “maidens wombe” is the “falling” of the “godhed . . . into the taking of oure kinde . . . [a] falling [in which] he toke grete sore. The sore that he toke was our flesh” (Rev. 51: 237–239). Julian’s long excursus establishes an integration without a merging of God and human persons, and one that, not insignificantly, resists dissolving the one in the other or reducing the one to the other, and is founded upon being Christian as, perhaps one may propose, “be-ing” Christian, which is to say that the living of her faith is the living of herself.

The threefold emplacement in the tableau of the servant, the Son, who is Christ, Adam, and every person is before, to the left, and to the right of the lord, the Father, who is God. The laborer’s clothing is Adam’s kirtle, soiled and torn through daily toil and the “sweppes and the scorges, the thornes and the nailes, the drawing and the dragging, his tender flesh renting” (Rev. 51: 247–248) in the trial of Christ that ends in the “slaine and dede” body that “yeld[ed] the soule into the faders hand, with alle mankinde for whome he was sent” (Rev. 51: 252–253). For Julian, rephrasing with added emphasis—sent for “alle mankinde”—appears permissible because hell is harrowed so as to draw “uppe the gret root oute of the depe depnesse, which rightfully was knit to him in hey heven” (Rev. 51: 255–256). Consequently, the resurrection morn’s victory transforms “Adams olde kirtel, straite, bare, and shorte” into clothing “made fair, new, whit, and bright . . . [a] semely medolour which is so mervelous that I can it not discrive” for it is itself humanity’s real opus: true praise or “very wurshippe” (Rev. 51: 259–264).

Thus, granted to Julian, and inscribed in the lives and writings of the longer centuries of the Christian faith, is the singular willed love of being before the God who is to be beheld and whose final love redeems all, and to see where “[n]ow sitteth the son, very God and very man, in his citte in rest and in pees, which his fader hath dight to him of endlesse purpose, and the fader in the son, and the holy gost in the fader and in the son”
See Rowan Williams appropriation of Austin Farrer’s thought in Christ the Heart of Creation (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), Chapter 1.
public words and deeds it more than reminds; rather, it constitutes the anamnētic re-enactment and summons of Love to be a human person of a particular kind of love—and, given the immediate contexts of both Julian and Desmond Tutu, to be human persons possessed by Love’s love who do not respond with violence, who do not hurt, maim, or destroy, but forgive, restore, and reconcile. Thus, this ultimate meaning of Love (Rev. 86) is both present and implicit in the characters’ actions and speech in the Lord-Servant Parable (Rev. 51), because there the vulnerability of love and the courtesy of human and divine concourse are instructive so as to show and to tell—to proclaim to—humanity how to comport itself in a world defeated by sin. The double-visioned theological focal lens in the narrative beholds God’s action in Christ in a committed life in which “now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13).

To whom does Julian direct this paradoxical, double-optic theology? Not “to the wise” (or, at least, not purposefully to the theologically educated), but to her “evencris-ten,” who reside in this world in which, it may often appear all too apparent, God is defeated. For it is in this mundane space that sin enacts its violence—it is what sin is: the violence of humanity that violates the nature of what a human person is in its composite divine and human form. However, although God’s defeat in the crucifixion straddles the divine-human chasm; nevertheless, because it does so, it is and must be that in which God is present: God is present in that defeat sub specie humanitatis while concomitantly impelling all to the eternal vision of God’s victory, evident in the human hope of love’s final well-being.

But what, in Julian’s arresting exploration, does the conquest of God in this world mean to and for human persons; or, to phrase this more directly: what, if any, crucified vocation arises from this defeat for the “evencristen”? If avoidance of this penetrating question is all too evident in an evangelist’s “prosperity gospel,” then it also is somewhat elided in a church and by its leaders that expect, even demand, recognition, status, and prelatical honors in the secular domain—heard in the cry of indignant protest from purple-cassocked clerics: “But do you not know who I am?” Unfortunately, the rather disagreeable answer is that to be a Christian is to be an outcast crucified by the sin that is the world’s; and because sin is in the world, so, troublingly and simultaneously, it is one’s own. Therefore, to press Julian, one may propose that God in the crucifixion is the disclosure of God’s nature, a concluding assertion that, if reasoned unusually by Julian (or, perhaps one ought to say, with Julian’s assistance) is a theological claim that, for all its paradoxical doublings, is not unorthodox. For “God is love,” a love which is of God and in God—that is, is God in se; and in its human-divine “shewing” on Golgotha is love defined as sacrifice, and lived in kenōtic vulnerability.

Yet that “sin is behovely”—that it is fitting or appropriate to a conception of ultimate “wellness” and “love”—still requires some probing. First, simply because of the claim itself. Second, because it is compounded by Julian’s assertion that “ther is no doer but he” (Rev. 11: 35), God. Third, because Julian rightly must ask a pivotal question: “What

35 On Tutu’s stance, see Battle, Desmond Tutu—Confessor, 76, 98–99.
36 For a Trinitarian and communal conception of kenōsis in Tutu’s thought, see Battle, Desmond Tutu—Confessor, 183–186.
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is sinne?” (Rev. 11: 4). The answer to this question is the _crux interpretationis_ of her anthropology of substance and sensuality: “sinne is no dede” (Rev. 11: 16–17). However, owing to the troubled material contexts of both Julian and Desmond Tutu and of the traumatic effects of “deeds,” further comment is obligatory.

The former’s less proximate context was noted earlier; while, in the case of the latter, the South Africa of a longer history of colonialism, but, more acutely, a shorter history of the specific legislative enactment of racial separation and its malignant effects comprised the period during which Desmond Tutu and a subsequent generation were dehumanized daily—from separate entrances to public amenities, separate railway coaches, separate beaches at which to swim and benches upon which to sit, to far more devastating and brutal physical acts of violence. Both Julian’s and Desmond Tutu’s distinctive arenas challenged the nature of a God who created a world of human beings and endowed them with the capacity of choice, of freedom, and of the consequences of “sin’s behovely presence”—whether it was in an intentional “necklacing” in the Lollard Pit or the township, or in a plague’s Black Death or Covid 19. If the formation of Christianly human selves is the fundamental task of a “spirituality,” of fashioning material persons in-animat- ted by a specific religious tradition’s living out of its doctrinal convictions about inventive and telic purpose in liturgy, study, prayer, and action, then this spiritual and theological work upon the self must impact upon the divine-human relationship as also upon the relationships between human persons.

Possibly one may consider sin’s “behoveliness” as an angled and awkward necessity. What sin does, perhaps one may phrase it, is that it “awkwards” the human person in the sense that, just as socially uneducated and _gauche_ public behavior is perceived to be awkward in such a context, it is, nevertheless, unavoidable—and therefore “behovely” to the person—because this particular person is unaware of the socially acceptable conventions of behavior. In this state of unawareness, the person is not blameworthy. Rather, this is a blameless social “fault”—a _ἁμαρτία_—a failure in accepted social etiquette, and it is in this respect that one could say that sin “awkwards” the human person.

Julian’s torsional grasp of the paradox of sin’s necessity and love’s _terminus in Deo_ elucidates such ultimate awkwardness as the unfitting fittingness of persons as they live out their human lives: growing, learning, and changing; fashioning themselves to, and being transformed into the likeness of, a God who does not blame and who _already_ has forgiven them. This is to live in faith or “by faith.” Those who cast blame demonstrate their lack of faith that “alle thinge that es done es wele done, for our lord God doth all” (_Vis._ 8: 15; _Rev._ 11: 14–15) and, crucially, that the one who “doth all” is Love. Yes, Julian admits, “man beholdeth some dedes wele done and some dedes eville,” but “our lorde beholdeth them not so” (_Rev._ 11: 30–31; emphases added). It is “not so” because “alle that hath being in kinde is of Gods making, so is all thing that is done in properte of Gods doing” (_Rev._ 11: 31–32).

Christian faith calls one “to see” _sub specie aeternitatis_. Therefore, where faith is wanting and where God is shunned is where there is impaired faith. Faith, as the submission to _knowing as a way of loving_, compels the Christian “to live into” the all-encompassing Love that begins and ends all things. It demands the loving of the awkward into the way, not primarily of knowing how to behave according to customs—“to straighten them out” and to eradicate their _gaucheness_, as it were; but of _loving them as a way of_
knowing them—that is, of welcoming, including, and sitting at table with them, even those whose “awkward” views about humanity may have led them to undertake “very awkward” deeds—so that their way of knowing may be invited to become a form of openness to Love’s ultimate call. To live and act in this way is to live and act in the cause of Christian redemption—the living of God’s purpose in which there is no blame: no blame of others and, possibly more insidious when present, no self-blame with its cycle of self-loathing, its concurrent projections upon others, and its subsequent wrecking of social, political, and ecclesial communities.

Julian founds her theology upon seeing and grappling to understand in the shewings of God human waywardness within a map of human wholeness and Love’s definitive purpose. From celled seclusion, she gifts to the future an inflected theology that, in its elucidation as future offering, may illuminate Desmond Tutu’s theological pronouncements about practices of dehumanization that dehumanize the dehumanizer. Julian’s contribution in this instance is evident in the distinction that she draws between the substance and the sensuality of the human self who, as a creature of God, possesses a “godly will” (Rev. 37; 53–57). To “behave as if we are not created by God”37 is to deny humanity’s substantive, perhaps, one may say, hypostatic,38 constitution, which, quite simply, is “made for goodness.”

This etched entailment that one is “made for” desiring rightly appears to underwrite Desmond Tutu’s repeated appeals to those who, in thought and deed, discriminated, subjugated, and oppressed: they crippled themselves, maimed their divinely sanctioned capacity to will what God’s wills each person to will and to work for, which is the “goodness” that is harmonious with the “good” and the “very good” evident in the nascence of all that is, and that is—actually is—who one is (Genesis 1). Thus, for Julian, as for Desmond Tutu, the distortion of the self does not damage the prior, original, and sacred will which, in welcome not in blame of others, enacts the will for the good and for God that is closer to oneself than oneself; or, in Augustine’s memorable phrase: interior intimo meo (Conf. III. 6. 11).

Conclusion

God calls each Christian—each human person—to be a “real presence” in the world precisely because sacrality is the founding condition of being human. The human being is divinely constituted so as both to love and to be loved into Love’s final meaning, where “alle maner of thinge,” ultimately, must “be wele” (Vis. 13: 61; Rev. 27: 28–29). This is the vision that a medieval, yet ever contemporary, unnamed and largely unknown “prisoner of hope” provides; a vision hammered out in prayerful attentive puzzlement at the disclosures of “Love’s Work,” and that continues to challenge conceptions of God and remains instructive. Scholarly inquiry, patience, questions, conference papers, and tentative and provisional answers over many centuries, not least the most recent, portray

37 Battle, Desmond Tutu—Confessor, 169.
38 For a brief elaboration of the Trinitarian perspective in Tutu’s theology, see Battle, Desmond Tutu—Confessor, 166–167.
a more comprehensive account of this “theology of hope,” which is etched with a sheer-
ness of love and inflects Christian discipleship and faith, than the centuries more imme-
diate to its author, an anchoress attached to St. Julian’s Church in Norwich from sometime
in the latter 1300s. The space of time’s work in effortful inquiry is required when assess-
ing the “spirituality” of a life’s work. It demands a detached probative examination and
a focused yet multi-focal optic, a task begun in the most recent and sweeping “spiritual
biography” of the southern African prelate.39 Whatever the more severely tested future
assessments of Desmond Tutu’s contribution to spirituality, theology, and the politics of
his homeland may produce, he, like Julian, was convinced of Love’s purpose that “alle
shalle be wele” (Vis. 13: 61; Rev. 27: 28–29).

Declaration of conflicting interests
The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/
or publication of this article.

Funding
The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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39 Battle, Desmond Tutu—Confessor.