MEETING GOD
AN INTERPRETATION OF ‘WOUND’
IN THE MYSTICAL WRITINGS OF
JULIAN OF NORWICH AND
JOHN OF THE CROSS

BY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the thesis is to discover what an examination of the theme of ‘wound’ in Julian’s and John’s mystical writings reveals about meeting God (contemplation) in this life. Wounds are God’s wounding touches of love which draw Julian into oneing and John into transforming union.

The thesis is based on the monastic definition of theology in which knowing is experience. Julian and John wrote theology from within lives of prayer. In keeping with a literary/theological hermeneutic which recognises their texts as literary and mystical, it is argued that a lectio divina approach is most appropriate. Interpretation of Julian’s Showings includes a special focus on the Westminster manuscript because it is a contemplative compilation of long text excerpts. John’s Spiritual Canticle and Living Flame poems and commentaries are closely examined because wounds of love appear most often in them. Other material from both writers is included.

For both mystics, the crucified Christ is the Image of the Johannine God of Love who delights in and desires union with humankind. Far from concepts of atonement and appeasement, the God they revere is their vulnerable Lover: the compassionate Beloved who suffers with humankind. Like the bride of the Song of Songs, Julian and John are lovers given over to their Beloved, who stirs within the silence of their hearts. They teach prayer as flowing from kataphatic into apophatic, with Christ drawing them in love-longing into the life of the Trinity. Meeting God involves surrendering into the dying and rising of Christ. In their suffering with Christ they are transformed and come to live a new Reality. Julian and John meet God in a life of prayer. They delight in Trinitarian love and peace, and are compassionate lovers of others. There are implications for Christology, our understanding of contemplation, and a theology of suffering.
I wish to express my gratitude to many who assisted my project. I especially thank my two supervisors. I am deeply grateful to Dr Kerrie Hide for sharing her amazing knowledge of mystical theology and for wise and inspired guidance. I am greatly indebted to Dr Michael Smith SJ (Dean of Sentir Graduate College of Spiritual Formation) for generously supporting my project and for helping it along to its conclusion. I acknowledge the warm hospitality of the MSC community and the Silence of St Mary’s Towers Retreat Centre, Douglas Park, over several years. Dr Paul Chandler O.Carm. advised helpfully on current mystical scholarship. Fr Gregory Burke OCD provided invaluable information on Spanish contacts. Sr Margaret Costello FMIC offered wonderful hospitality in Rome and Assisi and arranged time at La Verna. Dr Francisco Javier Sancho Fermin OCD welcomed me to stay at CITeS, Universidad de la Mística (Avila), and to accompany the student group on the annual Sanjuan/Teresian pilgrimage to Andalucía. Fr Ramón de la Cruz OCD provided a hermitage for Holy Week at the Desierto de S. José, Batuecas. Dr Iain Matthew OCD allowed me to accompany his pilgrim group to Segovia. I am grateful for kindness shown me at Julian’s Shrine in Norwich. Professors Philip Sheldrake and Sandra Schneiders generously agreed to conversations. Dr Edward Howells offered encouragement and advice. My thanks are especially due to Dr Aloysius Rego OCD and Dr Andrew Hamilton SJ who kindly read drafts and offered valuable feedback. I thank Mr Philip Harvey of the Carmelite Library (Middle Park, Melbourne) for help in acquiring resources, and acknowledge the librarians at the British Library (London), and the Teresianum and Carmelite libraries (Rome). I thank Barry, Andrea, Carolyn, Naomi, Stephanie and family and friends for their support, with special mention of Tim Medlin, as well as Swan Hill Copy Centre, for IT assistance.

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## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS</th>
<th>vii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CITATIONS FOR THE TEXTS</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### PART I. PRELIMINARIES

1. INTRODUCTION  
   Overview  
   Aim and Objectives  
   Scope, Assumptions and Limitations  
   History  
   Meeting God  
   The Mystical Texts of Julian of Norwich and John of the Cross  
   Literature Review  
   Concluding Comments  

2. A LECTIO DIVINA INTERPRETATION  
   Introduction  
   Wound  
   Entering the Wound  
   A Lectio Divina Approach  
   Scholarly Support for a Contemplative Methodology  
   Concluding Comments  

### PART II. JULIAN OF NORWICH

3. THE THREE WOUNDS  
   Introduction  
   Sitting in Julian’s Anchorage  
   Julian Prays for Three Wounds  
   The Westminster Version of Julian’s Showings  
   Mary’s Reverent Beholding  
   Concluding Comments  

4. WOUND OF COMPASSION  
   Introduction  
   Christ’s Passion  
   The Showings  
   “Lo, how I love thee”  
   Medieval Mystical Context  
   Beholding God’s Goodness  
   Concluding Comments
5. WOUND OF WILLFULL LONGING TO GOD
Introduction
Willfull Longing to God
Grounded in the Trinity
Seeking in to Beholding
Beseeching: “Prayer oneth the soul to God”
Concluding Comments

6. WOUND OF CONTRITION
Introduction
Christ is Our Wound of Contrition
Christ is Our Mother of Mercy and Grace
Healing Our Sensuality
Oned into God
Concluding Comments

PART III. JOHN OF THE CROSS

7. WOUNDED BY LOVE (Spiritual Canticle I)
Introduction
Stanzas One to Twelve
Stanzas Thirteen to Twenty-one
Concluding Comments

8. WOUNDED LOVERS (Spiritual Canticle II)
Introduction
Stanzas Twenty-two to Thirty-five
Stanzas Thirty-six to Forty
Concluding Comments

9. WOUND ENFLAMED (Living Flame)
Introduction
Stanza One
Stanza Two
Stanza Three
Stanza Four
Concluding Comments

10. THREE WOUNDS OF LOVE
Introduction
The Delightful Wound of Trinitarian Love
The Wound of Suffering: Christ is the Doorway
The Wound of Contemplation: Transforming Union
Concluding Comments
PART IV. CONCLUSION

11. MEETING GOD
   Introduction
   Theology and a Life Lived Informed by Prayer
   Contemplation: A Meeting of Wounded Lovers
   Meeting God in Suffering
   Concluding Comments

APPENDIX A. 269
Julian of Norwich: Westminster Cathedral Manuscript of Showings.

APPENDIX B. 309
John of the Cross: Dark Night, Spiritual Canticle, Living Flame.

APPENDIX C. 318
The Writings of John of the Cross

BIBLIOGRAPHY 319
ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure

1. Despenser Retable in Norwich Cathedral (1381)  14
2. The Sketch of the Crucified Christ by John of the Cross  23
3. Showings in the Westminster Manuscript  68
4. Bone Crucifix  81
5. Cántico Espiritual in the Manuscrito de Jaén  158
6. Original Painting of the Christ that Spoke to John in Segovia  234
CITATIONS FOR THE TEXTS

Julian of Norwich


Citations from the Westminster Cathedral Manuscript have the initial W followed by manuscript folio number, line number in the manuscript folio, and page number in the SISMEL edition, all in Arabic numerals.

Citations from the Amherst, Paris and Sloane Manuscripts have the initials A, P and S respectively. The chapter number of the manuscript is in lower case Roman numerals. The page number in the SISMEL edition is in Arabic numerals.

John of the Cross

Unless otherwise stated, poetry citations are from: Centred on Love: The Poems of Saint John of the Cross. Translated by Marjorie Flower. Varroville: Carmel, 1983. Citations from the poems Spiritual Canticle (SC), Living Flame (LF) and Dark Night (DN) are identified by the appropriate initials and stanza number. Other poems are individually identified.


A Ascent of Mount Carmel
DN Dark Night
L Letters
LF Living Flame
S Sayings of Light and Love
SC Spiritual Canticle

Spanish Citations are from: San Juan de la Cruz: Obras Completas. Edited by José Vicente Rodríguez and Federico Ruiz Salvador. 6th ed. Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 2009. These citations are identified by the initials OC.
## ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COED</td>
<td>Concise Oxford English Dictionary</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSUD</td>
<td>Collins Spanish Unabridged Dictionary</td>
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<tr>
<td>CWS</td>
<td>Classics of Western Spirituality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KR</td>
<td>Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, <em>Collected Works of St. John of the Cross</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>NJBC</td>
<td><em>New Jerome Biblical Commentary</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSCM</td>
<td><em>New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SISMELE</td>
<td>SISMELE edition of Julian’s <em>Showing of Love</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unless otherwise stated, Scripture references are from the *New Jerusalem Bible*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1990.
PART I

PRELIMINARIES
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Father spoke one Word, which was his Son, and this Word he speaks always in eternal silence, and in silence must it be heard by the soul (S.100.92).

It is God’s will that we set the point of our thought in this blessed beholding, as often as we may, and as long (W.112v.8-11.117).

The focus of this dissertation is human beings meeting God in this life. Meeting God can be interpreted as encountering God or contemplation\(^1\) or even mystical theology.\(^2\) Christians throughout the tradition have sought this encounter with God in prayer.\(^3\) My purpose is to research what Julian of Norwich and John of the Cross write about their contemplative experience of God because I believe that they have something to say to the people of today. I have chosen to do this through an examination of the theme of ‘wound’ in their texts because, for both mystics, wounds are wounds of love in which God is met. Julian and John are respected representatives of the Christian mystic tradition and their writings are regarded as mystical classics. It is appropriate to reinterpret such texts in our own age.

Overview

The dissertation is organized in four major sections. Part I deals with preliminary concerns. The present chapter, the first chapter of Part I, lists the main sections of the dissertation. It then explicitly sets out the aim and objectives of the dissertation and defines its scope and limitations, as well as underlying assumptions. The chapter explains the history of the dissertation. It comments on what meeting God means in the Christian tradition, and on mysticism in a postmodern age. Textual underpinnings are provided in preliminary biographical, historical, and literary

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\(^1\) In this dissertation, contemplation is defined as meeting God in this life.

\(^2\) John of the Cross often uses the term to describe contemplation: 2A.8.9.176; 2DN.5.1.401; 2DN.12.5.423; 2DN.17.2.436; 2DN.20.6.445; SC.Pro.3.470; SC.27.5.582; SC.39.12.626.

\(^3\) In this dissertation, prayer is an umbrella term denoting seeking God.
examinations of Julian and John and their texts. Finally I engage with the question of the appropriate place for a literature review.

Part I’s second chapter explains the contemplative methodology which is integral to my research and makes its own contribution to theology. I argue that a *lectio divina* approach is most appropriate for the task of interpreting Julian’s and John’s mystical texts. Both mystics relied on *lectio divina* in writing their texts and would have expected their texts to receive the same reading.

Parts II and III of the dissertation are major research sections which explore meeting God, through an examination of the theme of ‘wound,’ in the mystical texts of Julian and John respectively. There are four chapters for each.

Part IV concludes the dissertation with a single chapter containing a detailed discussion of what is learned about meeting God from an examination of ‘wound’ in Julian’s and John’s mystical writing. The chapter addresses the major issues of the dissertation, and deals with them. In its interpretation of the mystical writings of Julian and John, this dissertation enlarges previous knowledge of their mystical thought, and contributes towards “a renewed contemporary theory and practice of mysticism.”4 The aim and objectives of the dissertation are explicitly stated in the next section.

**Aim and Objectives**

The aim of the dissertation is to discover what an examination and interpretation of the theme of ‘wound’ in the mystical writings of Julian of Norwich and John of the Cross reveal about meeting God in this life, in order to enlarge and modify existing knowledge of contemplation.

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There are a number of objectives:

- To demonstrate that in Julian’s and John’s writings, as in the Johannine tradition, the beholding of God’s goodness is the foundation for meeting God, and to draw out the implications of the grounding of all reality in a God of Love.

- To enlarge previous knowledge of the significance of the wound in Julian’s and John’s understanding of contemplation, as articulated in their mystical texts.

- To address the role of desire and longing in Julian’s and John’s articulated understanding of meeting God, and to draw implications from this.

- To examine the nature of contemplation as explicated by Julian and John in their mystical writings.

- To analyse the role of Christology in Julian’s and John’s texts, and to provide evidence of its centrality.

- To pursue research using the monastic model of *lectio divina* as an hermeneutic tool, and to evaluate the method of approach by the fruitfulness of the contribution that the research makes to a contemporary understanding of meeting God in contemplation.

- To provide evidence of how the mystical writings of Julian and John are of a genre where theology and spirituality meet, and to show how mystical writings like Julian’s and John’s contribute to a Christian understanding of God which comes from a life lived informed by prayer.
Scope, Assumptions and Limitations

The scope, assumptions and limitations of the research are here defined. In Julian’s and John’s extensive mystical writings there is a vast quantity of material available for researching the topic of meeting God. It is therefore necessary to define the scope of my study. The dissertation specifically examines the theme of ‘wound’ in their writings, using it as entry-point to their contemplative thought. I have chosen to do this because for both mystics, wounds are wounds of love in which God is met. Because of the focus on the theme of wound in Julian’s and John’s writings, meeting God in suffering is of significance, but this dissertation does not set out to provide a theological treatise on suffering. Rather, its concern is: when we are suffering, where is God in it? For Julian’s writings, there is a special focus on the Westminster manuscript, which I argue is a scribal copy of an early fifteenth-century version of Julian’s thought compiled (possibly by Julian herself) from the original long text manuscript for contemplative purposes. The Paris long text and Amherst short text versions are also extensively used. For John’s writings, interpretation focuses on the Spiritual Canticle and Living Flame because these texts have most to say about wounds. Selected passages from John’s other texts are incorporated.

It is assumed that the reader has general background knowledge of mysticism. A detailed study of mysticism in the medieval Christian tradition is beyond the scope of this thesis.

It may seem that researching the writings of two mystics (rather than one) limits the possibility of fruitful research. I am aware of the breadth of my task. The topic of contemplation has within itself a necessary complexity. Researching the writings of two mystics has greatly enhanced the depth of the study. Each has informed my understanding of the other. There are many points of contact that are explored. Examining the writings of two mystics allows for an enriched understanding of medieval mysticism and what it may contribute to our understanding of contemplation. The breadth of the study has meant that I have had to be extremely selective.
History

The dissertation has grown out of a long-held desire to spend time researching the unfathomable mystery that God is love. Some years ago, study of John’s Gospel led me to the realization that the crucifixion of Christ is really what Christianity is all about. In Christ’s living amongst us, and particularly in his passion and death, he reveals to us a God who loves us and the depths of that love. Having already explained to his disciples that “I am in the Father and the Father is in me” (Jn 14:11), and that “no one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn 15:13), Christ shed the very last drop of his blood, which is clearly shown when “one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out” (Jn 19:34). The message of John’s Gospel is taken up in the Johannine Epistles where we are explicitly told that “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God and God abides in them” (1 Jn 4:16).

In more recent years, the reading of Julian of Norwich’s Showings has led me to understand that Julian’s writings are actually a theological commentary on John’s Gospel, and in particular on I John 4:16. Over a similar period of time, some of John of the Cross’s writings have been speaking to me of a personal relationship with God who is love. The writings of these two Christian mystics lead in to the Christ of the Gospels who is depicted as the Mystic of mystics, in his prayer and in his life, until he “bowed his head and gave up his spirit” (Jn 19:30) and was transformed in resurrection.

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6 See “Citations for the Texts,” viii. The title Showings is applied to all known manuscripts of Julian’s writings. The main ones are the short text version: Amherst manuscript, ca. 1413-50; the long text versions: Paris manuscript, ca. 1580, and Sloane manuscripts, ca./post 1650; and a compilation of long text passages known as the Westminster manuscript, ca. 1500. This dissertation extensively uses the Amherst, Paris and (especially) the Westminster versions. Appendix A contains the SISMEL Westminster manuscript and translation.


8 See “Citations for the Texts,” viii. See Appendix C for a list of John’s mystical texts. Appendix B provides John’s Dark Night, Spiritual Canticle and Living Flame poems.
In contemplating the crucified Christ, Christians throughout the Christian era have come to know in a deep and mysterious knowing that God is love. At a particular point in history, Christ died because he knew and believed and trusted with all his heart and soul that God is love and held him safe. He lived his life demonstrating his belief, in his teaching and in his healing, and, since the establishment found such teaching threatening, when the Hour came he gave his life for it. In that Hour, Christ comforted the weeping women of Jerusalem (Lk 23:28); his heart was free of bitterness (Lk 23:34); he promised paradise to the thief who threw himself upon the mercy of this outcast (Lk 23:43); and he made provision for his mother (Jn 19:27). For his part, he was ridiculed by his own people (Mt 27:38-44; Mk 15:29-32; Lk 23:35) and felt abandoned by his God (Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34) but he believed that it was into God’s loving hands that he was putting his life (Lk 23:46). He totally believed that God is love. And he died for it. And this was his Hour of glory. For me, this is what Christian mysticism is about. I read Julian and John in its light.

Because of the origin and nature of the texts I am examining, my research has been pursued using the monastic contemplative approach of lectio divina, which I explain in the next chapter. I have come to two acknowledged teachers, Julian of Norwich and John of the Cross, for spiritual guidance. Julian and John were mystics of their times but examining their writings leads one in to the remarkably consistent Christian mystic tradition.

Meeting God

Scripture contains many illustrations of humankind encountering God. In the Tent of Meeting, Yahweh spoke with Moses “as a man talks to his friend” (Ex 33:11). In the Song of Songs, the divine Lover calls, “Come then, my beloved, my lovely one, come” (Sg 2:13). Jeremiah is powerless to resist Yahweh’s overtures: “You have seduced me, Yahweh, and I have let myself be seduced; you have overpowered me: you were the stronger” (Jer 20:7-9). The apostle Paul was “caught up into Paradise

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and heard words said that cannot and may not be spoken by any human being” (2 Cor 12:4). The Johannine writings proclaim a God of love who lives in us, and in whom we live (I Jn 4:16).

In early post-scriptural times, on his way to being thrown to wild beasts in Rome in AD 107, Ignatius of Antioch wrote of his desire:

I am yearning for death with all the passion of a lover. Earthly longings have been crucified; in me there is left no spark of desire for mundane things, but only a murmur of living water that whispers within me, ‘Come to the Father.’

Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604) saw the human condition and relationship with God in terms of compunctio (compunction), which he taught has two aspects: the suffering caused by our sinfulness and need for repentance; and the suffering caused by our desire for God, and even our very possession of God … an obscure possession, awareness of which does not last, and consequently gives rise to regret at seeing it disappear and to a desire to find it again. The ‘compunction of the heart,’ ‘of the soul’… always tends to become a ‘compunction of love,’ ‘of delectation’ and ‘of contemplation’… Compunction is an act of God in us, an act by which God awakens us, a shock, a blow, a ‘sting,’ a sort of burn. God goads us as if with a spear; He ‘presses’ us with insistence (com-pungere), as if to pierce us. The love of the world lulls us; but, as if by a thunderclap, the attention of the soul is recalled to God.

Desire for God is God’s active presence within the human heart. The Pseudo-Dionysius (ca. 500), whose works arrived in the West in the ninth century, wrote of God as the ‘eros desire’:

In God, the ‘eros desire’ is outgoing, ecstatic. Because of it lovers no longer belong to themselves but to those whom they love. God also goes out of himself … when he captivates all creatures by the spell of his love.

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and his desire … In a word, we might say that Beauty-and-Goodness is
the object of the eros desire and is the _eros_ desire itself.\textsuperscript{13}

The Pseudo-Dionysius, like the earlier Evagrius Ponticus (345-99), understood
true contemplation to be imageless. Imageless contemplation is apophatic spirituality.
It cannot be discussed in isolation from kataphatic spirituality, which is synonymous
with the affirmative way: God is revealed in creation and in the coming of Christ, and
“in this way God’s immanence enables man to relate to and know God.”\textsuperscript{14}
Apophatic spirituality, on the other hand, involves _ascesis_, the stripping away of unhelpful
images, ideas and attitudes, and a transformation of desires, “in order to ‘make room’
for God.”\textsuperscript{15} We are drawn in to the hidden God in one movement which includes both
the kataphatic and apophatic.

Isaac of Nineveh, a seventh-century monk, bishop (briefly, till he fled), and
hermit, comments charmingly that in contemplation thoughts and meditation cease:
“They are like a flutter of impudent birds. Let their activity cease … for the Master of
the house has come.”\textsuperscript{16} Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) describes the visits of the
Bridegroom, in which, “as soon as he enters in he stirs my sleeping soul. He moves
and soothes and pierces my heart (Song 4:9).”\textsuperscript{17}

The late Middle Ages, a time of institutional crisis very like our own, saw a
flowering of mysticism which provides the context for Julian of Norwich and the later
John of the Cross. Since then, the secularizing effect of the Renaissance, the
Reformation concern with orthodoxy, and the crowning of science and reason in the
Enlightenment meant that for several centuries mysticism was generally regarded as
esoteric and dangerous, before scholarly re-engagement in the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{13} Dionysius the Aeropagite, _Divine Names_, IV, 13 (PG 3, 712), in Olivier Clément, _The Roots of
Christian Mysticism_, 7\textsuperscript{th} ed. (London: New City, 2002), 22.

\textsuperscript{14} Henny Fiska Hagg, _Clement of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Apophaticism_, ed. Gillian

\textsuperscript{15} Edward Howells, “Apophatic Spirituality,” in NSCM, 117.

\textsuperscript{16} Isaac of Nineveh, _Ascetic Treatises_, 31, p. 134, in Clément, _Roots_, 209.

\textsuperscript{17} _Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works_, trans. G. R. Evans, CWS (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press,
1987), 255.

\textsuperscript{18} See McGinn, _Foundations_ (Introduction and Appendix); and Harmless, _Mystics_ (Select
Bibliography).
At a conference in Rome in 2010, Ciro García Fernández provided a definition of mysticism which bears pondering:

The mystical experience, whatever its expression may be, seems to have for its main objective the search for a union that breaks through the confines of the ‘ego’. In this way, it immerses itself in a lived reality, which is mystical union. The mystical experience is essentially a divine pathos (divine passion) which means to ‘experiri’ (to experience) the presence of God and to suffer, to feel, to accept His transforming action in us, and thus, it is a bond, a relationship, ‘a loving glance’, a loving contact with a reality which is immensely appreciated and conceived as the secret, most intimate centre of one’s existence and as its permanent source which causes the mystic to exclaim: ‘O living flame of love that tenderly wounds my soul in its deepest centre!’ (St. John of the Cross, ‘Living Flame of Love’).

García Fernández is suggesting that Christian mysticism involves a wounding, transforming, ego-freeing, painful and ecstatic longing for union with God (Living Flame of Love), who is found within us.

Like late medieval times our present age is seen as an age for mystics. Labeled “postmodern,” contemporary culture and spirituality is marked by a sense of loss and disillusionment about the ability of scientific method to solve problems and ensure world progress. Postmodernism criticizes “overconfidence in the powers of reason to establish definitive meaning … [because] all human attempts to grasp ‘truth’ are culturally conditioned, contingent, and morally flawed as well as intellectually partial,” which leads to suspicion and rejection of social systems, religious certainties and institutions. An absence of dogmatic authority means that in “all its variety and pain, our ordinary human experience becomes the immediate context for God’s self-disclosure.” There is interest in the cosmic God and human consciousness. For postmodern people, God is the absent God well known to mystics and articulated by Christ, the Mystic of mystics, in “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mk 15:34). According to Philip Sheldrake, Thomas Merton (1915-

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22 Sheldrake, Explorations, 126.
68) is the postmodern spiritual and intellectual pilgrim wanderer whom Michel de Certeau describes as the mystic, “drunk with desire … who cannot stop walking and with the certainty of what is lacking, knows of every place and object that it is not that; one cannot stay there nor be content with that ... It makes one go further, elsewhere.”

For mystics, God has always been holy mystery: the very terms are related.

Today’s new cosmologists find spiritual meaning by starting with science and creation. Other theologians start from within anthropological disciplines such as psychology or sociology. Christian mystics, looking at the same questions, have a somewhat different starting point. Their theology is grounded in prayer experience of God. For example, Julian’s theology is built on her understanding that God is love (derived from her showings), and she struggles through her fears and dreads to oneness with this God of love. John’s theology emanates from his romance with God the Lover. Thus, in his prison he composed his Johannine inspired Romances followed by his Song of Songs inspired Spiritual Canticle which is the story of his journey to transforming union with a hidden God.

Julian’s and John’s theology is Christocentric (with Christ’s Passion especially important) and Trinitarian. Traditionally, Christian mysticism is concerned with the wounded Word, expression of God “in the beginning” (Jn 1:1), who gives us the “Spirit of truth … [to] lead us to the complete truth” (Jn 16:13). Edward Schillebeeckx argues that the Christology of every age, including ours, has Jesus of Nazareth as its touchstone and starting point because “the Christian faith entails not only the personal living presence of the glorified Christ, but also a link with his life on earth; for it is precisely that earthly life that has been acknowledged and empowered by God through the Resurrection.” Sandra Schneiders distinguishes between the actual Jesus, the historical Jesus of the New Testament and the proclaimed Jesus of the Church. The pre-risen actual Jesus lived in Palestine two thousand years ago, and the post-risen

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actual Jesus now lives in glory, and in us through his Spirit.\textsuperscript{26} Christ is central to the Christian mystical tradition.

**The Mystical Texts of Julian of Norwich and John of the Cross**

This section provides a biographical, historical and literary introduction to Julian of Norwich and John of the Cross. In this dissertation, contemplation is explored through an examination and interpretation of their mystical texts. These texts were written within particular contexts and with particular emphases but both Julian and John understood that God is love. They were Christ-centered mystics with a strong devotion to Christ crucified. Their mystical texts lead into Scripture and the Christian tradition.

**Julian of Norwich**

Amidst sixteen showings of Christ’s Passion, Julian of Norwich (1342–ca. 1416), an English anchoress, was given a vision of God’s love which she shared with her fellow Christians (“even-Christians”) who, in an age of plague, war and social upheaval, as well as Church emphasis on sin, were wondering if salvation was possible. Julian’s *Showings* reassures her readers that God is compassionate, homely and courteous, creating and protecting us in love, and ever drawing us into oneing\textsuperscript{27} with the Trinity. Christ, in his Incarnation and Passion and as Mother Christ is a focus of Julian’s Trinitarian theology of God as love. Scholars mostly agree that Julian

\textsuperscript{26} Sandra M. Schneiders, preface to *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), xxiv.

\textsuperscript{27} Oneing is a Julian term denoting union with God. In Middle English, oneing means being united, joined, merged with, made one in union. See *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*, ed. Georgia Ronan Crampton, (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1994), 216. The term oneing includes the activity of making human beings holy: “I shall gather you … and make you meek and mild, clean and holy, by oneing to me” (P.xxviii.247). See Kerrie Hide, *Gifted Origins to Graced Fulfillment: The Soteriology of Julian of Norwich* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 53. Julian understands oneing in Johannine terms. There is oneness in God because of the mutual presence and indwelling of the three divine Persons, and, being closed in God, humankind shares in this mutual indwelling and oneness. In recent times the term has become more commonly used. Cf. “I have decided to speak of oneness [with God] rather than unity, union, reconciliation, harmony, peace, or love … Oneness … would seem to imply that we are already one and always have been, and that it is simply a matter of becoming aware or conscious of that oneness.” Albert Nolan, *Jesus Today: A Spirituality of Radical Freedom* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 137-38.
wrote a short account (short text) of her showings shortly after she experienced them in 1373 and a longer more theological account (long text) twenty years later.

Not much is known about Julian of Norwich, with what we do know coming from her writings and a small number of external sources. It is generally thought that she took her name from the church in Conisford parish in Norwich where she was an anchoress in her later years. A medieval anchoress was a religious recluse, ceremonially enclosed (or “buried”) by a bishop in a small dwelling attached to a church. In *Ancrene Wisse*, an influential text for medieval anchoresses, we read that anchoresses are to be like owls who dwell under the eaves of churches because they understand that they should be of so holy a life that the whole of Holy Church, that is, Christian people, can lean upon them and trust them, while they hold her up with their holiness of life and their blessed prayers. This is why an anchoress is called an anchoress, and is anchored under a church like an anchor under the side of a ship, to hold that ship so that waves and storms do not overturn it. In the same way all holy Church, which is called a ship, must anchor on the anchoress, in order that she may so hold it that the devil’s blasts, which are temptations, do not overturn it.

*Ancrene Wisse* comments that “the night-bird flies by night and gathers food in darkness. In the same way an anchoress must fly by night toward heaven with contemplation – that is, with high thoughts and with holy prayers – and gather her soul-food by night.” The text is referring to both night vigils and apophatic contemplation. From Julian’s writings, we know that she was well educated in scripture and theology. In 1413, the scribe of the Amherst manuscript refers to Julian as “living yet” (A.i.711). Margery Kempe (b. 1373), who visited her in about 1415, wrote of the wise advice she gave. There are records of four wills that name her as beneficiary, dated from 1393 (or 1394) to 1416.

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28 For a discussion of Julian as anchoress, see Kerrie Hide, “Gifted Origins to Graced Fulfilment: The Soteriology of Julian of Norwich” (PhD diss., Australian Catholic University, 1999), 4-15.
Figure 1. Despenser Retable in Norwich Cathedral (1381).
When Julian wrote the second version, or long text, of the showings, she was probably settled in the anchorage attached to the church of St Julian in Norwich, where she lived a simple life of enclosure and prayer, available to those who sought her out for spiritual counsel. Norwich was a busy city and port with easy access to continental influences and information. The fourteenth century was an age of much pain for the people of Norwich, with devastating waves of the Black Death (1348-9, 1361, and 1369), famines, the collapse of the economy and the first Peasants’ Revolt (1381). In Norwich there were fifty parishes, many religious orders, and a cathedral priory, with bitter quarrels and serious moral decline amongst clergy and religious orders. There were theological controversies such as those occasioned by Wyclif’s teaching and the Lollard movement, and dissidents were harshly dealt with. The condition of Julian’s immediate world at the time of her visionary experience in 1373 may well explain her desire to die and leave it (P.iii.154; P.lxiv.417), as well as her untiring efforts over many years to examine with her reason, which she regarded as the highest gift we have received (P.lxxxiii.485), the evidence of this lovingly homely and courteous God who was revealed to her in her showings. Julian wrote her Showings of Love because she did not see her revelations as meant just for herself, but for all her “even-Christians” (P.viii.176; P.xxvii.245; P.xxxvii.277; P.lxxix.472).

Julian of Norwich’s mystical texts are an example of the genre of medieval visionary literature, which David Perrin defines as

a body of writings in which persons, usually characterized as mystics, describe their faith experiences through ‘direct’ sensory vision (sight and sound, or even smell and touch) or by intuitive inner vision. The visions are accompanied by [profound insights and] a deep-felt conviction of the truthfulness, for themselves and for others, of what has been ‘seen’.  

After 1200, visionary literature relates especially to the mystical experience of women. Visionary narratives of this time describe “direct encounters with Jesus that signal a new form of mystical consciousness, or mystical knowing – more direct,

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33 Brant Pelphrey, Love Was His Meaning: The Theology and Mysticism of Julian of Norwich (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1982), 47-49. Julian may well have seen the Retable in Norwich Cathedral. Said to have been given by Bishop Despenser in connection with the Peasants’ Revolt in 1381, it survived political upheavals disguised as a table. In 1958 it was expertly restored and placed in St Luke’s Chapel. See Figure 1.

more excessive, more bodily in nature than older forms.”35 The practice of devotional meditation, which was prayer focused on Christ’s life, or his mother’s, was formally taught by the Franciscan and Dominican friars, and, “to a great extent … was the only form of meditative exercise apart from repetitive prayer that was taught to laypeople and nuns, to tertiaries or Beguines unable to read Latin.”36 Educated women, too, practiced devotional meditation, which encouraged an awareness and acceptance of visionary experience.37 The medieval visionary women who wrote mystical texts were generally celibate (or widowed), educated, and possessing the time for scholarship, the necessary materials, financial independence, patronage, and religious zeal,38 ie. they were mostly nuns in convents, recluses, or anchorites like Julian of Norwich.

Some visionary narratives are stand-alone accounts, some are enclosed in hagiographies, and some are “linked with other visions and commentary to form a quasi-genre, the visionary collection or compendium, as illustrated by mystics like Hadewijch in the thirteenth century and Julian of Norwich in the fourteenth.”39 Sometimes, visionary accounts appear in spiritual diaries or journals. Some mystics, like Mechthild of Magdeburg,40 wrote prose and poetic versions of courtly personification dialogues, in which there is a human and a divine voice, and much of the dialogue is both amatory and didactic.41 Visionary accounts of Christ’s Passion could sometimes become psychologically problematic but Julian strictly adheres to the traditional process of monastic exegesis (as will be defined in Chapter 2) in interpreting her visionary experience.42 Using the medieval categories for interpreting

37 For example, Gertrude the Great of Helfta, as discussed in Petroff, Medieval Women’s Visionary, 10.
39 McGinn, Flowering, 20.
41 Petroff, Medieval Women’s Visionary, 26. Julian too includes dialogue.
scripture (a process which takes place in a contemplative lifestyle built on *lectio divina*) the visionary mystic as a “discerning medieval Christian could penetrate, like Julian of Norwich, through the blood and pain to the merciful love of the Trinity.”

Although there were surely women mystics before 1200, there are no significant records of their voices. Receiving visions empowered medieval visionaries to share them, and, in writing mystical literature, they gained a voice and authority. In the fourteenth century, the writings of visionaries were increasingly subjected to assessment for authenticity, with the visionary’s life of virtue being the yard-stick. Jean Charlier Gerson (1363-1429) of the University of Paris, typifies this growing mistrust in his treatise, *De probatione spirituum*, written at the same time as the Council of Constance (1415) was discussing the visions of St Bridget. Fears of mystical heresies were to persist from the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries. The place of Julian of Norwich (1342-ca. 1416) within the medieval visionary tradition is here.

Julian’s path of prayer was that of a fourteenth-century English woman who at some point became an anchoress. It would have owed much to Anselm’s patristic and monastic piety and have been anchored in the *lectio divina* of Scripture with devotion to the humanity of Christ. Living in Norwich, Julian may well also have been influenced by the writings of continental mystics. Through the Norwich Dominicans, for instance, she may have been exposed to Eckhart’s thought. The huge number of churches within the walls of Norwich (many still standing) attest to the place of the Church in the lives of its citizens. There was no division between Church and State. In a way inconceivable to those living in a largely secular society, Church and Sacraments were integral to everyday life. Julian’s writings flow from her life of

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43 Cousins, “Humanity and Passion,” 388.
45 Alois Maria Haas summarizes Gerson’s thought: “In every case reports of visions are to be met with mistrust and caution. The moral, human, and religious integrity of the mystics is the uppermost demand.” “Schools of Late Medieval Mysticism,” in Raitt, *Christian Spirituality II*, 171.
prayer. In those writings, we find medieval visionary literature, as well as speculative theology.

Within a vision of Christ’s Passion on her deathbed in 1373, Julian received what she describes as sixteen showings or revelations of God’s love. After recovering, she wrote an account of her visionary experience (the short text version). This account is credited with being the earliest known writing in English by a woman. Watson and Jenkins argue that in this text, Julian presents herself mainly as a participant in a sequence of events, not as an interpreter, and that, apart from its close affinities with continental medieval visionary literature, the text can also be read as “an essay in the genre of personal meditation associated with Anselm of Canterbury.”

Joan M. Nuth likewise considers Julian’s visionary mystical text to be “modified by native forces” which had their origin in the works of Anselm of Canterbury and in other English mystical literature, particularly that written for recluses. Nuth sees English mysticism as strongly influenced by Scripture and the monastic tradition of lectio divina, as well as the English tradition of “affective piety, with its tender devotion to the humanity of Christ,” and the popularity of the solitary life.

Watson and Jenkins believe Julian’s second, and much longer text (written twenty years later and known as the long text version) “shows deep respect for the words and ideas of its predecessor even as it transforms them into something new.” Julian herself explains the causes of this transformation as the God-given result of her years of contemplating her vision, a lectio divina process which included two later

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49 Anselm’s *Cur Deus Homo? (Why the God-Man?)* and *Prayers and Meditations* were major works.

50 For example, “Ancrene Wisse.” See Savage and Watson, *Anchoritic Spirituality*.

51 Nuth, *God’s Lovers*, 16.

52 Watson and Jenkins, *Julian of Norwich*, 2.
revelations or insights (1388 and 1393), in the first of which Julian is led to understand the significance of the parable of the lord and the servant, and in the second that “Love is our Lord’s meaning” (P.lxxxvi.490). Based on the extant Paris and Sloane long text scribal copies of the original long text version, Watson and Jenkins consider that the long text version is

a work with no real precedent: a speculative vernacular theology, not modeled on earlier texts but structured as a prolonged investigation into the divine, whose prophetic goal is to birth a new understanding of human living in the world and of the nature of God in his interactions with the world, not just for theologians but for everyone.53

In this dissertation, the Westminster version of Showings holds a special place because of its contemplative nature. It appears to be a compilation of passages from the original long text version and will be discussed in some detail in Chapter 3.

In attempting to understand Julian’s mystical texts, it is important to keep in mind that, as a “vernacular theologian,” she gave primacy to her personal experience of God,54 and that she interprets her mystical experience as a public revelation intended for all, hence her writings. Readers are invited to share Julian’s experience of God as love. Her constant inclusive use of the personal pronouns: “we,” “our,” and “us,” means that this dissertation also uses them. Her readers are drawn in and involved as she tells them what she understood immediately, what inner learning she gradually came to later, and, finally, “the meaning of the whole revelation in the visions, while always leaving room for mystery. She integrates ideas from Scripture and other sources. She draws on reason, Church teaching, and grace.”55 Within Julian’s mystical writing there is a mystical wholeness, with many contributing theological ideas which are interconnected, so that approaching Julian’s complex texts requires a spiraling process of interpretation.56

53 Watson and Jenkins, Julian of Norwich, 3. This view of Julian’s theology is supported by Nuth, God’s Lovers, 100; and McGinn, Flowering, 20. Cf. Francis of Assisi was “a ‘vernacular theologian.’ He had profound experiences of God and he articulated those experiences in his own words.” Ilia Delio, The Humility of God: A Franciscan Perspective (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2005), 4.

54 Hide, Gifted Origins, 40.

55 Hide, Gifted Origins, 35.

Two hundred years after Julian, in Spain, John of the Cross wrote his mystical texts, to which we now turn.

John of the Cross

John of the Cross (1542–91), a sixteenth century Spanish Carmelite priest, belonged to the age of Reformation and wrote for Religious men and women, as well as lay directees. John was a poet who sings and speaks of God as Lover, for whom we need to make space so that we may become the “transformed” beloved. As a spiritual director, John provides guidelines to help us in this making of space for God. For John “of the Cross,” Christ is central to a theology of Lover and beloved.

In contrast to the lack of personal information on Julian, there is a wealth of biographical detail available on John, beginning with early biographies like those of José de Jesús María (Quiroga), and Jerónimo de San José, written in support of the beatification process which began in 1614, twenty-three years after John’s death in 1591, after a delay caused by popular veneration of him which was deemed to be excessive. The first compilation of John’s works was in 1619.

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57 José de Jesús María (Quiroga), Historia de la vida y virtudes del Venerable Padre Fr. Juan de la Cruz, primer religioso de la Reformación de los Descalzos de N. Señora del Carmen (Brussels: Jean Meerbeeck, 1628).

58 Jerónimo de San José, Historia del Venerable P. Fr. Juan de la Cruz, primer Descalzo Carmelita, compaño y coadjutor de Santa Teresa de Jesús en la fundación de su reforma (Madrid: Diego Díaz de la Carrera, 1641).

John was born in 1542 in Fontiveros, near Avila, the third son of Gonzalo de Yepes and Catalina Alvarez. His parents married for love in 1529, resulting in his father (possibly of _converso_ stock) being disinherited by his family. The family lived in poverty, surviving as weavers. After Gonzalo died in 1545, the family moved to Aravelo, and then to Medina del Campo in 1551. John was placed in the residential Catechism school for poor children (1551-58), where he received good schooling, and became an acolyte at La Magdalena convent. He tried various trades before assuming menial tasks at the hospital in Medina, and studying humanities, and perhaps philosophy, at the newly established Jesuit school (1559-63). John joined the Carmelite Friars in Medina in 1563, and was given the name of John of St Matthew. After profession in 1564, he obtained permission to live the unmitigated rule.

Fray Juan de Santo Matía was then sent to the Carmelite friary at Salamanca, and enrolled at the famous university there. He excelled at study and in devotion, being named prefect of students whilst still a student himself. Mysticism began to preoccupy him and he was interested in “the exact determination of the nature of contemplation.” Thus he made a special study of mystical writers, especially “St Denis and St Gregory” and wrote his well-received matriculation thesis comparing current false interpretations of contemplation with the spiritual teaching of the Fathers and Doctors. In 1567, John was ordained priest, and, returning to Medina for his first Mass, he met Teresa of Avila who persuaded him to join her in the Carmelite reform. John with two others inaugurated the first friars’ foundation at Duruelo on November 28, 1568, promising to live henceforth by the original rule. John became known as Fray Juan de la Cruz.

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60 _Conversos_ were Jews who converted to Christianity, often under pressure. Peter Tyler suggests that John’s mother was the daughter of _moriscos_ (Muslim converts to Christianity). _St John of the Cross_ (London: Continuum, 2010), 14.
61 Mass server.
62 Carpentry, painting, carving, tailoring.
63 The original rule of St Albert for the Carmelite friars (ca. 1214) had been mitigated. See Bruno, _John of the Cross_, 25-26.
64 Crisógono, _Life_, 38.
65 Crisógono, _Life_, 38. St Denis is the Pseudo-Dionysius.
The new community which became known, like the nuns, as the Discalced Carmelites (wearing sandals), flourished and John was involved in formation at several locations before coming to Avila in May 1572 at the request of Teresa to be vicar and confessor at the monastery of the Incarnation.\textsuperscript{66} For the first two years Teresa was also there, working to set aright a very large community, although she attributed dramatic changes to John’s gifted ministry of spiritual direction with the sisters. By this time there were tensions between the Observant and the Discalced Carmelite friars who were seen to be renegades. On December 2, 1577, John was kidnapped and imprisoned in the Carmelite monastery in Toledo for nine months. In August, 1578, he escaped from his prison with the notebook of extraordinary mystical poetry he had written.

While the Observant/Discalced Carmelite tensions were being resolved, John ministered in the southern province of Andalucía, at El Calvario, Beas and Baeza. As prior in Granada from 1582 to 1586, John frequently traveled to new foundations, and to Chapters of the Order. This was also the time when John wrote more poetry and responded to requests for explanations, culminating in his commentaries, which may be seen as part of his spiritual direction ministry. John was vicar provincial of Andalucía from 1585 to 1587. At the Chapter of 1588, John was elected first councillor (second to Nicolás Doria, the Vicar-General) of the Order’s new governing Consulta, and took up residence at Segovia, where he was also prior and involved with building the new monastery. At the extraordinary Chapter in June 1590 in Madrid, John did not support Doria’s harsh treatment of Jerónimo Gracián (Teresa’s choice of leader in the earlier years, who was now expelled from the Order) nor the proposed plans for governing the Carmelite nuns. Subsequently, at the Chapter in June 1591, John was stripped of all offices and went to the solitude of La Peñuela in Andalucía. In September, already enduring a vicious slander campaign, he was obliged to travel to Ubeda because of fevers and gangrenous sores to his foot. Having foretold the hour of his death and requested verses from The Song of Songs to be read, John went joyfully “to sing Matins in heaven” at the start of Saturday, December 14, 1591.\textsuperscript{67}

\textsuperscript{66} John remained there until kidnapped in 1577. One day he sketched the crucified Christ of his prayer. The tiny sketch is still preserved at the monastery. Ruiz, God Speaks, 146. See Figure 2.

\textsuperscript{67} Crisógono, Life, 303.
Figure 2. The Sketch of the Crucified Christ by John of the Cross.
John’s legacy is to be found in his writings: mystical poetry and prose which enable us to discover in our own day something of John’s God, and how we may meet God in contemplation. This was precisely John’s mission in life, and it now continues after his death. We may contrast John’s context and the literary genres he uses with those of Julian of Norwich. Together with Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) and Teresa of Avila (1515-82), John was part of the Spanish Golden Age, a term which describes a period of Spanish spiritual, political and cultural greatness. John of the Cross (1542-91) is today regarded as a major mystical and literary figure of sixteenth-century Spain.

In Spain, there was a strong religious reform and renewal movement predating the Council of Trent (1545-63). In the fifteenth century, many religious orders had begun to establish houses of prayer and retreat, and the teachings on paths of prayer that developed in these houses were soon disseminated via the new printing presses. A major figure in this reform movement was the Benedictine abbot, García Jiménez de Cisneros. Influenced by the spirituality of the devotio moderna, Cisneros introduced daily mental prayer as part of his reform program for the Montserrat monastery, and in 1500 published his Ejercitatorio de la vida espiritual. According to Massimo Marcocchi, it was this work which triggered the subsequent writings on methodological mental prayer by many others, including the Franciscan, Pedro de Alcantara, the Dominican, Luis de Granada, and, especially, the founder of the Jesuits, Ignatius of Loyola, who wrote his important Ejercicios espirituales in 1522.

Another path of prayer, named “recollection,” was written about by Franciscans like the influential Francisco de Osuna in his Tercera parte del libro llamado Abecadario Espiritual (Toledo: 1527), and Bernadino de Laredo in his Subida del Monte Sion (Seville: 1535). According to Kavanaugh, the distinctive

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feature of the Spanish spirituality of this time was the movement of interiorization, which was a spiritual path from an emphasis on vocal prayer and external works, through mental prayer and recollection, towards the subjective experience of God’s love.71 Along this path, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross would have walked.

John’s mystical poetry burst forth from his experience of the mystical marriage,72 in the nine months he was harshly imprisoned at Toledo in 1577-78. According to Iain Matthew, this was not a sudden eruption in John’s spirituality, for “when he finally came to write, his life had funnelled to a fine point which almost had to say this word in just this way.”73 More poetry and prose writings and even sketches followed as he tried to share his mystical experience with others. John’s mystical experience and writings are totally entwined and it is important to have an understanding of his mystical writings as a whole. His monastic and scholastic formation served him well in his analyzing and discerning of mystical experience, in his guidance of others, and in his writing.74

John would have been exposed to Teresa’s favourite spiritual writers, and, because of his education, he had access to a “much wider range of writings than Teresa.”75 E. Allison Peers names John of the Cross’s chief non-Scriptural sources to be Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Gregory, and “probably” the pseudo-Dionysius. He fairly unenthusiastically discusses the suggestions of P. Crisogono regarding the probable influence exerted by Bernard, Hugh of St. Victor, the Imitation of Christ, and the German mystical school, especially Tauler, with Ruysbroeck and Suso less so.76 By contrast with Peer’s views, and recent scholars would agree, Marcocchi

72 “This spiritual marriage is … a total transformation in the Beloved, in which each surrenders the entire possession of self to the other with a certain consummation of the union of love. The soul thereby becomes divine, God through participation, insofar as is possible in this life” (SC.22.3.561-62).
74 Cf. Federico Ruiz, “Mystic and Theologian,” in God Speaks, 89. Ruiz appears to distinguish between mysticism and theology. John himself writes in many places that mystical theology is contemplation. See Chapter 1, N.2.
asserts that John was profoundly influenced by the pseudo-Dionysius in his understanding of the path of negation as the path to God,\textsuperscript{77} and José C. Nieto attaches great importance to the availability of Spanish translations of the German medieval mystics, Eckhart, Tauler, Suso, and Ruysbroeck in the second half of the sixteenth century, arguing that it was this influence which took the writings of Teresa and John further than those of Osuna, Lareda, and others who wrote earlier.\textsuperscript{78}

The influence of Teresa herself ought not to be down-played. John makes reference to her writings and invites his reader to use them in tandem with his own (SC.13.7.522). For Teresa, Christ is “the originating principle of [her] mystical experience, the foundation on which the structure of [her] doctrine and spirituality is based.”\textsuperscript{79} Although John does not so often use the names “Jesus” or “Christ,” he does use the words “Bridegroom” or “Beloved” more than five hundred times. John’s drawing of Christ on the Cross, completed in Avila, probably between 1574 and 1577, also attests to his focus on Christ, as does his practice of invariably starting his letters with “Jesus be in your soul.” John’s theology may be Trinitarian and apophatic, but it is strongly built on God’s love as revealed in the Incarnation.

John did not compose extraordinary lyrical poetry in 1578 in his Toledo prison out of a cultural vacuum. As a student in Medina del Campo, John was introduced to the poetry of Garcilaso de la Vega (1504-36) and Juan Boscán (d. 1542). At Salamanca, John was taught by the theological professor and poet, Fray Luis de León (1528-91), who had made a special study of the \textit{Song of Songs}, which he translated into Spanish.\textsuperscript{80} John’s later \textit{Spiritual Canticle} was also based on this biblical book. The popular poetry of Old Castile was part of John of the Cross, and his poems show

\textsuperscript{77} Marcocchi, “Spirituality,” 170.
\textsuperscript{78} José C. Nieto, \textit{Mystic, Rebel, Saint: A Study of St. John of the Cross} (Geneve: Librairie Droz S.A., 1979), 21. Marcocchi states that these translations were available in the first half of the century. “Spirituality,” 164. My research uncovered many apparent links between John’s thought and that of medieval mystics like the Flemish Mechthild of Magdeburg and Gertrude of Helfta, which John could well have had access to, particularly through Tauler. In his writings, John carries the medieval mystical tradition into post-Tridentine times.
\textsuperscript{80} For this, in 1572, Fray Luis de León was incarcerated by the Inquisition for five years, before being exonerated. Robert Sencourt, \textit{Carmelite and Poet: A Framed Portrait of St. John of the Cross} (New York: Macmillan, 1944), 29.
an indebtedness to the poetic forms of romances and villancicos. Love was the most popular theme and there was a lyrical tradition of using secular songs and poems to express and sing of divine love. John’s three most perfect poems are the *Spiritual Canticle*, the *Dark Night* and the *Living Flame* which owe much of their elegance and musicality to the influence of Garcilaso. There are even some resemblances between the poems of the two men. Gerald Brenan, drawing on the work of the Spanish scholar Dámaso Alonso, also suggests that a work published in 1575 by Sebastián de Córdoba, an Andalucian poet from Ubeda, probably influenced John, because of its timing. In this book, de Córdoba modified the poems of Garcilaso and Boscán by replacing the human love in the lyrics with divine love.

John composed poetry before his imprisonment at Toledo, but, in the darkness of his suffering, something happens which transforms him and his poetry. John’s lyrical poetry, expressing this mystical transformation, comes from deep within, and is expressed in his own “language,” which is everything that makes John who he is. He does not write poetry to fill in the time; it is an expression of his encounter with God, and, after he escapes, he continues to revisit it. John expresses his meeting with God in poetry because he has the soul of a poet. Poets are those who “share their perceptions and heightened awareness in language and metaphor. They hear, see and speak in ways many of us cannot.”

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81 “A romance was a very simple narrative poem, with a rhyme that often remained unchanged throughout, and that usually tells a love story. A villancico was a poem with a refrain, often sung, the theme of which was formulated in an envoy, the envoy reappearing, at times in different forms, as refrain.” George H. Tavard, *Poetry and Contemplation in St. John of the Cross* (Athens, OH: Ohio University, 1988), 4-5.


83 Alonso, Dámaso, *La Poesía de San Juan de la Cruz* (Madrid: 1942).

84 Sebastián de Córdoba, *Las Obras de Garcilaso y Boscán trasladadas a materias cristianas y religiosas* (Granada: 1575).


86 John adds and re-orders but does not alter the stanzas themselves.

John’s prose works grew out of his poetry for he was asked to explain it, which led to oral conferences and brief writings, and eventually to his four commentaries, in which John, as a spiritual director, tries to explain the mystical journey. The commentaries help to unfold the poems and draw us back to them, and John’s meeting with God. Ruiz comments that when John came to Granada he became both mystic and master, fusing poetry and prose, with the result that John’s commentaries have a special form of poetry and prose closely connected. As far as possible, one needs to enter John’s use of the Spanish language, for there can be loss in translation. The commentaries provide invaluable assistance to readers who are not native Spanish speakers.

This examination of the historical and literary contexts of Julian of Norwich and John of the Cross is intended to provide underpinnings for my examination of their texts. Just as the early monks in their study of Scripture knew that background study was required to facilitate the accessing of a fuller meaning, so too do contemporary exponents of textual interpretation demand that this task be completed.

Literature Review

Although a separate Literature Review may often be expected in a PhD dissertation, to provide a review as an introductory chapter is not appropriate or helpful in a textual study of this nature. Therefore, this section briefly acknowledges some of the issues raised in contemporary scholarship and then indicates some specific places in the dissertation where engagement with scholarship is found.

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88 Each of the commentaries has “a different emphasis and a different style … Ascent is more of a treatise, on Christian growth; Night is descriptive, portraying that growth at its most painful; Canticle is lyrical, sometimes allegorical, where growth is a lovers’ journey of search and encounter. However, it is the Flame that stays closest of all the commentaries to the poetic impulse … It is a song of wonder, and is not really ‘for’ anything, other than itself.” Matthew, Impact, 20.

89 Matthew, Impact, 10.


91 Cf. “My translation of the three major poems was influenced by [John’s] own interpretation in his commentaries.” Marjorie Flower, Centred on Love: The Poems of St John of the Cross (Varroville, NSW: Carmel, 1983), 7.
Most scholarship on Julian’s writings does not focus specifically on prayer, preferring to integrate comments on prayer within works which deal more overtly with other themes, or to provide a section or chapter devoted to “Julian’s prayer.”\(^\text{92}\) As a recent example, Denys Turner announces at the outset that his concern is “one key issue, the problem of sin (the core issue addressed by this book),”\(^\text{93}\) and then provides a chapter entitled “Prayer and Providence.” It is observable that there is a major strand of contemporary Julian scholarship attempting to understand her writings via an interest and purpose markedly different from that of those attempting to engage with her contemplative teaching. In a recent publication on medieval English mysticism, Nicholas Watson considers the academic fields of training and background of contributors, and acknowledges the need to think through the problems of “the secular study of medieval contemplative writing.”\(^\text{94}\)

A good deal of scholarship on John of the Cross is in Spanish,\(^\text{95}\) some of which is available in translation, and there are many studies in English, including Washington ICS publications. It is particularly helpful to be able to access John’s contemplative teaching through the writings of such Carmelites as Edith Stein, Titus Brandsma, Thérèse of Lisieux, and Elizabeth of Dijon. Some recent John studies (like many Julian studies) interpret John’s spiritual thought through a contemporary anthropological lens: psychology, sociology, theories, archetypes etc.\(^\text{96}\) Valuable


\(^{93}\) Denys Turner, preface to *Julian of Norwich, Theologian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), xi. Turner appears to be saying that sin is the core issue of his own book, but he possibly means Julian’s *Showings*.


\(^{95}\) Some Spanish scholars I have found helpful are Federico Ruiz, Eulogio Pacho and Maximiliano Herráiz García.

\(^{96}\) For example, Tyler justifies his study’s approach by stating that “John stresses in his writing that the Christian engagement with God should involve ‘the sciences, Sacred Scripture and experience’ (A 1.2).” *John of the Cross*, 144. I suggest that John is actually saying that we ought not to rely heavily on
though these approaches may be, they originate in the human condition and can lose sight of the fact that John’s theology emanates from mystical experience (as interpreted through Scripture). As in John’s day, his writings are there for all who want to read them but his stated purpose is to help people of prayer. John was acutely aware of their need, as opposed to that of beginners for whom there was already much help available (SC.Pro.3.470). Suppose we simply accept John’s stated audience and purpose? In addition, John expressed his mystical experience of God in the language of the bridal mystical tradition. Suppose he did this (as other mystics have done) because that was what his experience of God was like? Iain Matthew writes that John aims to have his readers pick up an echo of the impact that God had on him, which will “open up for us the possibility of encounter with God, in faith, and prayer, and lead us to perceive the presence in all this of Jesus.”97 Yes, and more than this. In this dissertation I suggest that John (and Julian) want us to know God as our Beloved.

There are certain places in the dissertation where I purposefully engage with the work of other scholars. Chapter 2 challenges the Western Church’s contemporary definition of theology by establishing a methodology based on a definition of theology which includes spirituality, insisting that it is crucial to maintain the unity of theology and spirituality. Chapter 3 establishes the credentials of the Westminster version of Showings as a scribal copy of an earlier contemplative compilation of long text excerpts made in the first half of the fifteenth century, when Julian may herself have been an active contributor (she was alive until at least 1416). Chapter 5 argues that Julian’s beseeching is apophatic contemplation, challenging the view commonly held by Julian scholars that beseeching is intercessory prayer. Chapter 7 engages with John’s use of the language of bridal mysticism as expression of John’s actual experience of his Beloved, challenging the more commonly held view that John’s (and Julian’s) bridal mysticism is to be understood only as genre. Chapter 11 relates Julian’s and John’s experience of meeting God in suffering to the contemporary theological understanding of suffering.

the sciences and experience: “In discussing this dark night, therefore, I will not rely on experience, or science for these can fail and deceive us. Although I will not neglect whatever possible use I can make of them, my help in all that, with God’s favour, I shall say, will be Sacred Scripture, at least in the most important matters, or those that are difficult to understand. Taking Scripture as our guide we do not err, since the Holy Spirit speaks to us through it” (A.Pro.2.115).

Matthew, Impact, 3-4.
In my dissertation there are word constraints to consider as well as a need to highlight points most relevant for my topic. Engagement with scholarly thought on key issues occurs where appropriate.

Concluding Comments

The dissertation focuses on Julian’s and John’s meeting of God, who this God is whom they meet and what they can tell me about contemplative prayer. My task is to draw from their united mystical strength a new vision for our day. In my interpretation of their texts, I focus on passages relating to wounds which for Julian and John are wounds of love in which we meet God and are transformed. This focus of necessity includes a consideration of the connection between suffering and spiritual transformation in the Christian tradition. In our own day much of Western theological debate is not Christ-centred nor Scripturally-based nor reliant on Christian tradition, so the dissertation makes a case for the rehabilitation of traditional Christian mysticism in our religious consciousness and practice.

This introductory chapter provides an overview of the dissertation, states its aim and objectives, and defines its scope, assumptions and limitations. It explains where the dissertation has come from, indicates the approach being taken, and comments on what meeting God means for Christians. It provides a preliminary understanding of Julian of Norwich and John of the Cross and their mystical texts. I have argued that my way of incorporating and engaging with relevant scholarship is appropriate because of the nature of the dissertation. The next chapter explains the dissertation’s contemplative methodology. It is argued that a lectio divina approach is most likely to lead to fruitful research in a dissertation which involves the interpretation of Julian’s and John’s mystical texts.
CHAPTER 2

A LECTIO DIVINA INTERPRETATION

“[The] spirit is difficult to understand, much richer and more plentiful, very extraordinary and far beyond the boundaries of the letter” (2A.19.5.215).

Introduction

In order to learn more about meeting God in contemplation, I am interpreting the mystical texts of Julian of Norwich and John of the Cross, two recognized spiritual guides in the Christian tradition. Examining the literary symbol of ‘wound’ in their texts enables me to explore their understanding of contemplation because meeting God in wounds, which are wounds of love, leads Julian in to oneing and John to transformation. The question which guides my research is: What can I learn about meeting God by examining ‘wound’ in the mystical writings of Julian and John?

In this chapter, I explain how I may enter the wound, that is, interpret the mystical texts I am examining. Writers of mystical texts recognize God’s activity in their lives and try to articulate this. We, the readers of mystical texts, try to gain access to mystical meaning which is encased in the language of a particular person, time and place. From experience, we know that God is at work in this process, for we too may meet God in our reading of mystical texts when “our hearts burn within us” (Lk 24:32). Interpreting mystical texts requires a hermeneutic which recognizes them both as literary texts and as mystical texts, and which takes into account the contexts and biases of the reader. After explaining my literary/theological hermeneutic, I argue that a lectio divina approach with its traditional theological methodology is best suited to my task.

Wound

The theme of wound has been chosen for my research of Julian’s and John’s teaching on meeting God. For both mystics, wounds are wounds of love. They are the
place where God works and is encountered. Textual passages relating to wounds are examined.

The symbols of wound and wound of love have a long history in the Christian tradition. In Chapter 20 of John’s Gospel, Thomas is directed to put his finger and hand into the “holes”\(^1\) of Christ’s wounds, and so he comes to faith: “My Lord and my God!” (Jn 20: 27-28). Church Fathers like Origen (d. ca. 253) and Gregory the Great (d. 604), as well as medieval mystical writers like Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153), and Richard the Victorine (d. 1173), write on the wound of love, citing Song of Songs texts such as the beloved’s “I am sick with love” (Sg 2:5) and the Lover’s “You ravish my heart, my sister, my promised bride … with a single one of your glances” (Sg 4:9). In Commentary on Song, Book 2, Origen describes Christ as God’s chosen arrow (Is 49:2) who strikes or wounds the soul with love.\(^2\) Other significant Old Testament texts for these writers include Psalm 42, which may be interpreted as a description of the lovesick soul, pining for God, and the book of Job which asserts that “he who wounds is he who soothes the sore, and the hand that hurts is the hand that heals” (Jb 5:18). The English Abbott Gilbert of Hoyland (d. 1172) writes in detail of the mutuality of the wounding and sickness for the Lover and beloved.\(^3\) In 1224, at the height of his mystical journey, Francis of Assisi receives the stigmata, the marks of Christ’s wounds, and so becomes “another Christ.” Gertrude the Great of Helfta (d. 1301/2), asks that she “may deserve to build a nest like a turtledove in the wound of love of Jesus, my spouse.”\(^4\) In 1559, Teresa of Avila (d. 1582) experiences a vision in which it seems to her that an angel plunges a large golden dart deep into her heart and takes away with it the deepest part of her. This leaves her “on fire with a great love of God. The pain was so great that it made me moan.”\(^5\) Thus, even in this brief overview


\(^3\) McGinn, Foundations, 123.


of the significance of wounds in the Christian tradition, we find that: Christ’s wounds are the place to come to faith in him as God; the soul is wounded with love for God; God is both the wounnder and the consooler of the wounded soul; Christ is the wound of love; wounds are a sign of likeness to Christ; there is a mutuality of wounding and sickness for Lover and beloved; and the wound of love penetrates our inmost being and takes us out of ourselves.

For both Julian and John, a wound is a wound of love and is integrally related to the climax of John’s Gospel where Christ’s pierced side can be understood as a symbol of our God who is love:

> When they came to Jesus, they saw he was already dead, and so instead of breaking his legs one of the soldiers pierced his side with a lance; and immediately there came out blood and water. This is the evidence of one who saw it – true evidence, and he knows that what he says is true – and he gives it so that you may believe as well. Because all this happened to fulfil the words of scripture: Not one bone of his will be broken. And again, in another place scripture says: They will look to the one whom they have pierced (Jn 19:34-37).

In John’s Gospel, Christ’s death on a cross is the ultimate revelation of God’s love for humankind. The image of Christ, the Word of God, giving the very last drop of his blood from his pierced side, is the expression of our God who is love. This wounded one, dying for love of us, is God. And we are to look to him.

Julian’s vision (or showings) of Christ’s Passion embodies this passage from John’s Gospel. The Johannine passage shapes Julian’s whole life because, through life-long lectio divina of her vision, Julian herself comes to live and embody it. Julian explains this to her readers by structuring her writing and experience of God around her vision of Christ’s Passion and the three wounds she asks from God: the wound of contrition, the wound of compassion and the wound of willful longing to God. She uses a hermeneutic of “beholding” and moves from the kataphatic vision of Christ’s Passion to the apophatic understanding of being one with God. This may be clearly observed in the tenth showing of Christ’s Passion when Julian sees that

> with a good cheer our good Lord looked into his side, and beheld with joy, and with his sweet looking he led forth the understanding of his creature by the same wound into his side within (P.xxiv.235).
It is through Christ’s wound in his side that Julian’s understanding is led to be enclosed within him in mystical knowing. In the previous showing, Julian had been overwhelmed to hear Christ say: “It is a joy, a bliss, an endless liking to me, that ever I suffered Passion for you” (P.xxii.227), and she devotes two chapters of the long text to savoring this delightful knowledge (P.xxii, P.xxiii). Now in the tenth showing, as Christ invites her into his side, he declares: “Lo, how I love you” (P.xxiv.237). This looking at how Christ loves her is the looking “to the one whom they have pierced” in John 19:37. To come to the knowledge of God’s wondrous love for her, is for Julian a transforming meeting with God in contemplation. She learns that she is always to behold God’s love, and to come to God through Christ’s wounded side, which contains his cloven heart. In her writings, as Julian embraces the three wounds she has prayed for from the time of her youth, she shows us how to enter Christ’s wound and be oned with him, by which she also means being oned with the Trinity for “where Jesus appears the blessed Trinity, to my sight, is understood” (P.iv.156). She does not give great explanations or detailed directions about how we may do this, but she shares her experience of God and expects her readers to know what she is talking about.

John of the Cross, too, is centred on the pierced Christ of John’s Gospel. In the first stanza of the Spiritual Canticle, John sings of the bride, wounded with love for her Bridegroom, calling for him who, “like a stag” (SC.1), has flown. She goes in search and eventually catches sight of “the wounded stag” (SC.13) on the hill above. The stag (Bridegroom), like the bride, is wounded with love. John is using symbolic language to explain the bride’s God-given longing for God which leads in contemplation (the hill above) to her knowing that, if God, like the stag, “hears the cry of his mate and senses that she is wounded, he immediately runs to her to comfort and caress her” (SC.13.9.523). This being wounded and being caressed is contemplation and the bride is gradually led deeper, until in the twenty-second stanza of the Spiritual Canticle, she enters the “garden of her heart’s desire, a place wherein to rest all centred on love” (SC.22). It is “beneath the apple tree” (SC.23) in the garden that the bride and Bridegroom pronounce their marriage vows. In the deep cellar of

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6 Cf. “See how he comes leaping on the mountains, bounding over the hills. My love is like a gazelle, like a young stag” (Sg 2:8-9).
contemplation, the bride drinks of her Bridegroom and is taken out of herself, knowing “nothing, joy or pain” (SC.26). The Bridegroom gives her there his heart, revealing “sweet and secret knowledge” (SC.27), and she totally surrenders herself. When John of the Cross writes about sweet and secret knowledge given by the Lover to his beloved, he is referring to contemplation. This knowledge “is very delightful because it is a knowledge through love” (SC.27.5.582).

Beyond John of the Cross’s rich symbolism is an apophatic mysticism which sees the Bride’s search as a journey into rest, or silence, where she is centred on God, and this meeting with God takes place beneath the cross (the new apple tree in the new garden) in a meeting of woundedness. John has a Trinitarian understanding of God but his use of the terms Bridegroom and Beloved relate particularly to Christ, risen and with us. While delighting in the beauty of nature, and poetry, John downplays visions and emphasizes the apophatic as mature contemplation. For John, as also for Julian, God is ultimately to be encountered in silence. Christ, “the wounded stag” on Golgotha, is, for John, our way to the God we meet in silence. This silence encompasses a new (strange) way of knowing. In his commentaries, as a trained theologian and an experienced spiritual director, John explains how this way of knowing matures as we are wounded in love and our intellect, memory and will are emptied. According to Edith Stein, John’s purpose was not theoretical: he wanted to be like Dionysius and lead people by the hand.

It was at the deeply painful time of her own suffering unto death that Julian was given at last (within her visionary experience) a special grace of compassion for Christ’s suffering and was shown his joy in suffering for love, which led to her own joy in knowing God’s compassionate love. Likewise, in John of the Cross’s prayer

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7 “The sweet and living knowledge that she says he taught her is mystical theology, the secret knowledge of God that spiritual persons call contemplation” (SC.27.5.582).


9 Cf. “This state is called spiritual betrothal with the Word, the Son of God” (SC.14&15.2.525).

amidst his great suffering and dereliction in his prison cell at Toledo two centuries later, he understood something of Christ’s deep pain, and what this said about Love.\textsuperscript{11}

It was in the experience of their pain that John and Julian were overwhelmed by the knowledge of God’s love. Their mystical texts have something profound to say about the wounds of human suffering in which we find a God of love working. Both Julian and John write in a way that takes us into our own hearts, into our own wounds, to encounter the living knowledge of love. If we do not engage with our own experience as we read their texts, we are observers and not fully engaged in the reception of this living knowledge that imparts \textit{oneing} and transforming union. For both Julian and John, their wounds and Christ’s wounds are one, and they meet God within this wound they share. This is what gives meaning to their suffering and leads to spiritual wholeness, which is union with God.

My dissertation requires a hermeneutic which enables me to enter Julian’s and John’s wound of love in the pursuit of an answer to the question: What can be learned about meeting God by examining ‘wound’ in the mystical writings of Julian of Norwich and John of the Cross?

\textbf{Entering the Wound}

Bernard McGinn challenges those who would narrowly define mysticism as a particular kind of experience of God, and considers that their approach has prevented a proper analysis of the hermeneutics of mystical texts, and encouraged a lack of “attention to genre, audience, structure, and even the simplest procedures for elucidating study of the text.”\textsuperscript{12} We can deepen our understanding of mysticism by examining the significance of mystical texts, “autobiographically mystical or not, in the history of Christian mysticism,”\textsuperscript{13} and our only access to mystics’ experience is via the texts they have left us.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{11} From the \textit{Romances} that John of the Cross wrote in his prison, we know that he was praying (from memory) the Gospel of John.

\textsuperscript{12} McGinn, \textit{Foundations}, xiv.

\textsuperscript{13} McGinn, \textit{Foundations}, xv.

\textsuperscript{14} McGinn, \textit{Foundations}, xiv.
The two critical factors for the meaningful interpretation of a mystical text are
the object of interpretation (the text) and the reader. When writing of readers of sacred
texts in the Patristic era, Leclercq declares that the cultivated monk is “a scholar, he is
versed in letters, but he is not merely a man of letters or an intellectual: he is a
spiritual man.” In addition, readers come to texts in a particular time and place, and
with inbuilt perspectives and biases. Hence the reader must be a scholar, a spiritual
person, who is aware of the history that he himself carries.

The object of interpretation in this dissertation is a mystical text. Scripture is
the most important mystical text of the Christian tradition but there are others,
including:

- liturgical texts,
- select writings of the Fathers (and Mothers) of the Church,
- the eminent teachers (or “Doctors”) of the past (such as Teresa and John of the
  Cross), and
- some of the mystics (Julian of Norwich, the author of The Cloud of Unknowing,
  Meister Eckhart).

Such texts as these are appropriately used because they express “the perennial faith of
the Church,” and “bring us into transforming contact with what is enduring and
essential in our religious tradition.” They are regarded as mystical classics. David
Tracy comments,

> every religious classic expresses an event of ‘limit-of’ reality that has the full
force of a power finally liberating us from ourselves, summoning us to and by
a power not our own … an event eliciting the dialectical experiences of
fascination, trust, fear and awe.

A classic text is one “whose subject matter is somehow universal, whose
composition is singularly effective, and whose style is beautiful to such an extent that
the work is relevant to the human situation as such.” Such a text is embedded in the

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17 Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 104.
time, place and culture that produced it but because of its semantic autonomy\textsuperscript{21} and surplus of meaning\textsuperscript{22} contains treasures for readers of other ages. According to Sheldrake, “what is present in spiritual wisdom traditions and texts is not reducible to what we can know cognitively.”\textsuperscript{23} Mystical classics engage the reader in the appropriating of spiritual meaning in a transformative process. To access spiritual meaning, a valid, fruitful and full interpretation is required.

In the hermeneutical process, there are certain characteristics of texts which must be taken into account. According to Sandra M. Schneiders, what is said “stands always against the background of the vast unsaid,”\textsuperscript{24} meaning that it is not possible to come to a definitive version of an author’s meaning because language “not only says something, means something, but evokes an entire range of meaning beyond itself that can be made explicit under different circumstances.”\textsuperscript{25} In addition, language is “essentially symbolic [in that it renders present] the otherwise imperceptible reality of thought and feeling.”\textsuperscript{26} Because of this symbolic characteristic, language is always not only ambiguous and open to misinterpretation, but also transformative in its challenge to listeners or readers. Also, most language is “essentially metaphoric,” which encourages the mind to “feel” towards meaning. Schneiders, like Lonergan, likens textual interpretation to a dialogue in which understanding of subject matter is clarified through questions and answers.\textsuperscript{27} Essentially, the exegete is working at uncovering the sense of a proposition and at determining what it refers to. The text itself is an artistic creation, presented in a style or genre of the author’s choosing,

\textsuperscript{21} “Inscription becomes synonymous with the semantic autonomy of the text, which results from the disconnection of the mental intention of the author from the verbal meaning of the text, of what the author meant and what the text means.” Paul Ricoeur, \textit{Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning} (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 29-30.

\textsuperscript{22}Surplus of meaning: “Symbols give rise to an endless exegesis … no given categorization can embrace all the semantic possibilities of a symbol.” Ricoeur, \textit{Interpretation Theory}, 57.

\textsuperscript{23} Sheldrake, \textit{Explorations}, 38.

\textsuperscript{24} Schneiders, \textit{Revelatory Text}, 138.

\textsuperscript{25} Schneiders, \textit{Revelatory Text}, 138.

\textsuperscript{26} Schneiders, \textit{Revelatory Text}, 139.

\textsuperscript{27} Lonergan, \textit{Method in Theology}, 162-64.
which may emphasize visual, auditory or dramatic dimensions of language,28 and for which there is no such thing as one definitive interpretation.29

According to Gadamer “the text … if it is to be understood properly, ie according to the claim it makes, must be understood at every moment, in every particular situation, in a new and different way.”30 Ricoeur outlines a process of “distanciation,” which does not differ greatly from Lonergan’s understanding process,31 in that it involves examining the relationship of the text to its author, its original audience, its originating situation, and its later reader. For Ricoeur, the reader is the … “remedy,” by which the meaning of the text is “rescued” from the estrangement of distanciation and put in a new proximity, a proximity which suppresses and preserves the cultural distance and includes the otherness within the ownness.32

Overcoming the distanciation issues enables the exegete to come as close as possible to a text’s original meaning. It also allows for “augmented meaning from great texts that no longer belong exclusively to one time, place or people.”33

Schneiders describes the hermeneutical task as demanding “a highly complex process of exegesis, criticism, and hermeneutical appropriation.”34 In addition, for mystical texts there must be accommodation for accessing mystical meaning, or the faith dimension of the text. Schneiders outlines a literary/theological interpretive approach which attends to historical interrogation (the world behind the text), literary criticism and theological analysis (the world of the text) and the reader’s

28 Schneiders, Revelatory Text, 148-50.
29 Schneiders, Revelatory Text, 153.
31 Lonergan, Method in Theology, chapter 7.
32 Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory, 43.
33 Schneiders, Revelatory Text, 144.
34 Schneiders, Revelatory Text, 151. Some definitions: “Exegesis today … usually bears upon some aspect(s) of the text or its referent that is historically or linguistically obscure and that can be clarified by various kinds of historical or literary inquiry,” 124. Literary criticism refers to “analyzing how the text does what it does and then judging the quality of that performance,” 124. “Hermeneutics means interpretation that, traditionally, takes three forms: speaking, translating, and explaining … Explanation is the process of clarifying the meaning of the text by abolishing all the obstacles to understanding offered by the text itself,” 125-26. My italics.
appropriation of the text’s spirituality (the world before the text). The reader works towards a transforming appropriation of spiritual meaning obtained from the text in a “fusion of horizons.”

The first operation, historical interrogation of the text, involves its correct translation, a proper assessment of its vocabulary and grammar, and an examination of its sources and redaction. Literary criticism encompasses placing the text within its literary context, as well as attention to a host of other literary concerns of the text:

Its structure, special vocabulary, and narrative or rhetorical features must be examined. The operation in the text of such literary devices as symbolism, irony, double-meaning expressions, and repetition, as well as structural and stylistic features such as rhythm, inclusion, and parallelism must be studied. The genre of the passage … must be discerned, since the genre shapes the traditional or original material in particular ways. Author and reader work together in construing the meaning of the text, and the text, in all its literary specificity is the script that governs that interaction … the analysis of the text as text – that is, as a literary entity – is extremely important.

A designated section of my introductory chapter has provided a basis for the historical interrogation and literary analysis of Julian’s and John’s texts.

Schneiders’ third operation - analysis of the text for theological content - is an attempt to discern the religious experience, or “the transformational meaning of the text,” through the theological language in which it is formulated. The fourth and culminating operation suggested by Schneiders involves the reader’s appropriation of the text’s spirituality, for “attention to the spirituality of the text attends to the life possibilities that the text opens out before the reader, the faith reality or world of commitment into which the reader is invited.” This is the “fusion of horizons” of being taken out of one’s old mental constructs into new mystical meaning.

36 Fusion of horizons takes place when the interpretive task is completed. “Paul Ricoeur describes the process of interpretation as a dialectic between explanation and understanding, between the use of methods to clarify the sense-reference content of the text and the holistic assimilation of that content as expansion of one’s being, one’s subjectivity.” Schneiders, Revelatory Text, 157.
37 Schneiders, Written, 21.
38 Schneiders, Written, 21.
39 Schneiders, Written, 22.
Schneiders describes her “single, particular, and … original approach” to the Johannine materials, developed over two decades, as an attempt to engage the spirituality of the biblical text through rigorously critical study undertaken in the context of living faith. This approach is not individualistic, homiletic, or devotional. Rather it is an engagement of the text which is rooted simultaneously and equally in the faith of the Christian community, past and present, and in the best critical biblical scholarship.  

While commenting on Bruno Barnhart’s similar approach, which he calls “sapiential,” a term stemming from the monastic tradition of lectio divina, Schneiders attests to finding few early companions in her enterprise, due, she suggests, to lack of interest, suspicion and fears. Nowadays, however, there is more support for Schneider’s approach due to a growing recognition that ignoring religious significance actually falsifies interpretation. It may also be a result of the intensified search for “personal meaning and specifically for life-integrating spirituality that has been a marked characteristic of the second half of the twentieth century.” Jean Leclercq comments that it is precisely the spirituality of theologians that gives their doctrine an enduring and universal value.  

In order to “enter the wound” (which I see as a symbol for meeting God) in Julian’s and John’s texts, my interpretation focuses on textual passages related to wounds. In Julian’s text, this particularly means an examination of passages related to Christ’s Passion, and to the three wounds of compassion, contrition and willful longing to God. In John’s text, it means an examination of passages which deal with the wound of love in his poetry, his commentaries and other works. This is organized within a framework of examining wound texts related to two of his poems: Spiritual  

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40 Schneiders, Written, 1.  
41 Schneiders, Written, 1-2. Barnhart defines sapiential exegesis as “the symbolic interpretation of scripture according to its “spiritual sense” which was dominant in both east and west until the thirteenth century.” Bruno Barnhart, The Good Wine: Reading John from the Center (Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1993), 430, N.6. In his text, Barnhart comments that his study “while frequently making use of the results of historical-critical scholarship, proceeds in a way which, like that of the pre-modern commentators, relies less on methods of scientific exactitude than on intuition and symbolic imagination, inclining less to analysis than to synthesis. Our work aims to continue, in a contemporary perspective, the sapiential exegesis of the fathers and of the eastern Christian traditions.” 2.  
42 Schneiders, Written, 2.  
43 Leclercq, Love of Learning, 225.
Canticle, and Living Flame, and drawing on selected parts of his other works. I use a literary, theological, and contemplative approach, with an emphasis on the world before the text. I observe the way that the mystical text engages the reader, noting how the text “functions as a system of signs, which generate meaning, and as a ‘mirror’ in which the reader is revealed to her- or himself in the process of engaging the text.” Sheldrake advises “a receptive yet critical dialogue with the text.” My approach requires attention to historical criticism (the world behind the text), literary criticism and theological analysis (the world of the text) and the appropriation of spirituality (the world before the text). I am interested in the transformative potential of the text for the postmodern reader. My hope is to come closer to “the question that gave rise to the text.”

Researching the writings of two mystics such as Julian of Norwich and John of the Cross means that some features of a case-study approach will be observed, because clearly there will be dialectical elements involved. In Mystics, William Harmless adopts a case-study approach based on the mystical texts of selected mystics in order to arrive at his definition of mysticism. My research project is similar in that I am studying wounds in the writings of Julian and John in order to come to know what such a study can add to my understanding of meeting God, or contemplation. A case-study approach means that comparison and dialogue are integral parts of my research process.

My hope is to produce an interpretation of contemplation in Julian’s and John’s texts which will be taken seriously because it “‘makes the text speak’ … without violating the canons of good exegetical and critical method.” I am mindful that the validation of any methodology lies in the appropriate interpretive tasks being completed competently, and in the fruitfulness of the research gained. It is my belief that the ancient monastic art of lectio divina is an approach which provides the

44 Schneiders, Revelatory Text, 113.
45 Sheldrake, Explorations, 43.
46 Schneiders, Revelatory Text, 142.
47 Schneiders, Revelatory Text, 165.
48 Schneiders, Revelatory Text, 165.
methodology most likely to enable me to complete the necessary interpretative tasks and to produce fruitful research.

**A Lectio Divina Approach**

A *lectio divina* interpretation or approach is a traditional theological approach for interpreting mystical texts, and includes both conceptual and perceptual methods. This is the way in which Julian and John experienced God in their lives and it is a critical dimension of their mystical texts. For a dissertation on contemplation, *lectio divina* is an appropriate approach because it is a holistic literary/theological approach which allows for rigorous interpretation of the text as text, and for the appropriation of mystical meaning through disciplined reflection and prayerful immersion. It is an approach which allows for a fuller understanding of mystical meaning than do other approaches. While it is not a commonly used approach in the academic establishment at present, its use can be justified by a solid hermeneutical framework, by the competent completion of all necessary tasks, and by the fruitfulness of the research it leads to.

**Lectio Divina**

Amongst the Fathers of the Desert, *lectio divina* was a term applied to Scripture itself, and was not merely a human activity focused on reading Scripture as is commonly, and mistakenly, thought today. Indeed, most people at that time could not read. Scripture was understood to be a school of life, and therefore “a school of prayer for the men and women who desired to make of their life a continual prayer, as Scripture demanded of them.”⁴⁹ It involved memorizing scripture so that texts could be ruminated on day and night, “in private as well as in the common prayer … A constant attentiveness which itself becomes a constant prayer.”⁵⁰ The early monks saw Scripture as their rule of life, a life they lived in the presence of God and in

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accordance with Scripture’s directives, in the process of which they themselves became living spiritual texts for others. Armand Veilleux comments,

The great masters of modern hermeneutics, who consider every interpretation as a dialogue between the text and the reader or the hearer, and for whom every interpretation should normally lead to a transformation or a conversion, invented nothing. They gave expression to a reality which the Fathers of the Desert lived.51

The scriptural way of life was not exclusive to the early desert monks; it was a way of life for all Christians of the time: for example, in Alexandria, Origen and his followers lived a life similarly grounded in Scripture.

After the early years of the Church, and until the twelfth-century establishment of the schools and the subsequent development of scholasticism in Western Christendom, theologians were monks, and monastic exegesis was “at one and the same time inseparably literal and mystical.”52 Monastic exegesis was concerned with the four senses of the sacred text: literal, allegorical, tropological (moral) and anagogical (mystical). For the literal sense, the monk reflected on the events of the scriptural passage. Applying the other three senses, which were spiritual senses, led to drawing out truths about faith (allegorical meaning), applying what was learned to one’s way of life (moral meaning), and so coming to union with God (anagogical meaning.) Thus monastic exegesis (and lectio divina) involved conversion of intellect, morals and desires.

From the twelfth century on, lectio divina began to be described as a monastic method of prayer, or exercise, with the steps of lectio, meditatio, oratio, and contemplatio.53 Over the centuries, a process of compartmentalizing led eventually to lectio divina being seen as “spiritual reading,” distinct from prayer of the Church,

52 Leclercq, Love of Learning, 79.
53 This was the monastic reaction to the pre-scholastic theological method of lectio, quaestio and disputatio, and is evidence of the scholastic influence. Guigo II (d. 1188), a Carthusian monk of Grand Chartreuse, wrote: “Reading is the careful study of the Scriptures, concentrating all one’s powers on it. Meditation is the busy application of the mind to seek with the help of one’s own reason for knowledge of hidden truth. Prayer is the heart’s devoted turning to God to drive away evil and obtain what is good. Contemplation is when the mind is in some sort lifted up to God and held above itself, so that it tastes the joys of everlasting sweetness.” Guigo II: The Ladder of Monks and Twelve Meditations, trans. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1979), 68.
meditation and contemplation. Related to growing disillusionment with post-Enlightenment method and its hold on theology, the twentieth century saw a renewed interest in *lectio divina*, with Jean Leclercq being an important figure who “highlighted an approach to theologizing that, while distinct from scholastic theology, was nevertheless quite complete and nuanced,”\(^{54}\) and whose work encouraged the reclaiming of the ancient art of *lectio divina* for all Christians. Today, our understanding of *lectio divina* needs to include an appreciation of its dependence on the Christian tradition founded in the first three centuries, where “contact with the Word is contact with the fire that burns, disturbs, calls violently to conversion … [It] is not a method of prayer; it is a mystical encounter.”\(^{55}\) The early monks saw each occasion of engaging with a text as an occasion for new spiritual meanings,\(^{56}\) and they stayed with a verse of Scripture until they lived it.\(^{57}\)

The monks understood the need to overcome textual difficulties through study, and regarded this study itself as a personal encounter with the living God. Veilleux discusses the study aspect of *lectio divina*:

Modern theories on *lectio divina* generally insist on the fact that *lectio* is something completely different from study. The Fathers certainly would not have understood this distinction and this division into separate compartments. Their approach to Scripture was unified. Every effort to learn Scripture, to understand it, to put it into practice, was simply an effort to enter into dialogue with God and to allow oneself to be transformed by him in this dialogue which became a continual prayer. Neither they nor Origen, nor above all Jerome, for whom ignorance of the Scriptures was ignorance of Christ, (In Esaiam, Prol. CCL 73,2 CCL 78,66) would have understood a study of Scripture which was not a personal encounter with the living God.\(^{58}\)

What is important is an attitude of submission and openness, and an understanding that study is not an added extra but an integral part of a process which involves all of


\(^{58}\) Veilleux, “Lectio Divina.” 8. See also Leclercq’s discussion of grammar as the introduction to the profundity of Scripture, *Love of Learning*, 72. See also 86, N.4.
life, and which leads to being able to “understand as accurately as possible the revelation God has implanted in fragile human words.” Textual interpretation, therefore, is an integral part of my holistic literary/theological/contemplative methodology. So too is a whole-of-life contemplative approach on the part of the reader.

According to Veilleux, what we are seeking in a sacred text is “not an abstract, immaterial meaning, it is a power capable of transforming the reader.” The experience of transformation, which is discovered within the process of engaging with a mystical text, is an experience of meeting God. Isaac of Nineveh writes that we ought always to approach the mystery contained in sacred texts with prayer: “Lord, make me perceive the strength that is to be found here.” In a study of the mystical texts of Julian of Norwich and John of the Cross, there must be this sort of prayerful, transforming engagement with their writings.

Julian of Norwich

It needs to be stressed that Julian of Norwich’s monastic/reclusive life as a fourteenth-century English anchoress was built around lectio divina. In their critical edition of Showings, Colledge and Walsh declare that “her book is a great monument to the Western monastic traditions of lectio divina of which she was heiress; and the learning she had inherited began and continued in the loving, prayerful study and

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59 Veilleux, citing Ricoeur, explains that reading ancient authors involves entering into the actual reality of which they speak. This requires a “pre-understanding which exists in a certain relationship already existing between the reader and the reality of which the text is speaking.” The desert monks knew this: a life of silence, solitude and asceticism was seen as the pre-condition for “understanding and interpreting the Scriptures in their full sense.” “Lectio Divina,” 9.


61 Veilleux, “Lectio Divina.” 8. Cf. Bernard Lonergan: The exegesis of classic mystical texts demands “an intellectual, moral, religious conversion of the interpreter over and above the broadening of his horizon … and he will come to know … only in so far as he pushes the self-correcting process of learning to a revolution in his own outlook.” Method in Theology, 161.

memorization of sacred Scripture.” It is the *lectio divina* approach that Julian applies to interpreting her vision. The theology of the long text version of *Showings* is the result of Julian’s twenty years of interacting prayerfully with her vision of Christ Crucified. She “reads,” reflects on and prays her vision, and this leads her to profound insights.

Julian *sees* in a process of beholding which means contemplating. In her contemplating, Julian comes to know the One who says to her, “I it am, that makes you to love. I it am, that makes you to long, the endless fullness of all true desires” (W.103.4-7.98). For Julian, “all this blessed teaching of our Lord God was showed in three ways … by bodily sight, and by words formed in my understanding, and by ghostly sight” (P.lxxiii.448-49; P.ix.179). In addition, when Julian struggles to understand her vision, she pleads, “Ah, Lord Jesus … who shall tell me and teach me what I need to know” (P.l.329), and then we learn of “more ghostly” sight:

> Our courteous Lord answered by showing most mistily a wonderful example of a Lord who has a servant, and he gave me a Showing in my understanding of both. Which sight was showed doubly in the Lord, and the sight showed doubly in the servant. That one part was showed ghostly in bodily likeness. That other part was showed more ghostly without bodily likeness (P.li.329).

So Julian *beholds* by bodily sight, through words formed in her understanding, by spiritual sight with bodily likeness, and by *more spiritual sight without bodily likeness*. Thus, Julian is led to an understanding of the parable, which leads her at last to a deeper understanding of her whole vision. She outlines three levels of understanding:

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64 Julian’s “beholding” is much more than simply gazing upon. Beholding may best be described as “holding-in-being.” In beholding, one takes what one beholds into oneself, and becomes one with it. It is akin to biblical and monastic “knowing.” I am indebted to Dr Kerrie Hide for this insight (Spirituality Masters coursework, Australian Catholic University, Canberra, 2006).

The first is the beginning of the teaching that I understood in it at the same time. The second is the inward learning that I have understood about it since. The third is the whole Revelation from the beginning to the end – that is to say of this Book – which our Lord God of his goodness often brings freely to the sight of my understanding. And these three are so oned that I cannot or may not separate them to my understanding. And by these Three as One, I was taught how I ought to believe and trust in our Lord God. (P.li.335-36).

For Julian, “these three are … oned” (P.li.335), demonstrating a lectio divina mentality, which unites reading, meditating (ruminating), and prayer, and culminates in transformation, or contemplation. Julian explains the process: “for twenty years after the time of the Showing, minus three months, I was taught inwardly” (P.li.336).

Julian’s spirituality and mentality have been formed by Scripture, so that her texts are an interconnecting web of Scriptural references and allusions. She is accomplished in the art of “reminiscence,” in which “the verbal echoes so excite the memory that a mere allusion will spontaneously evoke whole quotations and, in turn, a scriptural phrase will suggest quite naturally allusions elsewhere in the sacred books.” A simple example of this may be seen in the short text when at one stage of Julian’s vision, joy and pain alternate, so that Julian writes, “And in the time of joy I might have said with Paul: ‘Nothing shall separate me from the charity of Christ.’ And in pain I might have said with Saint Peter, ‘Lord, save me, I perish!’” (A.ix.735). Lectio divina is a major influence on the way Julian uncovers meaning in her vision, and presents her ideas. Hide argues that Julian is writing theology that comes from the illumination that the prayer of lectio divina brings … [and that there is an inherent expectation in Julian’s text] that, as the reader scans the pages, she or he must also apply the art of lectio divina to the showings: for she concludes the final chapter of revelation 16.

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66 Leclercq borrows William of St. Thierry’s term to describe this active reading as “meditative prayer … [which] occupies and engages the whole person in whom Scripture takes root, later on to bear fruit.” Love of Learning, 73.
67 Leclercq, Love of Learning, 73-74.
68 Cf. Rm 8:35; Mt 8:25.
chapter 86: ‘This book is begun by God’s gift and his grace, but it is not yet performed, as I see it,’ (Colledge & Walsh, 86: 342).

John of the Cross

Terence O’Reilly explains how John of the Cross himself wanted his writings to be read. According to the clear evidence of witnesses, in John’s approach to reading Scripture he himself used *lectio divina*, a monastic practice long established in the Carmelite Order. Despite his scholastic education, John belongs to the monastic stream. He knew much of the Bible by heart, and accorded primacy to the ‘spiritual’ or ‘allegorical’ meaning of the biblical text.” John of the Cross was able to compose the first 31 stanzas of the *Spiritual Canticle* in his Toledo prison cell because he knew the Song of Songs (and its imagery) by heart, learned through his practice of *lectio divina*. John’s experience of the transcendent God led him to see that “the spirit is difficult to understand, much richer and more plentiful, very extraordinary and far beyond the boundaries of the letter” (2A.19.5.215). For John, “the spiritual sense of Scripture can be apprehended only by a person who is inspired by the Spirit, a person who is open to receiving in contemplation the knowledge that comes through love.”

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72 Cf. “the same intimate link between reading and recollection was noted by fray Agustín de los Reyes, who told a friend in 1585: ‘Arrimado a estas paredes hallé este día al padre fray Juan de la Cruz … con una Biblia en la mano, ocupado, como solía, en contemplación.’ Quoted in Federico Ruiz, *Introducción a San Juan de la Cruz. El escritor, los escritos, el sistema* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1968), 83: “Today I found Fr Juan de la Cruz leaning against these walls … with a bible in his hand, absorbed, as usual, in contemplation.”
73 Scholastic Scripture commentaries grew out of *quaestio* and *disputatio* and were designed to resolve interpretation difficulties, and instruct in doctrine. O’Reilly, “John of the Cross,” 117.
74 O’Reilly, “John of the Cross,” 105. In 2A.19.8.216, John of the Cross writes regarding the literal interpretation of Psalm 71: “These prophecies about Christ should have been understood in their spiritual sense, in which they were most true.”
76 O’Reilly, “John of the Cross,” 110.
John of the Cross applies his way of reading Scripture to how his own writings ought to be interpreted, for he understands them to have grown out of mystical experience. Thus, for example, referring to his poem, he writes in the Prologue to the *Spiritual Canticle* commentary,

Since these stanzas, then, were composed in a love flowing from abundant mystical understanding, I cannot explain them adequately, nor is it my intention to do so … As a result, though we give some explanation of these stanzas, there is no reason to be bound to this explanation. For mystical wisdom, which comes through love and is the subject of these stanzas, need not be understood distinctly in order to cause love and affection in the soul, for it is given according to the mode of faith through which we love God without understanding him (SC.Pro.2.470).

John implies that “only a contemplative … can read the poem properly, a contemplative who is familiar with the conventions of *lectio divina*.” John’s writings grew out of his experience of prayer; he did not consult many books. Like Julian, because of his immersion in Scripture, he was a master of the monastic ability to make connections (“reminiscence”) and to draw on a huge store of internalized treasures. The writing itself was a contemplative process: witnesses attest that he wrote the *Spiritual Canticle* commentary on his knees. In the Prologue to *The Living Flame of Love* commentary, John writes that “one speaks badly of the intimate depths of the spirit if one does not do so with a deeply recollected soul” (LF.Pro.1.638).

O’Reilly concludes his paper, and needs quoting at length:

In their different ways, the poems and the prose works both grew out of *lectio divina*, and both were intended, in turn, to serve as *lectio* for others. They assume, in fact, a context of contemplative prayer. This raises the question: is it possible, outside a contemplative context, to read them properly? St John, surely, would have answered: no. Such an answer does not render other approaches invalid, but it does, perhaps, confirm a certain truth about the nature of religious language which was recognized and noted by Wittgenstein:

‘In religion every form of devoutness must have its appropriate form of expression which has no sense at a lower level. [A] doctrine, which means

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77 O’Reilly, “John of the Cross,” 117.

something at a higher level, is null and void for someone who is still at the lower level; he can only understand it wrongly…\(^{79}\)

This no doubt is why the finest interpreters of St John’s thought, such as Elizabeth of the Trinity, have been contemplatives themselves.\(^{80}\)

The finest interpreters of mystical texts are mystics who approach texts with a contemplative methodology within the contemplative contexts of their own lives. It stands well supported that the incorporation of a contemplative methodology is entirely appropriate for a dissertation on mystical texts. Such an approach includes the conceptual and the perceptual, and incorporates the text-interpretive skills which enable literary access to their words. The process is similar to that being pursued by any doctoral student. The difference lies in the recognition that the nature of the texts being studied requires the addition of a contemplative approach, which explicitly brings God into the undertaking, to access a fuller meaning.

**Scholarly Support for a Contemplative Methodology**

Philip Sheldrake notes that there is strong support by some contemporary theologians for seeing the Christian mystical tradition as a vital source for renewing theology. He argues against explaining religious experiences and teachings “merely”\(^{81}\) in terms of their theological ideas, and challenges contemporary theologians to engage their hearts as well as their heads:

The writings of the great mystics introduce a *way* of knowing that is different from the way offered by traditional theological method. It is a knowledge that arises from participation and love rather than something that depends on purely rational enquiry. Mystical ‘knowing’ never loses sight of the essential ineffability of God and so it concentrates on seeking images to express the passionate and the poetic rather than on concepts and analysis to provide information. The mystical tradition in fact invites theologians to cultivate a degree of conceptual ‘silence’ and to re-engage their analysis with contemplation and the imagination.\(^{82}\)

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82 Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology*, 100.
The “traditional” theological method Sheldrake is referring to in the second line of this quotation is the scholastic and post-Enlightenment model, and he is arguing for the more contemplative approach of that other traditional theological method, that of the mystical tradition, expressed in monastic exegesis and the ancient art of lectio divina. The Fathers of the early Church did not understand “intellect” to be a term related solely to human reasoning. They understood the intellect to be “the highest faculty in man, through which – provided it is purified – he knows God or the inner essences or principles … of created things by means of direct apprehension or spiritual perception.” In the texts of the early Fathers, theology denotes far more than the learning about God and religious doctrine acquired through academic study. It signifies active and conscious participation in or perception of the realities of the divine world – in other words, the realization of spiritual knowledge … To be a theologian in the full sense, therefore, presupposes the attainment of the state of stillness … and dispassion … itself the concomitant of pure and undistracted prayer, and so requires gifts bestowed on but extremely few persons.

Julian of Norwich is “a woman, unlettered, feeble and frail” (A.vi.727) who highly respects reason. She sets herself to sharing with others what she knows about God “by means of direct apprehension or spiritual perception.” John of the Cross’s vision of the transformation of the caverns/faculties in contemplation (LF.3.76-85.705-08) describes a theological world which reaches far beyond human reason and attachment. What Sheldrake is arguing for is a reclaiming of the contemplative dimension of theology.

83 This model is explained by the contemporary western definition of theology: “the methodical effort to understand and interpret the truth of revelation. As fides quaerens intellectum (Lat. “faith seeking understanding”), theology uses the resources of reason, drawing in particular on the disciplines of history and philosophy. In the face of the divine mystery, theology is always “seeking” and never reaches final answers and definitive insights. It breaks up into a number of areas and subareas.” Gerald O’Collins and Edward G. Farrugia, A Concise Dictionary of Theology, Rev. ed. (New York/ Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2000), 263.


85 Philokalia II, Glossary, 389.

86 “Our reason is in God … it is the highest gift that we have received” (P.lxxxiii.485).

87 Philokalia II, Glossary, 384.
Experiencing God in the Gospel of John is a collaborative attempt to go beyond the usual constraints of their respective disciplines by Anthony Kelly (theologian) and Francis Moloney (scripture scholar). The authors remind us that the purpose of John’s Gospel is to bring readers to the transforming experience of faith, for we are told that “these things are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing this you may have life through his name” (Jn 21:30-31). When Kelly and Moloney assert that it is “necessary to reclaim the Christian experience of God as is documented in the New Testament,” they imply that we have lost our ability to access this experience. The authors comment that it is possible to have meaning (doctrines) but to have missed the transforming experience, which, according to Bernard Lonergan’s theological method, ought to precede the formulation of doctrines. Lonergan describes the transforming conversion inherent in experience as a gratuitous fulfillment [which] is not the product of our knowledge and choice. On the contrary, it dismantles and abolishes the horizon in which our knowing and choosing went on and it sets up a new horizon in which the love of God will transvalue our values and the eyes of that love will transform our knowing.

In further support of the experiential focus of their scholarly book, Kelly and Moloney cite Karl Rahner’s view that

Today it is becoming clearer, and that too within Christianity at the doctrinal and institutional level, that this experience of God … really constitutes the very heart and center of Christianity itself and also the ever living source of that conscious manifestation which we call ‘revelation.’

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89 Kelly and Moloney, Experiencing God, 3.
90 Lonergan, Method in Theology, Chapter 5.
91 Lonergan, Method in Theology, 106.
It is of vital importance that Christians are able to access the mystical dimension of their sacred writings. Kelly and Moloney consider that the experiential dimension of the mystical text they are studying, far from being an optional extra, or worse, a soft option in the intellectually demanding work of theology in its efforts to objectify and clarify the meaning of God, is the vital datum from which theology emerges and to which it returns in its special ministry to the church under the guidance of the Spirit of Truth.93

In order to access spiritual meaning in John’s Gospel, the authors suggest a seeing, hearing and touching approach,94 which is an approach very similar to *lectio divina*. Their comments about accessing the mystical experience of John’s Gospel are relevant to my researching of the mystical texts of Julian and John.

William Johnston, in “*Arise My Love ...*”: *Mysticism for a New Era*, also draws on Lonergan when he relates Lonergan’s theory of knowledge to how we ought to approach mystical texts. Lonergan describes scientific method as an application of the transcendental precepts: to be *attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible*. To these, in his theological methodology, Lonergan adds that we are to *Love*,95 because “cognitional self-transcendence is not enough; human beings aspire to actual transcendence, which comes through love.”96 Love leads to *wisdom*, which for the Christian tradition is a gift of the Spirit, “and is not clear-cut and conceptual; it transcends reasoning and thinking and imagining to enter a cloud of unknowing.”97 Johnston refers to “a ‘thinking power’ by which we can know creatures and a ‘loving power’ by which we can know God.”98 He continues: “God can be loved; but God cannot be thought. Love goes directly to God. Some mystics say that it ‘wounds’ God.99 It brings the highest wisdom – *sophia* or *sapientia* – which is knowledge of

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93 Kelly and Moloney, *Experiencing God*, xi-xii.
97 Johnston, “*Arise My Love,*” 15.
98 Johnston, “*Arise My Love,*” 15.
99 Cf. “one glance of mine wounded you past recall” (SC.31).
God in a cloud of unknowing.”

Although Johnston’s thinking is influenced by *The Cloud of Unknowing*, a fourteenth-century mystical text which differentiates between intellect-knowledge and heart-knowledge, a distinction not understood by the earlier Fathers for whom they were one, clearly Johnston and Lonergan are describing a kind of knowing, or wisdom, which requires a contemplative heart, open to the gift of God.

Further support for a contemplative methodology may even be found in the 1991 English translation of a book written by Dutch professor of theoretical psychology, Han F. de Wit. De Wit argues that in the Western world, since the time of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, academic (scientific) psychology and contemplative psychology have become estranged, a situation which is not true of the Eastern world. De Wit says that we need to recover our sense of contemplative psychology as totally legitimate and reliable. In contrast to academic (scientific) psychology, the contemplative psychology found within contemplative traditions accepts non-conceptual, perceptual knowledge, or awareness, as well as conceptual knowledge, because non-conceptual awareness strategies aim “to sharpen one’s awareness and improve one’s ability to perceive one’s field of experience without bias.”

De Wit argues that the conceptual and awareness strategies work together in contemplative traditions for “the conceptual strategy helps us to think accurately about our (true or false) experiences. The awareness strategy helps us to see our (true or false) thoughts clearly and precisely.”

Mainstream popular writers on spirituality have also noted the value of a contemplative approach to life and to the reading of texts. Richard Rohr, borrowing

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103 de Wit, *Contemplative Psychology*, 108.
104 de Wit, *Contemplative Psychology*, 113.
from the writings of Richard of St. Victor (1123-73), argues for a way of knowing which he calls contemplation, or nondualistic thinking, or “third-eye” seeing. The first eye sees what is physically seen and touched. The second eye sees through imagination, intuition and reason. The third eye is the ability to taste: to remain “in awe before an underlying mystery, coherence and spaciousness” that connects with everything else. Rohr says that mystics see with the third-eye (as well as the other two eyes) and that without third-eye seeing, “truth is no longer possible … [and] even theology becomes more a quest for power than a search for God and mystery,” because we are clinging to the control of our knowing. Rohr, like the mystic tradition (including Julian and John), and like Lonergan, says that the love of God has been poured into our hearts (Romans 5:5): the gift is already given and our task is to discover it. Relying on the first and second eyes is not enough. Rohr’s third-eye reminds us of the humble, open listening involved in *lectio divina*.

*A lectio divina* approach has the great advantage of being a non-dualistic contemplative method which incorporates text interpretation, and is well supported by scholars, but there are some who may not be comfortable with such an overtly contemplative method. In Western Christendom, mysticism has been problematic from the Reformation until the twentieth century. Suspicion still lingers in some theological circles in which Christian mysticism may be described as “the esoteric world of private introspection.” The scholastic approach, talking “about” God, can seem safer and more rational in an age of uncertainty about the boundaries of psychology. The Enlightenment still wields power, despite a general acceptance that historical criticism by itself has been discredited. Although there is more scholarly awareness of the issue, the relationship between theology and spirituality is not always understood as it was by Evagrius who wrote: “If you are a theologian you truly pray; if you truly pray you are a theologian.” How theology and spirituality

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107 Rohr, *Naked Now*, 27.


relate is an ongoing academic discussion to which my dissertation may make a helpful contribution, because a contemplative methodology provides an emphasis lacking in other approaches. David Tracy considers that we need to find a new language that is “appropriate to the originating religious experience of the event,” and Andrew Louth, after examining the presuppositions of the claims of the Enlightenment, argues for the allegorical approach to mystical texts, and traditional ways of theology, because these are still valid.

It ought also to be noted that a purely contextual approach, advocated by some, has limitations in the interpreting of mystical texts. Olivier Clément, in explaining Origen’s approach to the mystical texts of Scripture, comments,

Certainly one must ‘knock and seek’ to understand Scripture, to make out its historical context, and translate it from an archaic mentality into our own. That justifies the whole scientific apparatus of hermeneutics and exegesis. But science cannot give a meaning. If it tries to do that, it conveys a ‘contraband type of philosophy’. The meaning is revealed only to prayer, and certainly to prayer with tears.

Scholars, such as Michel de Certeau, stress the contextual aspect of mystical texts by emphasizing the social origins and situations of mystics. Steven Katz may be seen as pushing the contextual approach to its limits when he insists that “all experience is processed through, organized by, and makes itself available to us in extremely complex epistemological ways.” He sees all mystical experiences as contextually related to religious traditions, which provide the key to the mystic’s experience. There is much to be said for Katz’s emphasis on using a contextual approach in order to come to an understanding of the mystical experience described in mystical texts, but it is possible that an extreme contextual view could impose an anthropological limitation on our efforts to come to some understanding of mystical experience, because it may effectively negate the place of God’s action in mystical

111 Tracy, Analogical Imagination, 178.
113 Clément, Roots, 100.
114 de Certeau, Mystic Fable, 21.
experience, which, mystical scholars like Thomas Merton would say, transcends all religious traditions.\textsuperscript{117} Although some scholars today would deny it, Christian mystics have always attested to an ineffable dimension to mystical experience which defies being put into language, which means that we cannot fully access their experience through their texts, however much we understand their language and contexts, because there is an aspect of mystical experience, or consciousness, which cannot be translated into words. But we can access mystical meaning in mystical texts, as opposed to fully accessing the mystic’s experience itself, because classical mystical texts have for contemplative readers of every age a transforming dimension,\textsuperscript{118} which Christians would say is God’s active presence in the process. Mystical texts have the potential to transform us when we contemplatively engage with them, by providing us with our own encounter with God, which is why this dissertation involves a \textit{lectio divina} approach to the mystical texts of Julian of Norwich and John of the Cross, in an attempt to discover more about meeting God.

\section*{Concluding Comments}

The interpretive approach for this dissertation has been developed in response to the question which guides the research: What can be learned about meeting God by examining “wound” in the mystical writings of Julian of Norwich and John of the Cross?

For both Julian and John, the piercing of Christ’s side on the cross as described in John’s Gospel (Jn 19:34) is of immense mystical significance. Both use the literary symbol of wound in their writings about the mystic’s meeting with God; both understand wound as a wound of love; and both explain to us how we may enter this wound of love and be drawn into union with God. Therefore, in the research of what Julian and John write about contemplation, there is a focus on textual passages

\textsuperscript{117} Michael Casey, “Merton’s Notes on ‘Inner Experience’ Twenty Years Afterwards,” in \textit{The Undivided Heart: The Western Monastic Approach to Contemplation} (Petersham, MA: St Bede’s Publications, 1994), 194.

\textsuperscript{118} This view is supported by Ricoeur in his theory of “distanciation,” and by Tracy: “The interpreter must risk being caught up in, even being played by, the questions and answers – the subject matter – of the classic … Where both form and subject matter are major – where the truth of existence is engaged, indeed at stake – the risk is greater, and the result will prove … transformative.” \textit{Analogical Imagination}, 153.
which relate to wounds. Given the particular requirements of the task, a contemplative methodology allows for an appropriate and fruitful interpretation of these textual passages.

The dissertation has a literary/theological hermeneutic which focuses on the writings of Julian and John as literary texts and as mystical texts, and on the reader. A lectio divina approach has been chosen because it allows for the fulfillment of the requirements of the hermeneutic. It is argued that both Julian and John relied on lectio divina in the composition of their texts and would have expected their works to be read in a similar manner. Therefore, the process I follow involves reflection on the events of the text (literal meaning), the drawing out of truths about faith (spiritual or allegorical meaning), applying what I learn to my own life (moral or tropological meaning), and coming to Truth and Oneness (mystical or anagogical meaning). As for the early monks, my acquiring of the third level of meaning (moral) is crucial to the process. There is often lengthy prayerful struggle before insight (Wisdom) and Peace is given, and it is only then that I can produce my own text and not merely reproduce someone else’s words. I will not know how close my interpretation is to Julian’s and John’s original meaning but if I engage with their texts as a reader who is similarly shaped by the same religious tradition, I can arrive at an interpretation of their experience of God which is not inconsistent with theirs. Because of the ineffability of language and experience, my interpretation may also make its own contribution to a deeper understanding of their texts.

There are a few final comments. Firstly, a relationship is recognised between the medieval understanding of the Johannine writings and the mystical writings of Julian and John. Secondly, as the writings of two mystics are included, some features of a case-study are observed, and there is extensive cross-referencing. The preliminaries now complete, the textual study begins. The writings of Julian of Norwich are examined first, followed by those of John of the Cross.
PART II

JULIAN OF NORWICH
CHAPTER 3

THE THREE WOUNDS

I heard a man of Holy Church tell the story of Saint Cecilia, in which telling I understood that she had received three wounds with a sword in the neck, from the which she pined to death. Moved by this I conceived a mighty desire, praying our Lord God that He would grant me three wounds during my lifetime, that is to say, the wound of contrition, the wound of compassion, and the wound of wilful longing for [wylfule langyngge to] God (A.i.713).

Introduction

What did Julian of Norwich know about meeting God in this life? Looking for an answer to this question, my research of Julian’s writings uses as a framework the three wounds which, from her youth, she desired from God: “the wound of true contrition, the wound of kind compassion and the wound of willful longing to God” (P.ii.150-51). Julian describes these wounds as three ways (menys: means) we come to heaven:\(^1\): “by contrition we are made clean, by compassion we are made ready, and by true longing for God we are made worthy” (P.xxxix.283). This dissertation, in line with Julian’s teaching, presents the three wounds in a different order to the above. It suggests that the wound of compassion may be interpreted in terms of beholding the goodness (compassion) of God. The beholding of God’s goodness makes us ready for oneing in to God. The wound of willful longing to God may be interpreted in terms of beseeching, which may be defined as entering contemplation and being drawn into oneing with God. The wound of contrition may be interpreted as being closed [beclosed] in, or oned in to, God, in the sense that our sensuality is, by God’s mercy and grace, oned in to our substance, which is always in God.

The present chapter provides a general introduction to Julian’s three wounds. Included is a reflection on Julian’s anchorage in Norwich, because it is helpful to have some idea of the main dynamic of Julian’s mystical thought, which the anchorage itself provides. There is also an introduction to the Westminster version of Julian’s

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\(^1\) Jesus is Julian’s heaven (P.xxiv.219). She therefore means our meeting God in this life as well as eschatologically.
Showings, which has a special place in the textual research, because it can be argued that this version was purposefully compiled for people of prayer. Indeed the physical dimensions of the Westminster manuscript (106x156mm) suggest that it was intended to be “a personal devotional book.” By way of introducing the Westminster version of Showings, and my study of meeting God in Julian’s writings, this chapter includes an examination of the first segment in the manuscript: Mary’s Reverent Beholding. The structure of my research of Julian’s writings reflects Julian’s own approach which is inspired by the three wounds of a great lover of God, the martyr Saint Cecilia. Within this structure, a strong link with the medieval understanding of the Johannine writings emerges as one enters deeply into what Julian writes about meeting God.

Sitting in Julian’s Anchorage

Spending time in Julian’s anchorage helps one to understand the dynamic of Julian’s thought. In 1410, 600 years ago, Julian was living in her anchorage, and had been for many years. In the anchorage there is a strong sense of this being the place where Julian and God met. Anyone who sits in that place comes to appreciate Julian’s fidelity, day in, day out, to prayer, to God, for years. It is a confined, enclosed space. She could hear Norwich life going on about her. She was engaged in the risky task of writing a mystical text for her “even-Christians,” while perceived religious dissidents were imprisoned in the dungeon of Norwich Castle, and gruesomely executed within earshot. She was dependent on others for her daily needs. She was available to anyone who came to her window for help. She was not going anywhere but to God.

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2 For Julian, and in this dissertation, the term “prayer” often encompasses both active praying and contemplation. Julian herself saw meeting God as one movement involving beholding and beseeching. The movement includes active praying, which Julian calls seeking, as well as contemplative beholding and beseeching. Cf. Turner’s discussion of a medieval distinction between prayer and contemplation, in Julian of Norwich, 148.


4 According to legend, with some historical support, Saint Cecilia was a virgin martyr in Rome (ca. 200-250AD). Cecilia’s executioner let his sword fall three times without decapitating her, and fled, leaving her bathed in blood. She lived three more days and gave her house in the Trastavere for a church. Catholic Encyclopaedia, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03471b.htm [accessed June 5, 2010].

5 There was a Lollard execution pit in Norwich just along the river from Julian’s anchorage.
each day, and in death one day. The faithful, long-term solitariness of Julian’s life strikes hard. She was centred on God alone.

Julian’s mystical message is contained in three excerpts from Showings which are displayed separately there at her anchorage: “Lo, how I loved thee;” “Thou art enough to me;” and “Prayer oneth the soul to God.” The chapel which is Julian’s anchorage today was constructed on the site of the original anchorage when St Julian’s church was rebuilt after being bombed in World War II. Some of the original foundations can be seen. In the anchorage there is a high window (depicting a joyful crucified Christ and Julian) in the wall which separates the anchorage from the church sanctuary. Below the window is a stone crucifix, at the foot of which is the inscription: “LO HOW I LOVED THEE.” Directly beneath this, on a memorial slab, is another inscription in stone:

HERE DWELT MOTHER JULIAN
ANCHORESS OF NORWICH  c. 1342 – 1430

“Thou art enough to me”

As one enters the anchorage from the church (through a door which would not have been there in Julian’s time) there is, at the door, the excerpt: “PRAYER ONETH THE SOUL TO GOD.”

Julian’s message may be understood as follows. The crucified Christ reveals to us how God loves us: “Lo, how I loved thee.” We respond by choosing for ourselves this God of love: “Thou art enough to me.” We meditate on Christ’s Passion so as to come to know more deeply God’s love for us, for it is there that we behold God’s love. This is the reason why we “look to the one whom they have pierced” (Jn 19:37). This “looking” to Christ is prayer. In a life given to God (religious or lay), “Prayer oneth the soul to God” and is an important part of the overall dynamic of Julian’s message.

6 In 1901, Grace Warrack, commenting on St Julian’s church, wrote that “still there are traces about its foundation of the anchorage built against its south-eastern wall.” Revelations of Divine Love Recorded by Julian Anchoress at Norwich Anno Domini, 1373, ed. Grace Warrack, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen, 1907), xvii.
These introductory comments on the dynamic of Julian’s thought may be placed alongside her desire for the three wounds of contrition, compassion and willful longing to God.

**Julian Prays for Three Wounds**

In her youth, Julian had prayed for three gifts. The third of the three gifts was the gift of three wounds. Before considering these wounds, it is important to be mindful of the first two gifts, the first of which was

the experience [*mynd*] of the Passion … I thought I had somewhat imagined the Passion of Christ. But yet I desired to have more by the grace of God. I thought I would have been that time with the Magdalen and with others who were Christ’s lovers, that I might have seen bodily the Passion that our Lord suffered for us, so that I might have suffered with him as others did who loved him … I desired after that showing to have truer knowledge of the Passion of Christ (P.ii.147-49).

In this, Julian is asking for a “bodily” sight of Christ’s passion, in order to suffer “with him as others did who loved him.” She wants to have the experience of Mary Magdalen and Christ’s other true lovers with him on Calvary, “for I would have been one of them and have suffered with them” (P.ii.148). Julian thinks that the bodily sight she seeks will give her “a truer knowledge of the Passion of Christ.” Julian desires the bodily sight of Christ’s Passion because she thinks it will grace her with the compassion experienced by Christ’s lovers. It will also enable her to know more deeply God’s love revealed in Christ’s Passion.

The second gift desired by Julian came to her mind

with sorrow (*contricion*), freely, without any seeking, a willing desire to have of God’s gift a bodily sickness. I wanted that illness to be to the death so that I might receive the Last Rites of Holy Church, believing myself that I should die and likewise that all those who saw me might suppose the same. For I would have no manner of comfort of fleshly or earthly life. In that sickness, I desired to have all the kinds of pains, bodily and ghostly, that I would have if I were dying, with all the dreads and temptations of fiends and all other manner of other pains, except the passing out of the soul (P.ii.149).
The desire for such an extreme sickness which came unsought to Julian was
c connected with her sorrow for sin (contrition). In this sickness unto death, she wants
to experience what Christ experienced on the cross: a total lack of any earthly
comfort, with every kind of bodily and spiritual pain possible. She does, however,
want to receive the Last Rites as God’s sacramental presence in her dying. In asking
for this gift of sickness from God, Julian is asking that because of it she might
experience a deep purging by God’s mercy which will help her afterwards to live
more “to the honour of God” (P.ii.149). She also hopes that her experience will be of
profit to her when she eventually does die, which she hopes will be soon, for she
desires “soon to be with my God and Maker” (P.ii.150). Julian is very much in the
Christian martyr tradition when she wants to be deprived of all earthly comfort and to
endure every pain for God. She is also in the Christian medieval mystical tradition
for, in asking for this sickness, Julian is asking for a powerful mystical experience of
sinking into the Abyss that is God, which leads to a “breakthrough in love.” It is an
experience of conversion or transformation, or true contrition, that Julian, conscious
of her “wretchedness, sloth and weariness” (P.lxiv.417), is seeking, and she asks for
it to happen in her thirtieth year (P.ii.150).

Julian desired these two gifts on condition that they be God’s will as she
considered them to be mystical favours rather out of the ordinary. Julian comments
that in time these two extraordinary desires passed from her mind (P.ii.150); in other

7 “Strange though it may seem to us, the illness had a Christological trajectory. It was part of Julian’s
deep desire to participate more deeply in the Passion of Christ.” Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology*,
106.

8 See Ignatius of Antioch’s Epistle to the Romans: “pray leave me to be a meal for the beasts, for it is
they who can provide my way to God. I am His wheat, ground fine by the lions’ teeth to be made

9 Beatrice of Nazareth (ca.1200-1268), a Flemish Beguine who died as a Cistercian prioress, wrote of
her experiences of God in an autobiography: The Seven Ways of Loving. Cf. “Beatrice’s basic
experiences (in thematic connection with the mysticism of Bernard and the Victorines and the views on
love of the courtly ethic) consist of an immeasurable experience of the love of God and a yearning for
love. The soul undertakes to bear pain (… ‘without a why’), to die while yet living, and to let itself sink
into the presence of God and there – ambivalently – to experience either a genuine ‘fury of love’ or the
calming experience of peace in God leading to fulfilment in a ‘breakthrough of love’.” Haas, “Schools
of Late Medieval Mysticism,” 141.

10 Julian associates sloth with impatience, bearing suffering heavily, lack of faith and trust
(P.lxxiii.449).

11 Like Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mt 26:39; Mk 14:36; Lk 22:42).
words, she forgot about them. However, we who have read Showings know that Julian was in fact given both of these gifts in her thirtieth year.

Julian’s desire for the third gift, for three wounds, was unconditional, and she prayed for them continually (P.ii.151). For this gift, she conceived a great desire to receive three wounds in my life: the wound of true contrition, the wound of loving compassion and the wound of wilful longing to God (P.ii.150-51).

It was not unusual for a medieval person to desire such wounds. Wounds were understood to be the place where God is to be found and related to. Julian understands these wounds to be spiritual gifts of God, graces which will transform her and one her to God. The fact that Julian asks for these three wounds “in my life,” and continues to do so, suggests she does not see these wounds as one-off spiritual events but more as ongoing open sores, like the wounds of St Cecilia who lingered on painfully in this life for some days (during which she arranged her household and bestowed her home as a place for Christian worship) before departing for the bliss of heaven. They are the sort of wounds you spend your life desiring and receiving. In the Christian mystical tradition such wounds are wounds of love and contain the paradox of joy and suffering.

The Westminster Version of Julian’s Showings

For the textual study of Julian’s writings, this dissertation draws on the Paris, Amherst and Westminster versions, with some reference to the Sloane. The Westminster version of Showings has a particular role because I perceive its passages to have been chosen for contemplation, the topic of this dissertation. While the Paris and Amherst versions need no introduction, it is important to offer some background on the more unknown Westminster manuscript. I argue that this manuscript is an authentic version of Julian’s Showings which illumines her thought.

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12 See discussion of wounds in Chapter 2.

13 Figure 3 is a facsimile of the first page (fol.72v) of Julian’s Showings in the Westminster Cathedral Manuscript. Plate II, SISMEL.
Figure 3. Showings in the Westminster Manuscript.
The Manuscript

The “Westminster Cathedral Treasury MS 4” is a Florilegium (anthology) discovered in the Westminster Cathedral Library in 1955, and dated at about 1500. It is believed to be a secretarial copy of an earlier manuscript: an early-to-mid fifteenth century compilation of passages of spiritual works usually ascribed to Walter Hilton and Julian of Norwich (neither is identified). The Hilton passages are commentaries on Psalm 90 *Qui Habitat* (ff. 1-25v) and Psalm 91 *Bonum Est* (ff. 25v-35v), as well as passages from *The Scale of Perfection* (ff. 35v-72r). The Julian passages (ff. 72v-112r) appear to have been taken from the long text version of Julian’s *Showings*. There is much evidence in the text to support this view. Because of the early date of the original of the Westminster compilation, the passages must have been taken from a long text version existing at that time, very possibly the original long text manuscript which is generally dated at about 1393.

In 1961, James Walsh and Eric Colledge published a translation of the whole Florilegium. Since then, Marleen Cré has transcribed the entire compilation, and Julian Bolton Holloway has transcribed and translated the Julian portion. Unlike others, both Cré and Holloway refrain from providing their transcriptions with an unhelpful overlay of interpretive punctuation and paragraphing. Hugh Kempster has transcribed the Julian portion. Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins provide a transcription which is a modification of Kempster’s. The transcriptions and translations so far mentioned are those to which I have personal access. For quoting

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15 For example, “And in thee selfe. to our souls we have that we desire” (W.94v.2-3.81) creates an obvious (if somewhat incoherent) bridge in the text by joining a passage ending with “and in the” (P.xlii.298) to a passage beginning with “selfe to our soule. we have that we desyer” (P.xliii.301). It may be scribal error. Other joins involve minimal linking, if any. Passages are easily identifiable in the long text version.
16 Walsh and Colledge, *Knowledge of Ourselves*.
19 Kempster, “Julian of Norwich.”
from the text, the SISMEL edition’s mostly literal translation is used. Modifications of the SISMEL translation will be my own translation of words or phrases added in square brackets within the quotation.

Scholarship

To date, the Westminster version of Julian’s *Showings* has attracted very little scholarly attention, probably due to the fact that it appears to consist of excerpts from the long text version already known and studied in the later Paris and Sloane versions. In her 1997 thesis concerning the whole Westminster compilation (Hilton and Julian), Marleen Cré argues that it

> has a precise and narrow aim: it teaches contemplation – the mystical life – to what must have been an intended audience of some sophistication … [My] study aims to show that it is not just the technical putting together of fragments from existing texts that make a compilation, but rather the thematic unity of the new text that is formed by the selecting and ordering of the fragments.

Because of vast discrepancies in the ‘thematic unity’ of Hilton’s and Julian’s writings, I think it possible that the more acceptably orthodox Hilton passages (there are many extant manuscript copies of his works as compared with Julian’s few) were placed first in the manuscript as a ruse, to enable the original compiler to include the revered writings of a more suspect medieval visionary woman. The survival of this version of Julian’s *Showings* was also almost certainly helped by its being included in a compilation of unidentified spiritual writings, and “lost” in a private collection.

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21 Appendix A of this dissertation provides a copy of the SISMEL transcription and translation of the Westminster version of *Showings*.

22 There is room for a new translation of the Westminster manuscript.


24 Cré argues that the compilation teaches the stages of contemplative life based on the classic purgative, illuminative, unitive model (named differently), and that themes introduced in the Hilton excerpts are developed in the Julian excerpts. Cré, “Westminster Cathedral Treasury,” 89. Cf. “In general terms, the Westminster *Revelations* can be understood as a version of Julian’s thought designed to deepen its connections with the thought of her most prominent orthodox contemporary, Hilton.” Watson and Jenkins, *Julian of Norwich*, 418. This dissertation does not support these views.

25 Although Archbishop Arundel’s Constitutions of 1409 were designed to eliminate Lollardy, they were applied to “writers and owners of all religious texts, except the simplest.” Nicholas Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel’s Constitutions of 1409,” *Speculum* 70 (1995): 829.
In 1961, well before Cré’s thesis, Walsh and Colledge argued that a “reviewer might describe the Florilegium (Hilton and Julian) as ‘very useful for the ex professo contemplative, definitely not for the beginner’.”

Hugh Kempster, in his 1996 thesis on the Julian portion of the Westminster Florilegium, rejects Walsh and Colledge’s view, arguing instead that the Westminster version of Julian’s *Showings* is a copy of a simplified version which was possibly compiled for “laity pursuing the ‘mixed life’.” Kempster suggests that Julian’s long text manuscript differed considerably from other spiritual writings available to lay people at that time, and involved a change of perspective:

Such a change was part of the scholarly discipline for theologically trained professionals, but a lay person was not trusted to be able to cope with difference. For the editor, conscious of his duty to uphold orthodoxy for a lay audience, any change in horizons was a risky business.

Kempster argues that this editing required the suppression of visionary references, theologising and theodicy. In marked contrast to this view, my research of the text itself shows that the Westminster version of Julian’s *Showings* was not compiled with simplification and censorship for a lay audience as guiding principles. Nor was it intended for beginners in prayer, be they religious or lay. The manuscript is a carefully chosen, highly focused teaching on Julian’s understanding of meeting God in prayer. It is a collation of contemplative passages to be prayed over. Julian’s long text is complex in organisation. The absence from the Westminster manuscript of the bodily visionary material, and of theologizing (particularly on sin), enables Julian’s teaching on how we meet God in this life to be more clearly seen.

The Westminster version of Julian’s *Showings* may indeed be made up of passages chosen from the long text, but, with minimal editing or internal rearrangement, these passages occur in the same order as they do in the long text. This

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dissertation argues that the selection of passages in the Westminster version allows for an illuminating interpretation of Julian’s teaching on meeting God in prayer, which may be obscured in the long text taken as a whole. The way in which the Westminster excerpts show Julian’s *Showings* to be organized around the theme of meeting God in contemplation, my research topic, makes the Westminster manuscript well worthy of my interest, particularly given its early date. We recall that the Westminster manuscript is a scribal copy of an earlier manuscript dated at early to mid-fifteenth century. Julian was alive until at least 1416 and may have been involved in the original compilation of her writings, or even the author of it. The original version of the Westminster manuscript is a contemporary of the short text Amherst manuscript, and possibly almost two hundred years earlier than the earliest extant long text version we have (the Paris manuscript). In the passages it contains, the Westminster is the earliest record we have of the original long text manuscript.

**A Lectio Divina Approach**

The Westminster manuscript is eminently suited to a theological approach of *lectio divina*, for when one examines the text one finds that it contains a collection of excerpts from the long text which enable the prayerful exploration of what Julian writes about *beholding* and *beseeching* and *beclosing*. The dissertation’s chapters on the three wounds will incorporate the research of these excerpts, as indicated in the introduction to this chapter. As a book for praying over, what the Westminster manuscript does is make it very clear that what Julian is telling us in *Showings* is not only that God is Love and that all shall be well, but, more importantly, that prayer is the way that we come to “know” that God is Love, and that all shall be well.

The *lectio divina* approach that Julian uses, and that is used in this dissertation, is a theological approach that enables us to find spiritual meaning in what Julian

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29 The “original” compilation may itself have been a copy of a yet earlier version.

30 These terms are defined in the appropriate places. In my initial textual study of the Westminster manuscript, I clearly identified passages on beholding, beseeching and beclosing, roughly an equal number of each, occurring in the same order as in the long text. In order to integrate my textual study of the Westminster into the framework of Julian’s three wounds, the passages have been dispersed. Interestingly, there is a marked affinity between the Wound of Compassion and beholding, the Wound of Willful Longing and beseeching, and the Wound of Contrition and beclosing (or oneing). I suggest that this structure, although there in the long text versions, is not so readily observable.
writes about meeting God. It is surely no accident that the Westminster manuscript finishes with: “It is God’s will that we set the point of our thought in this blessed beholding, as often as we may, and as long” (W.112v.8-11.117; P.lxiv.420). The compiler of the Westminster version is also making this same point right at the outset with a segment on Mary’s reverent beholding. This segment provides a powerful introduction to Julian’s teaching on meeting God.

Mary’s Reverent Beholding

The contemplative passage on Mary’s reverent beholding31 (W.72v.1.37 - 73v.9.39), which introduces the Westminster version of Showings, is made up of three short pieces from the long text, two of which are actually one piece into which the Westminster author has carefully inserted the third piece (P.iv.158; P.vii.168-69; P.iv.158-59). There is minimal editing for purposes of interconnecting the pieces and providing unity and coherence to the passage as a whole. The careful shaping of this passage is unusual for the Westminster manuscript and is not typical. It is obviously done for a purpose.

Mary as Model

In the passage, Julian is shown, and shows, Mary as model in beholding. Julian has long prayed with the Gospel story of the Annunciation, using a lectio divina approach. In her prayer she has pondered what might have been in Mary’s soul when God’s amazing proposal drew from her the response: “Lo me here, God’s handmaiden” (W.73.3.38). She has wanted to enter Mary’s experience of God, and to make it her own. Julian writes that our “gracious and good God” (W.72v.1.37) shows her the wisdom and truth of Mary’s soul,32 as this “little and simple” (P.xxv.239) maiden reverently beholds “her God who is her maker, marvelling with great reverence that he would be born of her that was a simple person of his making” (W.72v.7-11.37). Mary’s “marvelling with great reverence” is beholding. She

31 See definition of beholding, Chapter 2, 48, N.64.
32 Cf. “I am not taught to long to see her bodily presence while I am here, but just the virtues of her blessed soul, her truth, her wisdom, her charity, by which I am taught to know myself – and to reverently dread my God” (P.xxv.239).
reverently marvels because she knows the greatness of her maker, and also “the littleness of her self who is made” (W.72v.17.37 - 72v.1.38). The wisdom and truth of Mary’s soul

made her see her God so great, so high, so mighty and so good that the greatness and the nobility and the beholding of God fulfilled her with reverent dread. And with this she saw herself so little and so low, so simple and so poor in [regard to] her God, that this reverent dread fulfilled her with meekness. And thus, by this ground,33 she was fulfilled of grace and of all manner of virtue, and surpassed all [creatures] (W.73.4-17.38).34

The wisdom and truth in Mary’s soul (the Triune God) makes her wisely see the truth of God, and of herself. She is grounded and “fulfilled” in the meekness35 that comes from beholding God with reverent dread, that is, with a reverent and loving awe. The Amherst manuscript describes reverent dread as being a dread that is “full sweet and soft through the greatness of our love” (A.xxv.781). The Paris manuscript describes it as the dread which makes us

fall into our Lord’s breast like a child into its mother’s arms with all our intent and all our mind, knowing our feebleness and our great need, knowing his everlasting goodness and his blessed love, only seeking into him for salvation, cleaving with faithful trust (P.lxxiv.455).

It is the “dread” of the feeble child for its strong and totally trustworthy mother. Like a small and vulnerable child which leaps into its mother’s protective care, clinging there with confidence in its mother’s goodness and love, we are to “fall into our Lord’s breast,” (which is into the wound of his heart) seeking only there for salvation.

33 The term “ground” (or its derivatives) is often used by Julian, and denotes humankind’s foundational being in God. Cf. God is “the ground in whom our soul stands, and he is the means that keeps the substance and the sensuality together, so that it shall never part” (P.lvi.379); “our reason is grounded in God who is substantially its Nature. Of this substantial Nature, Mercy and Grace spring and spread in to us, working all things in fulfilling our joy. These are the grounds in which we have our being, our increase, and our fulfilling. It is three properties in one goodness” (P.lvi.382); “I am ground of your beseecing. First it is my will that you have it. And since I make you to will it, and since I make you to request it, and you seek it, how should it then be that you should not have your seeking?” (P.xli.290). According to Meister Eckhart, “the ground of the soul [is] the soul’s true nature. In it she comes into the first, into the beginning whence God bursts forth with goodness into all creatures. There she receives all things in God.” The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart, trans. Maurice O’C. Walshe (New York: Crossroad, 2009), Sermon 21, 149-50. Since there were Dominican preachers in Norwich, it is entirely possible that Julian had access to Eckhart’s spiritual thought.

34 P.vii.168-69.

In Mary’s reverent beholding of God she is “fulfilled” (W.73.38) with grace and virtues, and surpasses all creatures except “the blessed manhood of Christ” (W.73v.5-6.39). Christ surpasses her in his reverent beholding of his Father, and in his meekness, which leads him to embrace the cross his Father ordains for him. Mary’s: “Lo, me here, God’s handmaiden” flows from the ground of her meekness.

Julian as Model

The Westminster manuscript states plainly that when God shows Julian part of the wisdom and truth of Mary’s soul, Julian “understood” [Mary’s] reverent beholding” (W.72v.1.37) of God. In Julian’s prayer, then, God has given her the gift of understanding Mary’s “knowing the greatness of her Maker and the littleness of her self” (W.72v.15-17.37). Thus, Julian, too, beholds her Maker with reverent dread, and sees the littleness of herself, which grounds her in meekness and fulfils her in grace and virtue. Now Julian can understand Mary’s marvelling that her Maker will be born of her, and Mary’s simple response. Julian marvels that her Maker would be born of herself too, and her response comes from the ground of her meekness, which makes her desire that whatever God ordains will be accomplished in her. Christ ever being born within her is the Wound of Willfull Longing.39

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36 My italics.

37 An essential part of lectio divina for the ancient monks was to stay with a scripture passage until they lived it.


39 Mary’s reverent beholding, as described by Julian, is echoed throughout the Christian tradition. To Brother Leo, Francis of Assisi explains his night of prayer on Mount La Verna shortly before he receives the mystical and bodily experience of the Stigmata: “Two lights were shown to my soul: one of the knowledge and understanding of the Creator, and the other of the knowledge of myself. When I said, ‘Who are you, my dearest God?’ Then I was in a light of contemplation in which I saw the depths of the infinite goodness and wisdom and power of God. And when I said, ‘What am I?’ I was in a light of contemplation in which I saw the grievous depths of my vileness and misery, and therefore I said, ‘Who are you, the Lord of infinite wisdom and good and mercy, that you deign to visit me, a most vile and abominable and contemptible worm?’ And God was in the flame that you saw, and He spoke to me under the form of that flame, as He had formerly spoken to Moses.” “The Considerations on the Holy Stigmata,” in The Little Flowers of St Francis, trans. Raphael Brown (New York: Doubleday, 1958), 188.
Significance of Passage

The placing of this carefully structured contemplative passage at the start of the Westminster manuscript is highly significant. Julian is inviting her readers to *lectio* this passage for themselves, to await God’s gift of understanding and knowing Mary’s reverent beholding for themselves, which will lead to their own being grounded in meekness, in which they will be fulfilled in grace and virtues, and say yes to God in all things. The passage clearly establishes the Westminster manuscript as a contemplative text, put together for people who seek God in prayer. It indicates the way in which Julian and the compiler of the Westminster (if they are different people) wish us to proceed.

Concluding Comments

This chapter on Julian’s three wounds outlines the dissertation’s approach to the textual examination of Julian’s writings. It aligns that approach with the concrete reality of Julian’s anchorages. It explains what is meant by the three wounds that Julian prays for. It introduces the Westminster version of Julian’s *Showings* as a key text and establishes its credentials as a source of Julian’s thought. It presents the first segment of the Westminster version (Mary’s Reverent Beholding) as model for a *lectio divina* approach to Julian’s writings.

The next three chapters examine Julian’s three wounds. The order in which the wounds are examined is an important outcome of the research undertaken. The wound of compassion is best seen in the context of Julian’s visionary experience of beholding the goodness of God in the crucified Christ. This chapter will draw heavily on textual research of the Paris and Amherst versions, as well as the Westminster. The wound of *willfull* longing to God may best be understood as being drawn by love-longing in to beseeching, which Julian defines as contemplation. The research for this chapter has an almost exclusive focus on the Westminster version. The wound of contrition is to do with our being closed (beclosed) in God, which is our *oneing* in to God. This chapter draws mostly on the Paris and Westminster versions. We turn now to examine what Julian’s wound of compassion tells us about meeting God.
CHAPTER 4

WOUND OF COMPASSION

‘Lo, how I love you’ (P.xxiv.237).

Introduction

When the dying Julian gazes on the face of the crucifix held before her, she prays once more to be wounded with compassion for Christ in his sufferings. She is given this gift, amidst showings of Christ’s Passion. In this chapter, I firstly outline and discuss the bodily showings of Christ’s Passion, because they are integral to Julian’s message. Secondly, I examine in some detail the tenth (spiritual) showing of the crucified risen Christ, which incorporates many important medieval mystical themes and focuses on “Lo, how I loved thee.” Thirdly, drawing on the Westminster manuscript, I consider Julian’s teaching on beholding God’s goodness. This teaching flows from the spiritual sight of God’s goodness found in all of Julian’s showings. Although the Westminster manuscript omits all but fleeting references to the bodily-visionary aspect of Julian’s Showings, it includes the important tenth showing of Christ’s Passion. This chapter on the wound of compassion, encompassing the beholding of God’s goodness, provides the basis for meeting God in a life of prayer.

Christ’s Passion

Julian’s desire for the wound of compassion reflects medieval devotion to Christ and his Passion. Following the church debates in the early centuries on the divinity and humanity of Christ, there was, in the tenth to twelfth centuries, a resurgence of devotional interest in the humanity of Christ, particularly his Passion. The movement began amongst the Benedictines and the Cistercians and can be

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1 Julian is given bodily (and spiritual) sight in the first, second, fourth, fifth, eighth and ninth showings.
2 The visionary content performs an important function in the text. Humankind is knit in to God in substance and sensuality. Meeting God is one movement, incorporating both kataphatic and apophatic elements. There is one Reality encompassing all being.
observed in the writings of Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) already cited, and of
Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), who was regarded by many in his time as “the
supreme guide to the heights of heavenly contemplation.” It is particularly seen in
the Franciscan tradition, especially the writings of Bonaventure (1221-74). In
Lignum vitae (The Tree of Life), Bonaventure provides a meditative way of entering
into the life of Christ, and one third of the meditations are devoted to Christ’s Passion.
In these, he

draws the reader into the event by having him identify with Mary, sharing her
feelings of compassion for the suffering Savior. In these meditations, there is
a heightened concentration on the physical details of Christ’s suffering with a
subsequent evoking of compassion … By thus identifying with Mary, we can
share Christ’s sufferings and penetrate the meaning of his redemptive death.

We see here a description of the imaginative prayer taught by the Franciscans, widely
practised and endorsed in medieval piety, and taken up by Ignatius of Loyola in Spain
in the sixteenth century. The last stanza of Bonaventure’s Lignum vitae reads,

O my God, good Jesus,
although I am in every way without merit and unworthy,
grant to me, who did not merit to be present at these events
in the body
that I may ponder them faithfully
in my mind
and experience towards you,
my God crucified and put to death for me,
that feeling of compassion
which your innocent mother and the penitent Magdalene
experienced
at the very hour of your passion.

4 See Chapter 1, 18, N.49. Anselm’s writings stress an affective devotion to Christ’s humanity, and
argue that it is Christ’s human nature that enables him to represent us before God.

5 Bernard’s writings include De Diligendo Deo (On Loving God) ca. 1128 and Sermones super Cantica
Canticorum (Sermons on the Song of Songs) begun 1135.

6 McGinn, Growth, 163.

7 Bonaventure’s major work is considered to be The Soul’s Journey into God (ca. 1257). Written a few
years later, The Tree of Life is a meditation on the life of Christ.

8 Cousins, “Humanity and Passion,” 385-86.

9 Bonaventure, “The Tree of Life,” in Bonaventure: The Soul’s Journey into God, The Tree of Life, The
To experience this compassion\(^{10}\) for the suffering Christ was the second
wound desired by Julian. When she was aged thirty years and a half, she became very
ill. On the fourth night she received all the Rites of Holy Church, after which she
“languished for two days and two nights more, and on the third night I thought often
times to have passed away and so too thought those who were about me” (A.ii.713).
In the early morning, when death seemed imminent, the curate came to her with a
crucifix which he put before her face, saying, “Daughter, I have brought thee the
image of thy Saviour. Look thereupon and comfort thee therewith in reverencing of
Him who died for thee and me” (A.ii.715).\(^ {11}\) The crucifix held before Julian’s face
would have been typically medieval, with a lifelike, bruised and wounded Christ-
figure in wood, metal or bone.\(^ {12}\) Julian’s eyes had been fixed upwards but she did as
bidden, and, feeling as if at the very point of death, she fixed her gaze on the face of
the Crucified One (A.ii.715). Suddenly, all pain left her and she felt “all whole as ever
I was before or afterwards, and especially in the upper part of my body … [although]
I did not trust any the more that I should live” (A.ii.717). She was greatly astonished
at this change, considering it to be God’s work, and it came into her mind to pray for
her long-held desire for the second wound, the wound of compassion for her Lord’s
pains, which she saw represented in the crucifix held before her:

> For I would that His pains were my pains, with compassion and then with
longing for God. Thus I thought that I might with His grace have His wounds
that I had before desired. But in this I desired never of God either bodily sight
or any manner of showing, but compassion such as I thought a kind soul
might have towards our Lord Jesus, that for love willed to become a mortal
man. With Him I desired to suffer whilst I lived in this mortal body, as God
would give me grace (A.iii.717).

\(^{10}\) “The semantics and etymology of compassion lead back to the Hebrew rahamin (trembling womb),
the Greek oiktirmos (the feeling of compassion) and splanchna (the bowels or seat of the emotions),
and the Latin compassio (suffering with, feeling sympathy and agreement). In Middle English
compassion (ruth) conveys a sharing of suffering with another, sympathy and a feeling of sorrow for
another’s troubles, and involvement in an affliction as in 1 Cor 12:26, ‘If one member suffers, all suffer
together with it’.” Hide, Gifted Origins, 120-21.

\(^{11}\) The Church urges Julian to find comfort in gazing upon the One who knows what dying is like from
personal experience, and is present in it. The Paris version is even more direct: “I have brought the
image of your Saviour. Look upon it and comfort thee ther with” (P.iii.153).

\(^{12}\) See Figure 4 for a 16cm bone crucifix figure (ca. 1460) found in 1902 on the site of the London and
Counties Bank, High Street, Colchester. Peter Lasko and Nigel J. Morgan eds., Medieval Art in East
To share Christ’s Passion and to “have His wounds” has been Julian’s ongoing spiritual desire for many years. Now, gazing upon Christ’s suffering face has resulted in Julian feeling “all whole as ever I was before or afterwards” (A.ii.717). Fixing her gaze on Christ’s face has led Julian outside her own pain and she asks to suffer with him. Three times in the above long excerpt, Julian refers to her dependence on God’s grace for what she is asking. Julian wants her body to be filled “with mind [knowledge] and feeling of His blessed Passion.”\(^{13}\) She is not asking for a bodily sight of Christ’s suffering, as she did when asking for the first gift in her youth, but her desire at this point is for the wound of compassion, or more feeling of compassion for Jesus in his Passion, which she thinks a “kind soul”\(^ {14} \) would feel. Julian desires that “his paynes were my paynes wt compassion and afterward langying to god” (P.iii.155). Compassion will lead her to longing for God.

Julian has continually begged God for the wound of compassion since her youth. At this fraught moment, she earnestly desires Jesus’ pains to be her pains, and she desires to suffer with him while her life lasts. The prayer in itself contains the grace,\(^ {15} \) and Julian receives a spectacular response, for as her eyes are fixed upon the crucified Christ’s face, her vision begins: a series of fifteen showings which last from about 4am in the morning until about 3pm in the afternoon, with a sixteenth showing the following night. In her vision, Julian is given a deep experience of compassion for the suffering Christ, by a God “whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine” (Eph. 3:20). In fact, the vision sets in motion a lifelong process of *lectio divina* for Julian, in which ultimately all of her early desires are addressed, and there is a twist, for although Julian asks God to fill her body with “mind and feeling” of Christ’s Passion, so that she can long for (love) God more, what she is led to is the knowledge of God’s compassionate and unconditional longing (love) for her.

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13 To ask for “mind and feeling” is to ask for contemplative knowledge: to meet God in it.
14 As in Middle English word usage, Julian uses *kinde* to mean both “benevolent” and “of our nature.”
15 Cf. “I am ground of your prayer and of your beseeching” (W.90v.1-2.73).
Figure 4. Bone Crucifix.
The Showings

In the first showing, Julian sees in the crucifix held before her the physical sight of Christ’s head beginning to bleed from the wounds made by the crown of thorns:

suddenly I saw the red blood trickle down from under the garland of thorns, all hot, freshly, plentifully, and lifelike, right as me thought that it was at that time when the garland of thorns was thrust on His blessed Head. Right so, both God and Man, the same suffered for me. I conceived truly and mightily that it was Himself that showed it me without any intermediary, and then I said, ‘Benedicite! Dominus.’ This I said with reverence as my meaning, with a mighty voice. (A.iii.717).

Julian’s eyes are upon the ravaged but tender face of the Christ, “both God and Man.” She sees the living blood flow and, whilst conscious of her own wretched sinfulness, knows “truly and mightily” that God is immanently and familiarly present in her experience, causing her to bless the Lord with great reverence, amazement and strength: “Benedicite! Dominus.” This first showing, like the others, contains many spiritual understandings of God’s love, which will be examined in a later section of this chapter.

The second showing focuses on Christ’s face being brutally beaten:

I saw with my bodily sight the Face of the crucifix that hung before me, in which I beheld continually a part of the Passion: contempt, spitting on, defiling of His body, buffeting His blessed Face and many langours and pains – more than I can tell; and oft changing of colour. At one time all His blessed Face was covered with dried blood. This I saw bodily, but dimly and darkly; and I desired more bodily light in order to have seen more clearly, and I was answered in my reason that if God willed to show me more, He would, but that I needed no light but Him (A.viii.729).

Devotion to Christ’s Holy Face was important in medieval mysticism. It was believed that the veil Veronica used to wipe the face of Christ on the way to Calvary was

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16 For a brief overview of the showings of Christ’s Passion, see Anna Maria Reynolds, “The Passion in Julian of Norwich,” http://www.umilta.net/amrpassion.html [accessed October 6, 2008].

17 Quotations relating to Christ’s Passion are sometimes lengthy in order to convey Julian’s experience within the immediacy of her own words.

18 The SISMEL capitalisation of the word “Face” in the translation of the manuscript’s “faace” picks up the emphasis in the manuscript. For Julian, the face represents the whole person: “for all the pains that Christ suffered in His body showed in the blessed Face” (A.ix.735).
miraculously imprinted with the image of Christ’s face, and that this veil was, in Julian’s time, preserved in Rome. Julian refers to it in the long text version (P.x.185). Her description of Christ’s face being “continually” violated is graphic but it lacks sentimental exaggeration and includes her sensible and humble comment that, though she wants to see more because she sees “bodily, but dimly and darkly,” God will allow her to see what God wants her to see, and with this she can be content. Julian knows that spiritual sight as well as bodily sight is meant.

In the fourth showing, Julian “saw, beholding, the body plenteously bleeding, hotly, freshly and in a lifelike way, just as I saw before in the head. This was showed to me in the furrows of the scourging” (A.viii.729-31). In Julian’s showing, the precious blood pours out freely and suggests the Eucharistic sacrifice, for “the precious plenty of his blood overflows all the earth and is ready to wash all creatures of sin” (P.xii.195-96), and continues to do so now “as long as we shall have need” (P.xii.196). Christ’s Passion is redemptive.

In the fifth showing, Julian is let behold longer “both all that I had seen and all that was contained therein. And then, without voice or opening of lips this word was formed in my soul: Herewith is the fiend overcome” (A.viii.731). Bodily sight, spiritual sight, and words formed in her understanding are all mentioned in the description of this showing that Christ’s Passion has overcome the evil one.

In the eighth showing, Julian writes that

Christ showed me a part of His Passion, near His dying: I saw that sweet Face as it were dry and bloodless with the paleness of death, then turning more deathly pale, languishing, and change to a bluish colour, the colour of death, which grew deeper as the flesh became more deathlike. For all the pains that Christ suffered in His body showed in the blessed Face (as far as I could see), and especially in the lips (A.ix.735).

Julian sees all of Christ’s suffering showing in his face, and especially in his lips, and finds that

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19 The veil tradition has an ancient history. Since the Sack of Rome in 1527, its whereabouts is unclear. There are copies: for example, a 14th century copy in the Jaén Cathedral in Spain.
this was a heavy change to see, this deep pallor of dying. The nostrils also changed and dried up, to my sight. This pining seemed to me as long as if He had been a seven-night on the point of death, always suffering pain. And I thought the drying of Christ’s flesh was the greatest pain of the Passion – and the last (A.x.737).

This drying of Christ’s flesh, particularly his lips, reminds Julian of Christ’s words: ‘I thirst’ (Jn 19:28): She sees Christ’s physical thirst as

that which the body suffered from failing of moisture, for the blessed flesh and bones were wholly drained of blood and moisture. For a long, long time the blessed body was bleeding dry from the tearing wounds of the nails, caused by the heaviness of the head and the weight of the body. The wind blowing without dried Him too, and the cold tortured Him more than all other pains – more than my heart can think of … though he suffered but once, as I know well, yet he wished to show it me and fill me with mind of His Passion, as I had before desired (A.x.737).

Anyone who has witnessed the slow painful death of a loved one has some understanding of what Julian is describing in the last two excerpts, the dying that goes on and on seemingly never-endingly, the waiting for release that does not come, until eventually the body has no more reserves and gives up its spirit. Also, the similarity of Julian’s description of Christ’s lingering, drawn-out death, “as if He had been a seven-night on the point of death” (A.x.737), to what she herself has experienced in the past week is striking. She can identify with Christ in this long torment of dying in great pain. She knows what the terrible thirst is like, and the awful cold. She also sees that Christ suffered more than we do because, being both God and man, he had “a double thirst” (P.xvii.210), one physical and the other spiritual: “For the thirst of God is to have man generally come to him … and yet he still thirsts and longs” (P.lxxv.457). Julian is well aware that Christ is no longer physically dying, but is showing her these things so that she can have “mind of His Passion” as she has desired.

In this eighth showing, Julian describes Christ’s body as

broken in pieces as a cloth and sagging downwards, seeming that it would hastily have fallen for heaviness and for lowness. And that was great sorrow

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20 Cf. Paradoxically, Julian does not deny the doctrine of God’s impassibility (P.xxxi.254) but understands Christ’s spiritual thirst as God’s painful longing for us: “There is longing and desire in God and this quality is part of God’s everlasting goodness.” Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology*, 109.
and dread to me. For I thought that I would not for my life have seen it fall (P.xvii.212).  

In her own week of agony, Julian’s body too had become progressively heavy and lifeless for, after it was already dead from the middle down, then “the upper part of my body began to die as to feeling; my hands fell down on either side and also, from weakness, my head sank to one side” (A.ii.715-17). Christ’s human body is like a torn and tattered rag hung out to dry, utterly wrecked and poured out. Julian would rather die than see Christ’s body “fall,” or, as the SISMEL translation of the Paris version puts it, than see “all” that she is seeing (P.xvii.212).

Significantly, Julian comments that “in all this time of Christ’s presence I felt no pain but for Christ’s pain” (P.xvii.212). She wretchedly thinks that, if she had known how painful compassion for Christ is, she would not have prayed for it. She loves Christ more than herself, and her sorrow for Christ’s pain causes suffering greater than death or hell (P.xvii.212). This sorrow for Christ’s suffering comes with bodily sight of Christ’s Passion, the first gift that Julian prayed for in her youth but then forgot about. For many years, Julian has desired to share the compassion felt by Christ’s lovers who stood at the foot of the cross. In her showings, she understands Mary’s compassion: “she was so oned in love, that the greatness of her love was the cause of the greatness of her pain” (P.xviii.215). Julian is sure of this “by my own feeling” (P.xviii.216) as one of Christ’s lovers.

Julian sees a “great oneing between Christ and ourselves … For when he was in pain, we were in pain, and all creatures that might suffer pain suffered with him” (P.xviii.216). She comments that at the time of Christ’s death, even the comfort of those who were not Christ’s lovers was affected, for Scripture says that “the firmament and the earth failed for sorrow in their nature, in the time of Christ’s dying” (P.xviii216). Thus, “those who were his friends suffered for love, and …

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21 Julian writes that Christ “was hanging up in the air as men hang a cloth out to dry” (P.xvii.213). In a note, Reynolds and Holloway comment on the similarity of the appearance of Christ’s moisture-drained, hanging, sagging body to the public displaying of a victim’s body parts after drawing, hanging and quartering, SISMEL, 213, N.1.

22 Mt 27:45, 51.
those who knew him not, suffered for failing of all kind of comfort” (P.xviii.217). There is a great oneing between Christ’s suffering and ours.\textsuperscript{23}

Julian dares not look away from the cross because “I knew full well that while I was beholding the cross, I was secure and safe” (P.xix.218). The friendly thought comes to Julian to look up to heaven and away from the suffering Christ whom she is so painfully beholding (holding-in-being). She sees no moral issues with this and so feels called upon

either to look up or else to answer. I answered inwardly with all the might of my soul, and said ‘No. I may not. For you are my heaven’. This I said because I would not. For I would rather have been in that pain until Doomsday, than have come to heaven otherwise than through him. For I knew full well that he who bound me so sore, he should unbind me when he would. Thus was I taught to choose Jesus for my heaven whom I saw only in pain at that time. I liked no other heaven than Jesus, who shall be my bliss when I come there (P.xix.219-20).

Julian wants only Jesus. He is her heaven both in this world and the next. As one of his lovers, Julian chooses with all the might of her soul to remain suffering with him. Doing this means choosing to remain in her own suffering which is one\textsuperscript{d} into Christ’s suffering because of the great oneing between Christ’s suffering and hers. Julian remains there in love with Christ in a sharing of suffering which is transformative. In doing this she is choosing “Jesus for my heaven” because when he and she are one in her inner heart in a sharing of suffering, she is in Christ, who is her heaven in a realized eschatology.

We saw earlier Julian repenting asking for compassion because of the pain it gives her. Her explanation of this is illuminating and needs to be given in some detail:

Repenting and willful choice are two contraries, of which I felt both at that time. And they are of two parts, the one outward, the other inward. The outward part is our deadly flesh which is now in pain, and now in woe and shall be in this life. Of which I felt much at this time and that was the part that I repented. The inward part is a high and blessedful life, which is all in peace and in love. And this is more secretly felt. And it is here where, mightily, wisely and willingly, I chose Jesus for my heaven. And in this I

\textsuperscript{23} Another aspect of the oneing of suffering is examined in Chapter 6: “every man’s sorrow, desolation and anguish [Christ] saw, and sorrowed, for kindness and love” (P.xx.223).
saw truly that the inward part is master and sovereign to the outward, nought blaming nor taking heed of its desires, but all the intent and the will is set endlessly to be oned to our Lord Jesus (P.xix.220-21).

Our oneing with Christ includes delight and suffering, the inward and outward parts. The inward spiritual part of “a high and blessedful life, which is all in peace and love” comes from Julian’s Trinity-graced (mightily, wisely and willingly/lovingly) choosing to ignore outward suffering and to have “all the intent and the will … set endlessly to be oned to our Lord Jesus.” This inward spiritual part is “master and sovereign” to the woe we ever feel in “our deadly flesh” in this life. Julian is telling us how to embrace the suffering in our lives and find Christ’s peace and love in it. Heaven for Julian is Christ, her Lover, and she has heaven in this life by choosing to remain with Christ in prayer in a oneing in suffering. What Julian is describing here is a moment of conversion or transformation, and, I suggest, the “breakthrough in love” that she had prayed for in her youth as the second gift. In the time after her showings, Julian always draws strength from remembering this experience of choosing to remain suffering with Christ and she comes to know that she must always choose Christ “in wele and in wa” (A.xi.740) till doomsday. She is content to remain oned in to him until he releases her from the pain of this life.

Julian continues to wait in anguish for Christ’s death, but in the ninth showing, instead of death occurring as she expects, “Suddenly, while I was still beholding the same cross He changed to a blissful countenance. The changing of his expression changed mine, and I was as glad and merry as it was possible to be” (A.xi.741). It is “the same cross” that Julian is gazing at, but Christ’s face is transfigured with joy. When Christ’s face is transformed, Julian’s is too. Christ and Julian have been one in pain and are now one in joy. Compassion in suffering leads to a wonderful sharing of joy. “Then brought our Lord merrily to my mind: ‘Where is now any point of thy pain or of thy grief?’” (A.xi.741). Julian understands that in our own suffering, we are “now in our Lord’s meaning in his Cross with him in our pains … And we, willingly abiding in the same cross with his help and his grace unto the last point, suddenly he shall change his aspect to us, and we shall be with him in heaven … and then shall all be brought in to joy” (P.xxi.225). Christ’s suffering and dying, and our suffering and

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24 SISME (Paris) translates “wele” as “good.”
dying, are one. He is with us helping us and in “the same cross” there is both suffering and joy, until we come to see his glorious face in the very fullness of joy.

As part of this ninth revelation, Christ asks Julian if she is content that he suffered for her and when she expresses her gratitude profusely, he says,

“If thou be content [payede] … I am content [payede]. It is a joy and a bliss and an endless liking to me that ever I suffered Passion for thee; for if I might suffer more, I would suffer more’ (A.xii.741).

Christ’s question to Julian suggests that he wants her to know about his suffering for her, and to find joy in it. Christ himself finds his joy in her happiness, and he is “endlessly” (forever and without limits) glad about his suffering for her. Julian has experienced profound compassion for the wounded and suffering Christ, and then shared his joy. Now she is overwhelmed to understand that Christ’s joy and bliss comes from his suffering for love of her. Christ gave the very last drop of his blood. He would suffer more for her if he could, and “love would never let him have rest until he had done it” (P.xxii.229). In Christ’s “I am content,” we may understand the great “I am” of the Trinity involved in Christ’s saving action, for Julian sees “three heavens and all in the blessed manhood of Christ; and none is more, none is less, none is higher, none is lower, but all are alike equal in bliss” (A.xii.743). Christ shows Julian the Father (“in no bodily likeness but in His property and in His liking” [A.xii.743]), who gives the gift of meed25 to His Son Jesus Christ, and

this meed is so blissful to Jesus, that the Father might have given no meed that might have pleased him better … We are His bliss. We are His meed. We are His worship. We are His crown. This that I say is such great bliss to Jesus that he sets at nought His travail and His hard Passion and cruel and shameful death (A.xii.743).

Nothing is dearer to Christ (and the Trinity) than we are. Christ counts his pain as nothing because of the strength of his love for us, which gives him “great bliss.” Julian is shown this “plenteously and fully” (P.xxiii.235) and she exhorts her readers to contemplate the wonder that Christ “ever suffered Passion for thee” (P.xxii.227).

25 ‘Mede’ comes from ‘mead’: the fermented drink made from honey given to warriors in reward for service to their lord (A.743, N.2).
We are to ponder “wisely” (A.xxii.745) the word “ever” in an effort to somehow grasp the enormity of this revelation of God’s love for us.

Julian’s desire to feel compassion for Christ’s Passion has led her to a compassionate oneing with Christ and to a profound knowledge of God’s compassion for her. Having experienced compassion in which she loves Christ more than her own life, Julian knows that Christ’s Passion, in which he loves her more than his own life, and finds his joy in her contentment, means that God is a God of compassion and love. The next showing emphasizes this in image and word.

“Lo, how I love thee”

The tenth showing provides an extraordinary, theologically rich climax to the bodily showings of Christ’s Passion in Julian’s Showings:

Full merrily and gladly our Lord looked into His side, and beheld and said this word: ‘Lo, how I loved thee!’, as if he had said: ‘My child, if you cannot look on my Godhead, see here how I allowed my side to be opened and my heart cloven in two, so that all the blood and water that was therein poured out. And this gives me joy and so will I that it do to thee.’ This our Lord showed me to make us glad and merry (A.xiii.745).

In the above Amherst version of this showing, Julian uses icon imagery to depict the risen Christ who is gazing joyfully into the wound in his side (at his pierced heart) and saying “this word”: “Lo, how I loved thee.” Julian then quite profoundly explains the whole point of why we contemplate Christ’s Passion. The transcendent God is beyond our imaginings. The incarnate God allowed “all” (every single drop) of his blood and water to pour out (Jn 19:34) of his broken heart. Christ shows Julian his great delight in giving all of himself (represented by his cloven heart, blood and water) for her, and he wants her to rejoice in knowing that this is how God loves her: “Lo, how I loved thee.” In saying “Lo,” Christ is instructing Julian to look upon, or behold, his Passion to see how God loves her. Just as he is gazing into the wound in his side, so too he wants her to gaze into it, marvel at it, contemplate it, know it. She

26 Julian uses an “as if” literary device which gives us Christ’s analysis of his actions and words, and is an example of medieval biblical exegesis. See Watson and Jenkins, Julian of Norwich, 88.
27 With sacramental overtones.
is to “look to the one whom they have pierced” (Jn 20:37). This is who her God is. The showing is meant for all of us, for Julian writes that Christ showed her all of this “to make us glad and merry.”28

The Paris text of the tenth showing gives a longer version, which must be quoted in full. It begins,

With a good cheer our good Lord looked into his side, and beheld with joy, and with his sweet looking he led forth the understanding of his creature by the same wound into his side within. And there he showed a fair and delectable place, and large enough for all mankind that shall be saved and rest in peace and love. And therewith he brought to mind his most worthy blood and his precious water, which he let pour out for love. And with the sweet beholding he showed his blessed heart cloven in two. And with this sweet enjoying, he showed to my understanding in part the blessedful Godhead as far as he would that time, strengthening the poor soul so as to understand, it may be said, that is to mean, the endless love that was without beginning and is and shall be forever. And with this our good Lord said most blessedfully, ‘Lo, how I love you’. As if he had said, ‘My darling, behold and see your Lord, the God who is your maker and your endless joy. See your own Brother, your Saviour. My child, behold and see what liking and what bliss I have in your salvation. And for my love joy with me’ (P.xxiv.235-36).

In the Amherst text of this showing, we saw that we are invited to gaze upon Christ’s Passion because it reveals our loving God to us, and the longer Paris text of the showing (the beginning is above) underlines this by repeating Christ’s “Lo, how I love you” three times, twice in the present tense, which suggests that Julian is reliving her mystical experience as she writes, and once in the past tense as in the Amherst text. There are basic similarities between the two manuscripts, but the Paris text, thought to have been written twenty years after the Amherst text, and after twenty years of Julian’s contemplative lectio divina of her vision, also includes the cheer-full Christ drawing Julian’s understanding right into the wound in his side for a spiritual sight.

Because Christ’s hands are nailed to the cross, he draws Julian’s understanding into his side by his “sweet looking,” drawing her gaze with his into the wound in his side. From our perspective, Christ (the risen Christ) may seem vulnerable as he hangs there, held fast by nails, with his wound fully exposed and

28 My italics.
unprotected, and yet he is the initiator as he blissfully, with gentle insistence, invites invasion of his person, leading Julian’s understanding into the place where he is most vulnerable, his pierced heart. We are reminded of the risen Jesus who insists on Thomas both seeing his wounds and putting finger and hand into them, in order to recognize Jesus as “My Lord and my God!” (Jn 20:24-29). We are to enter Christ’s wounds. In choosing Christ for her heaven, Julian is invited into his heart.

Within Christ’s side, Julian sees a “fair and delectable place … large enough”29 for all humankind, who may enter Christ’s wound and find a place to rest safely in peace and love, enclosed in his side.30 As in the Amherst text, Christ reminds Julian that it is from this wound in his side that blood and water have poured out, which tells her that this sacred place, which keeps her safe in peace and love, also provides her with all she needs, which is Christ’s own life-force in Baptism and Eucharist. With “sweet enjoying” he shows Julian his heart “cloven in two,” and then “in part the blessedful Godhead … the endless love that was without beginning and is and shall be forever,”31 the experience of which requires God’s strengthening of her “poor soul.” The mention of an ineffable experience of the Godhead (which flows from contemplating Christ’s pierced heart) supports the view that Julian has for many years contemplated this showing. She is referring to apophatic spiritual experience of the Trinity.

Over time Julian discerns several meanings for Christ’s: “Lo, how I love you” which in the Paris manuscript she repeats three times. Explaining her first two, present-tense uses of Christ’s words, again using the medieval biblical exegetical approach, Julian comments that it is “as if” (P.xxiv.236) Christ is speaking to her using intimate endearments: “My darling” and “My child,” and is inviting her to “behold and see” the crucified Christ as not only her creator God, but also her own brother, saviour and endless joy, who wants her to rejoice in his love. It is also “as if” Christ is saying to Julian,

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29 “enough” is a recurring term in Julian’s Showings. For example, “Thou art enough to me.”
30 “all mankind that shall be saved and rest in peace and love” (P.xxiv.235). In her text, Julian implies that all will be saved by God’s mercy, hence my interpretation here.
31 Expressed in the traditional, liturgical form of a doxology.
'Behold and see that I loved you so much before I died for you, that I would die for you. And now I have died for you and suffered willingly that I may. And now is all my bitter pain and all my hard work turned to everlasting joy and bliss to me — and to you. How should it now be that you should pray for anything that I liked but I should most gladly grant it to you’ (P.xxiv.237).32

Since Christ has died for love of her, and since her desires come from Christ within her, no other good that she desires and prays for will be denied her.

Finally, Julian for a third time repeats Christ’s: “Lo, how I loved you,” this time in past tense, perhaps more directly referring us to his Passion, and, as in the shorter Amherst text, she comments that Christ showed her all this “to make us glad and merry” (P.xxiv.237). When charging Peter with the care of his flock, the risen Jesus asked three times: “Simon son of John do you love me?” (Jn 21:15-17). Here in Julian’s text it is Christ declaring three times his love for us. The message for Julian’s readers is to contemplate Christ’s Passion, know that God’s love denies us nothing that is for our good and rejoice in knowing that God loves us so dearly and intimately.

**Medieval Mystical Context**

Julian’s description of this showing is alluding to some key aspects of medieval mysticism. I have already commented on devotion to the Holy Face. There was also the devotion to the Five Wounds of Christ,33 which was taken up by the followers of Francis of Assisi. In 1224, when staying for the last time at La Verna, Francis, like the fourteenth-century Julian of Norwich on her death-bed, was focused on Christ’s sufferings and prayed for the grace of compassion:

‘My Lord, Jesus Christ, I pray you to grant me two graces before I die: the first is that during my life I may feel in my soul and in my body, as much as possible, the pain which You, dear Jesus, sustained in the hour of Your most bitter Passion. The second is that I may feel in my heart, as much as possible, that excessive love with which You, O Son of God, were inflamed in willingly enduring such suffering for us sinners.’34

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32 Jn 15:13; Rm 8:31-39; Rm 5:5-11; 1 Jn 3:22.
33 The emblem of the Crusades (commencing 1095) was the Jerusalem Cross of the Five Wounds.
Following this prayer, Francis was given a mystical experience, the physical sign of which was his being marked with the five wounds as “another Christ.”

When Julian sees Christ gazing into the wound in his side at his cloven heart, from which has flowed his “most worthy blood and his precious water” (P.xxiv.236), she is beholding this sight from within her medieval context of devotion to Christ in his Sacred Heart and in the Eucharist. These two devotions, related to Christ’s Passion, were usually connected in practice, as is seen with the Beguines and with medieval mystics like Gertrude of Helfta (1256-1302) who made a significant contribution to the formalizing of a devotion to the Sacred Heart, which was already in existence, and which initially grew out of Pauline and Johannine theology. Gertrude saw Christ’s heart as a symbol of the love of Christ (God and man) and the Godhead for humankind. Her mystical experience of the Sacred Heart was intimately entwined with her adoration of and reception of the Eucharist. Sometimes, like the “disciple Jesus loved” (Jn 13:23), she was invited to repose on Christ’s heart where she “could distinctly hear its most sweet beating,” or she was “held “close to the opening of the wound of love.” Gertrude’s theology of the Sacred Heart is Trinitarian. In one mystical experience, Christ holds a lamp as a symbol of his heart before the eyes of Gertrude’s heart, and he tells her that his heart, “the sweetest instrument of the ever adorable Trinity … will supply all that you lack, faithfully making up for all that you entrust to it.”

‘[M]y divine heart, recognizing the frailty and inconstancy of human nature, always waits with ineffable longing to supply for whatever you entrust to it, if not by words, at least by a sign, so as to do for you whatever you are unable to do for yourself. Its omnipotence makes it act with ease; its impenetrable

35 The thirteenth-century Beguines of Northern Europe were devoted to Christ’s Passion, his Heart and the Eucharist. Regarding the Eucharist, Beguines desired to see the consecrated elements, and to receive Communion frequently. In 1264, the feast of Corpus Christi for the universal Church was established by Pope Urban IV, who while archdeacon of Liege had written a Rule for Beguines. Elizabeth T. Knuth, “The Beguines,” 5. http://www.users.csbsju.edu/~eknuth/xpxx/beguines.html [accessed June 16, 2010].
36 “The devotion to the Sacred Heart is found in England as early as Bede [d. 735], it was well known to Bernard and to the author of the Ancrène Riwle, and was flourishing in Julian’s time.” Colledge and Walsh, Book of Showings I, 57.
38 Gertrude, Herald, 83.
39 Gertrude, Herald, 188-89.
wisdom enables it to know what is best; and the goodness which is natural to
me makes me to desire with sweet and joyous benevolence to accomplish this
end.”

In this, Christ ascribes to his heart the qualities of omnipotence, wisdom and
goodness, three qualities which are commonly used in mystical writings to describe
the Trinity. When Julian writes about her mystical knowledge of the Trinity, into
which contemplation of Christ’s Passion has led her, she also uses these terms:

For the Almighty Truth of the Trinity is our Father, for he made us and keeps
us, in him. And the deep Wisdom of the Trinity is our mother [Christ] in
whom we are enclosed. And the high Goodness of the Trinity is our Lord and
in him we are enclosed and he in us (P.liv.371).

Julian understands that entering Christ’s wounded side means that we are closed
within the might, the wisdom and the goodness of the Godhead.

The wound in Christ’s side is commonly mentioned in medieval devotional
books, with this place inside Christ “often imagined as a refuge for the meditator and
associated with the hiding place in the rocks”41 of the Song of Songs. This hiding
place of contemplation within Christ’s gashed side may also be observed in the story
of Francis of Assisi who loved to pray within the chasms of Mount La Verna, where
“it was revealed to him that those striking chasms had been made in a miraculous way
at the hour of Christ’s Passion when, as the Gospel says, ‘the rocks split’.”42 For
Francis, the caverns and gorges of La Verna “became like the sores and wounds of
our Lord in which to lose himself in contemplation.”43 Using the language of courtly
love, the fourteenth-century mystic, Catherine of Sienna (1347-80), wrote in a letter to
Frate Raimondo da Capua,

Shut yourself up in the open side of God’s Son, that open hostelry so full of
fragrance that sin itself is made fragrant. There the dear bride rests in the bed
of fire and blood. There she sees revealed the secret of the heart of God’s
Son.44

40 Gertrude, Herald, 189.
41 Watson and Jenkins, Julian of Norwich, 200. “My dove, hiding in the clefts of the rock, in the covert
of the cliff, show me your face” (Sg 2:14).
42 Brown, Little Flowers, 180.
43 Rodolfo Cetoloni, The Sanctuary of La Verna, 2nd ed. (Rimini: Pazzini, 2003), 47.
44 Catherine of Sienna, Letter 31, in Harvey D. Egan, Anthology, 363-64.
For Julian, as for these others, the wound in Christ’s side is a special place to
discover the mysteries and secrets of God in contemplation. In the sixtieth chapter of
the Paris long text of *Showings*, Julian describes how the mother
may lay her child tenderly to her breast. But our tender Mother, Jesus, he may
homely lead us into his sweet breast, by his sweet open side, and show us
there in part the Godhead and the joys of heaven, with ghostly sureness of
endless bliss (P.lx.402).

In this, Julian is saying that we meet God, and behold spiritual sights “of endless
bliss” in and through our Mother Christ who leads us familiarly into his heart (symbol
of our loving God) through his wounded side.

For medieval mystics, the crucified Christ is the Image of their compassionate
God who suffers with and for them. Because their relationship with their Beloved is
the mystical bridal relationship of the Song of Songs, they share their Beloved’s
suffering.

**Beholding God’s Goodness**

Within all of the showings of Christ’s Passion, Julian is given spiritual sight or
insight of God’s goodness. This is the source of great joy for her. She writes that at
the time of the first showing,

the Trinity filled my heart with joy. And so I understood that it shall be so in
heaven without end to all that shall come there. For the Trinity is God. God is
the Trinity. The Trinity is our Maker. The Trinity is our Keeper. The Trinity
is our everlasting Lover. The Trinity is our endless joy, and our bliss, by our
Lord Jesus Christ and in our Lord Jesus Christ. And this was shown in the
first showing and in them all. For where Jesus appears the blessed Trinity, to
my sight is understood … And I was greatly astounded out of wonder and
marvel that he who is so revered and so awesome would be so homely with a
sinful creature living in this deadly [wretched] flesh (P.v.156-57).

Paradoxically, in the poverty of her own suffering, whilst lovingly suffering with
Christ, Julian’s heart is filled with joy. Like Mary, she marvels and rejoices at the
goodness of the All-holy God to her in her nothingness.
This section resumes the examination of the Westminster version of *Showings*. After the opening passage which presents Mary as model in beholding (Chapter 3), the manuscript continues with a long piece on beholding (or contemplatively knowing) God’s goodness (W.73v.9.39 – 88v.6.69). The section culminates in the beholding of God’s goodness in Christ’s Incarnation and Passion.

God is Everything That is Good

The passage begins with Julian telling us what she has been shown:

I saw that our good Lord is to us all things that are good and strengthening [comfortable] to our help. He is our clothing, which for love wraps and surrounds us [wrappith vs & wyndith vs], helps us and enables [ablyth: prepares, empowers] us, and hangs about us for tender love, that he may never leave us (W.73v.9.39 - 74.1.40).46

We are to behold the marvel of God’s unchanging goodness to us. God encloses and embraces us, helps and empowers us, tenderly “hangs about us” and will never abandon us. This is what Julian has come to know and understand about God’s love for humankind, expressed in warm and homely imagery.

We read in the Paris version that for Julian to experience and know God’s homely love in her showings is the greatest of spiritual comforts, and a foretaste of the bliss of heaven. For her, to know God’s homely love is to experience God as lovingly present, intimate, and familiar, which she thinks is greater than any other gift the Lord God could possibly give her. She confesses that she

might be ravished and almost forget [herself] for joy at this great homeliness … For truly it is the most joy that may be, to my sight, that he who is highest and mightiest, noblest and worthiest, is lowest and meekest, homeliest and most courteous. (P.vii.172).

Homeliness is a Julian term for a characteristic of God’s love for humankind. Homely may be defined as kind, familiar, simple, pertaining to the warmth of home.

45 Cf. all becloseth vs (all becloses us) (P.v.159); alle be teches vs (all guides us) (A.iii.718-19). The Westminster’s ablyth adds the notion of graced inner empowerment to an excerpt otherwise about God’s enfolding care of us.

46 P.iv.159.
Homely "implies nearness – more, an active, loving presence to us and in us on God’s part … the closeness, warmth and tenderness of the loving mother whose service is always ‘nearest, readiest and surest’."\textsuperscript{47} It is comfortable and personal, and involves intimate communion.\textsuperscript{48} One can be homely with loved family members and friends. Julian understands that God is “nearer to us than our own soul” (P.lvi.379).

Maker, Keeper, Lover

In this section of the passage,\textsuperscript{49} Julian is shown “a little thing, the quantity of a hazel nut, lying in the palm of my hand, as it seemed” (W.74.4-7.40). Words formed in her understanding tell her that this tiny thing is “all that is made … [which] lasts and ever shall for God loves it” (W.74.13.40 - 74v.2.41). In the little thing representing all that is made (including herself), Julian sees that God made it, God loves it and God keeps it. Therefore, she reasons, if God is her Creator, Lover and Keeper, she “may never have full rest nor true bliss … until I be so fastened to him that there is nothing that is made between my God and me” (W.74v.12-16.41). She must be “noughted” (W.75v.1.43) or emptied for love, of all that is not God, if she is to have true spiritual rest in knowing “our God who is all mighty, all wise and all good” (W.75.10-12.42). This is God’s desire for us, for “God will be known and wants us to rest in him” (W.75.13-14.42).

Nothing is Beyond God’s Goodness

This section\textsuperscript{50} begins by stating that God’s goodness comes down to us to “the lowest part of our need” (W.78v.3.49). Julian repeats this, and adds,

For he does not despise what he has made, neither does he disdain to serve us with the simplest office that belongs to our natural bodies,\textsuperscript{51} for love of the

\textsuperscript{47} Anna Maria Reynolds, “‘Courtesy’ and ‘Homeliness’ in the Revelations of Julian of Norwich,” 4, \url{http://www.umilta.net/homeliness.html} [accessed October 6, 2008].

\textsuperscript{48} Crampton, Shewings, 215.

\textsuperscript{49} W.74.4.40 – 75v.5.43 (P.v.159-61).

\textsuperscript{50} W.78.2.48 – 80.7.52 (P.vi.165-68).

\textsuperscript{51} Our sensuality and substance are both grounded in God. In contrast to those who would see the body as evil, Julian sees God as present in the most basic human process of excretion (W.78.12.48 -
soul that he has made to his own likeness. For as the body is clad in clothes and flesh, and the heart in the breast: so are we clad and closed in the goodness of God. Yes, and more holy\textsuperscript{52} [homly: homely], for all these may wear and waste away, but the goodness of God is ever whole and near to us without any likeness (W.78v.4.49 - 79.1.50).\textsuperscript{53}

Body and soul, we are clad and “be closed” in God’s incomparable goodness, which is always wholly with us. For the Westminster’s “without any likeness,” the Paris version has “without any comparison” (P.vi.166). In line with its approach, the Westminster version suggests the apophatic “without any image; unseen,” underlining that this is spiritual sight, which is contemplative knowledge. It is the ardent desire of our “lover” (W.79.2.50) that we always and with all our might “be ever climbing\textsuperscript{54} to his goodness” (W.79.4-5.50). It is beyond any creature to know “how much and how sweetly and how tenderly our maker loves us” (W.79.14-16.50).

We ought, therefore, writes Julian, “with his grace and with his holy presence be in spiritual sight [beholdynge] with everlasting marveling, in this [here] overpassing unmeasurable love … that our Lord has for us of his goodness” (W.79.17.50 - 79v.5.51). With God’s help we may behold God’s boundless loving goodness with the endless marveling that was Mary’s at the Annunciation. As happened for Mary, our beholding of God’s goodness leads us to fasten our will in to God’s:

We may ask of our lover with reverence all that we will. For our natural will is to have God. And the good will of God is to have us. And we may never cease in willing nor of loving, until we have him in fullness of joy. And then may we desire no more. For he wills that we be occupied in knowing and loving him, until the time comes when we shall be fulfilled in heaven (W.79v.6.51 - 80.1.52).\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{78v.10.49} SISME\textsuperscript{L} places a spiritual gloss on the passage in its Westminster translation. The Sloane version omits it.

\textsuperscript{52} SISME\textsuperscript{L} inappropriately spiritualizes homly as “holy.” Julian is saying that God loves our bodies and souls, our sensuality and substance.

\textsuperscript{53} P.vi.165-66.

\textsuperscript{54} Watson and Jenkins comment that the Westminster Cathedral manuscript’s “climbing” instead of the Paris manuscript’s “cleaving” (P.vi.166) turns the passage into “a meditation on mystical ascent.” \textit{Julian of Norwich}, 391. It is possibly an editorial alteration to link Julian’s passage with the Hilton excerpts in the manuscript, as “climbing” does not sound like Julian. Cf. W.76.17.44 and W.76v.9.45 where Julian advises us to cleave to God’s goodness.

\textsuperscript{55} P.vi.167-68.
We recall that in Mary’s reverent beholding she wisely knew the truth of God’s goodness and her own littleness, which led her to meekness, which is true humility with a loving willingness for all that God lovingly wills. In this excerpt, Julian describes our desire as our willing and loving. It is our natural will to be fastened and oned in to God, and this is what we ask of our Lover. Until this desire is fulfilled in fullness of joy in heaven, we are to be occupied in “knowing and loving” God, which is a classic description of contemplation.  

Beholding That God Does All

Beholding the goodness of God leads to beholding that God does all. This Westminster passage (W.82.8.56 – 83v.5.59) is made up of three segments selected and re-ordered from the eleventh chapter of the long text version (P.xi.188-90, 192-93, 192). To wisely and truly know and understand that God ordains all that happens in our life, both the good and the apparently not so good, finds its meaning in the knowledge that God is All-Goodness. If one’s image of God is as All-Goodness, then one rejoices that God ordains all, and lives in trusting peace.

Julian sees God “in a point” (W.82.9.56). We are to know that God is the “midpoint of all things and he does all” (W.82v.15-16.57). Just as we were created in God’s love, so too we are always kept in God’s love, and so too will we come to the fulfillment ordained for us by God. In God’s Wisdom, God ordains everything that happens, even the smallest thing. Nothing happens by chance, and all is done well.

Julian explains the meaning of what she is shown, in words she attributes to “our good Lord” (W.83.3.58):

‘See, I am God. See, I am in all things. See, I do all things. See, I never lift my hands from off my work, nor ever shall, without end. See, I lead all things to the end, to which I ordained them, from without beginning, by the same

56 John of the Cross, L.F.3.32.686.

57 Scholars generally agree that Julian’s view reflects the Pseudo-Dionysian “comparison of the Divine with the centre of a circle where all the radii meet.” Wolfgang Riehle, The Middle English Mystics, trans. Bernard Strandring (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1981), 83. Cf. “Nature is all good and fair in itself, and Grace was sent out to save Nature and keep Nature, and destroy sin, and bring again fair Nature in to the blessed point from which it came, that is God” (P.lxiii.413).

58 Julian’s version of pre-destination is that all of humankind is destined to be saved by the Might, Wisdom and Love of our Maker, Keeper, and Lover.
Might, Wisdom and Love, that I made them with. How should then anything be amiss?’ (W.83.4-13.58).

We are being led to the bliss for which we were created. Julian’s famous “All shall be well” is held in Christ’s “How should then anything be amiss?” The passage concludes strongly by reaffirming that everything is right fully ordered and always has been (W.83v.1.59). In our praying with faith, hope and love, God gradually leads us to know that, despite our ingrained and sometimes crippling perceptions to the contrary, everything about us is held in the Wisdom and Love of God. The graced understanding that God ordains all is central to the Christian tradition. To be ready for this gift, well known to the mystics of our tradition,59 we need the meekness that comes from reverently beholding the goodness of God, and our own littleness.

Beholding God’s Goodness in Christ’s Incarnation and Passion

In the Westminster manuscript the bodily showings of Christ’s Passion may be absent, but the placing of this next passage60 as the highpoint of passages on beholding God’s goodness, emphasizes Julian’s understanding of Christ, now risen, as our Way (Jn 14:6) into the apophatic knowing of the Triune God.

Having reminded us of how we may joyfully and thankfully behold God’s amazing love and joy in Christ’s dear buying of us, Julian focuses on the saving action of Christ’s Incarnation, not only in his Passion and Death. The cost to God of our redemption is to be found in Christ taking on our human form, “beginning at the sweet Incarnation, and lasting until the blessed uprising on Easter day in the morning” (W.85v.4-7.63). Once again Christ says: “I ask for nothing else of you for my travail, but that I might pay [please] you” (W.86.17.64 – 86v.2.65). Julian sees in this the chivalrous courtesy61 of the glad giver, who counts the cost as nothing, if the recipient

59 Cf. John of the Cross: “Think nothing else but that God ordains all, and where there is no love, put love, and you will draw out love” (L.27.760).

60 This lengthy Westminster passage (W.83v.5.59 – 88v.6.69) provides passages found in Chapters 22 and 23 of the long text version of the ninth showing: P.xxii.227, 228-29; P.xxiii.232, 233; P.xxii.228; P.xxiii.233-35; and in Chapter 24 (the tenth showing): P.xxv.235-37.

61 In the fourteenth century, courtesy was the key feature of chivalry and a mark of the good knight or lord. It concerned manners: hospitality, a warm welcome, gaiety and openheartedness, loyalty, generosity and compassion. See Reynolds, “‘Courtecy’ and ‘Homeliness’,” 4.
accepts the gift with gladness and thanks. The glad giver is full of “joy and delight … for he has so pleased and solaced him whom he loves” (W.86v.13-15.65). All of this is “plenteously and fully” (W.86v.16.65) shown because God wants us to reflect on God’s joyful, loving, costly work in the Incarnation and Redemption, and, in our prayerful recollection, allow God’s grace, active in our beholding, to lead us to thanking and joy. That God wants us to rejoice in Christ is a constant refrain.

Julian is led to wisely and truly know and understand that Christ’s Incarnation, Passion and Death is the most convincing evidence of how much God loves her. We are our Lord God’s “darling” (W.87v.10-11.67), and are to behold the crucified Christ as our own brother, king, Lord God, maker, and endless joy (W.87v.11-14.67). To wisely and truly behold this is mystical experience and the gift of it requires God’s strengthening of us. As we behold God’s goodness in Christ’s Passion, once more Christ urges us to “for my love, enjoy with me” (W.87v.16-17.67). We desire God, and God desires us. God’s desires and our deepest desires are the same.

Concluding Comments

This chapter has shown that the wound of compassion that Julian prays for allows her to choose the suffering Christ for her heaven. This is a marvelous oneing in a sharing of suffering. Julian is led, and leads her readers, through Christ’s Passion to the knowledge of God’s love. Julian’s God is a Trinitarian God: her Maker, Keeper, and everlasting Lover, who fills her heart with joy, and is revealed and accessible to her in and through Christ. Julian is overwhelmed by the knowledge that the all-holy God is directly and familiarly meeting with her. From her own first-hand experience of God’s homely love, Julian understands that God, far from being aloof or disinterested, on the contrary desires a homely relationship which is warm, trustful and intimate. The final section of the chapter draws on the Westminster version of Showings to explain Julian’s understanding that meeting God in this life begins with our beholding of God’s goodness,
Christ’s thrice repeated: “Lo, how I love thee,” is an important link between the bodily sights of Christ’s passion and the spiritual sights of God’s homely love.62 Just as John’s Gospel tells us to “look to the one whom they have pierced” (Jn 19:37), so too Julian teaches us to look to (behold) the loving goodness of God, revealed to us in Christ’s Passion. We are to fix our spiritual eyes on and rest our hearts in God’s love, in an endless, ongoing prayer-process as we gradually enter the wound of God’s love, which is the wound of compassion. For God “will be seen, and he will be sought, and he will abide, and he will be trusted” (P.x.182). If we gaze upon God’s love we will be “wounded” by the knowledge that God loves us. To look at God in this way is to behold God. The contemplative knowing of God is further explored in my next chapter, which examines the wound of willful longing to God.

62 This link can be clearly seen in Julian’s “as if” monastic exegesis of ‘Lo, how I loved thee’: “As if he had said, ‘My darling, behold and see your Lord … my child, behold and see … behold and see that I loved you so much’” (P.xxiv.236-37).
CHAPTER 5

WOUND OF WILFULL LONGING TO GOD

‘I it am, that makes you to love; I it am, that makes you to long, the endless fullness of all true desires’ (W.103.4-7.98).

Introduction

After a preliminary consideration of what Julian means by the wound of willfull longing to God (P.ii.151), this chapter examines relevant passages in the Westminster version of Julian’s Showings. The chapter is grounded in Julian’s teaching on Trinitarian Love: we are beclosed in God, and God is beclosed in us. From this it follows that we know both God and our self “in one” (W.101.2.94). The chapter provides a study of prayer as seeking God, and of beseeching as right full prayer (W.89.4-5.70). In this thesis, the term “prayer” is often used as Julian used it: as a holistic term to cover what happens in a life of prayer. As such, it may refer to more active forms of praying (seeking) as well as to contemplation, which I have already defined as meeting God in this life, and which Julian calls beseeching. It is in a life of prayer that we are oned in to God. We are truly saved, writes Julian, but we do not have the fullness of God’s peace and love “while we are here. Therefore it befalls us always the more to live in sweet prayer, and in lovely longing with our Lord Jesus” (W.88v.14.69 – 89.1.70).

Willfull Longing to God

Julian teaches that the wound of willfull longing to God is true longing for God by which we are made worthy for heaven, as well as, Julian understands, for

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1 Julian uses the terms: closing, beclosing and enclosing. Beclosing appears to be a language usage combination of be and closing (See P.liv.371-72). To be closed in God suggests a greater finality than to be enclosed in God. To be closed in something is to be locked away inside it. Beclosing describes being closed in God, and God in us, which is what the contemplative passages on Trinitarian Love are about.

2 The SISMEL translation of the Westminster manuscript usually does not capitalize “lord” in “lord God” or “lord Jesus.” I have done so throughout, as being the more common practice.

3 P.xl.287.
oneing in to God in this life. We recall that longing has already been mentioned in connection with compassion: Julian wants to experience compassion for Christ’s sufferings, and *afyrwarde langynge* to God (A.ii.716; P.iii.155). She understands compassion and longing to be two properties of God’s goodness (P.xxxi.256). She believes that it is through Christ that she will be led in to God, because experiencing compassion for Christ’s sufferings will give her a deep understanding of God’s loving goodness, and stir her to long for this God of love. Because of her *oneness* with Christ in suffering, she chooses Christ as her heaven (in the here and now) and trusts him to lead her from this world’s pain into bliss. A life of prayer is one of faith, hope and love.

In Julian’s text, “longing” is not always what it may seem at first glance. For example, the compiler of the Westminster version includes the following excerpt from the long text:

Also I had great desire⁴ and longing for [of] God’s gift to be delivered of this world and of this life.⁵ For often I beheld the woe that is here in this life, and the weal [wele: wellness] and the blessed being that is in heaven, and I thought sometimes, though there had been no pain in this life but the absence of our Lord God, it was more than I might bear, and this made me to mourn and anxiously to yearn [besyly to long: busily to long] (W.111v.6.115 – 112.1.116).⁶

Julian is describing being pushed to long for the relief of a life without pain, but there is more to it than this. Julian is actually saying that she often beholds the world’s woe, and looks (with faith) to the bliss that is in heaven, namely God. This is longing. It is also prayer. In addition, writes Julian, there are times when the perceived absence of

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⁴ Julian juxtaposes “desire” and “longing.” Cf. Bernard of Clairvaux’s theological approach to human desire: It “elevates desire above the level of an effective experience of yearning for the absolute and accords it an ontological reality; it is the movement of an incomplete being toward its divine completion.” Michael Casey, *Athirst for God: Spiritual Desire in Bernard of Clairvaux’s Sermons on the Song of Songs* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1988), 60. For Julian, like Bernard, desire is an inner passion for self-transcendence, whereas longing suggests more an active yearning for God which is prayer. Both desire and longing are “of God’s gift” and signify God’s active presence within her. Julian writes from an existential viewpoint.

⁵ The Amherst manuscript at this point includes: “for I would [schulde] be with my God in bliss, where I hope firmly, through his mercy to be without end” (A.xx.765). This eschatological fragment is omitted in the Westminster, Paris and Sloane versions, so it is very possibly an amendment made by Julian herself at the time of writing the long text, twenty years after the short text. The omission indicates Julian’s deepening experience of God in this life.

⁶ P.lxiv.417.
God threatens to overwhelm her. She bewails this as more suffering than she can bear. It causes her “besyly to long” (busily to long). I suggest that in this excerpt Julian is not describing longing as a feeling (as the SISMEL translation suggests) but as praying.

Julian’s writings support this interpretation:

For prayer is a righteous understanding of that fullness of joy that is [for] to come with true longing and very trust. Savouring or seeing our bliss that we are ordained to, naturally making [makyth: makes] us to long. True understanding and love with sweet meaning in our Saviour graciously makes us trust and thus we have by nature to long, and by grace to trust. (P.xlii.299).

Julian defines prayer as rightly understanding (truly knowing, experiencing) the fullness of joy that comes with true longing and very trust. Our God-given nature causes us to long for God when we savour or see God’s Love for which we are created. We find joy (and not just the pain of absence) in our longing because God graces us with trust, which comes from truly understanding and loving the sweet truth of our Saviour. All God asks of us has already been given us in our nature and by grace: we are to long for oneness with God (whose joy we taste), and to trust in Christ (the Saviour who reveals God’s great love for humankind). Furthermore, “the nearer we are to our bliss, the more we shall long, and that both by nature and by grace” (P.xlvi.310). The closer we are to God, the greater is our longing for God. Hence we may understand Julian’s prayer over many years for the wound of compassion (and afterwarde langynge), and for the wound of willfull longing to God. She wants closeness to God. In the above indented excerpt, longing is associated with joy, with truth, with love, and with trust.

In other places, Julian writes about longing connected with painful feelings, for example: Christ “waits for us, moaning and mourning, that means all the true feelings that we have in our self, of contrition, and compassion, and all moaning and mourning, because we are not oned with our Lord, and what is helpful is Christ in us”

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7 I omit the comma SISMEL imposes here on the manuscript (which does not show any stop mark). The manuscript phrase “that is for to come” means “that will come” as in the here and now, not eschatologically.

8 The manuscript has a stop mark here. I suggest it ought to be a full-stop and not a comma (as SISMEL chooses), because of makyth, which translates as “makes,” not “making” as SISMEL adjusts.
three ways of longing in God, and all to one end. The first is that he longs to teach us to know him and to love him ever more and more, as it is convenient and helpful to us. The second is that he longs to have us up into bliss as souls are when they are taken out of pain into heaven. The third is to fulfill us with bliss, and that shall be on the last day fulfilled to last for ever. For I saw, as it is known in our faith, that then pain and sorrow shall be ended for all who shall be saved (P.lxxv.457).

Firstly, God longs for us to know and love God, which is contemplation. Secondly, God longs that we be oned in to God in this life. Thirdly, God longs to fulfill us with endless bliss in heaven. Our longing for oneing in to God finds its origin in God’s thirst for us. God’s longing shall end when our longing (“pain and sorrow”) ends and we are brought in to endless bliss. Julian often uses the term “love-longing” instead of willfull longing. It is Christ’s “thirst and love-longing to have us all to gather wholly in him in endless bliss” (P.xxxi.254). It is significant that it is in the context of Christ’s Passion that she writes of Christ’s thirst, which is a “double thirst, one bodily and another ghostly” (P.xvii.210). If humankind’s longing is a share in Christ’s thirst, it is painful.

In the twelfth showing the glorious Christ tells Julian, “I it am, that makes you to love; I it am, that makes you to long, the endless fullness of all true desires” (W.103.4-7.98). Once again longing and desire are juxtaposed. Our love-longing is Christ in us as both cause and effect. To know love-longing in our heart, is to know God. For Julian to write about this, suggests that she is describing her own mystical experience of it. In love-longing, the Holy Spirit secretly and sweetly touches her with love and ones her in to God: “And thus by his sweet grace we shall in our own meek continuing prayer [communyng] unto him now in this life by many privy touchings of

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9 Contemplation is commonly described as loving knowledge of God. Cf. John of the Cross (SC.27).
10 Julian often links “love” and “longing” in relation to both Christ’s thirst for humankind, and humankind’s desire for God. Cf. P.xxxi.253; P.xl.287; P.xlii.299; P.xliv.304; P.xlvi.309-10; P.lii.358; P.lxxii.445-47; P.lxxv.457-58; et al.
11 In the Christian tradition, the theological virtues of faith, hope and love are aligned with the soul’s spiritual faculties of intellect, memory and will. Love is associated with will.
sweet spiritual sights and feeling measured to us, as our simpleness may bear it (W.96.6-14.84). 12 The wound of *willfull* longing to God is a wound which has its origin in God alone, and it leads us to love-long “until we shall die in longing for love” (W.96.16-17.84). In so dying, we are one with Christ.

Julian’s longing contains within itself a paradox of joy and suffering. The joy comes from recognising God’s loving presence in our longing. The suffering comes from the thirst we have to come fully in to God. The following section develops an understanding of the wound of *willfull* longing by grounding it in Julian’s teachings on Trinitarian Love.

**Grounded in the Trinity**

Julian’s contemplative teaching is grounded in a theology of the Trinity. In the Westminster version, this theology is presented in a long passage (W.97.6.86 – 103.16.98), 13 which is here examined in five sections.

Made for Love

The passage begins by recalling the truth and wisdom of Mary’s soul in her reverent beholding and meek beseeching. Trinitarian connotations are explicit:

Truth sees God, and wisdom beholds God, and of these two comes the third, and that is a marvelous holy delight in God, which is love. Where truth and wisdom is, truly there is love and truly coming of them both, and all of God’s making. For God is endless sovereign truth, endless sovereign wisdom, endless sovereign love unmade. And man’s soul is a creature in God, which has the same properties made, and ever more does what it was made for. It sees God, and it beholds God, and it loves God, when God joys in the creature and the creature joys in God, endlessly marvelling (W.97.6.86 – 97v.10.87). 14

Love is defined here as “marvelous holy delight in God.” Where there is truth and wisdom, there too is love. In this we read a theology of the Holy Spirit proceeding

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12 John of the Cross calls these touches wounds of love.
13 P.xliv.305-6; P.liii.370-72; P.lv.373-74; P.lvi.378-81.
14 P.xliv.305.
from the Father and the Son. The properties of the triune God are also properties of our souls. We are made in the image of God (Gn 1:26) and when we see, behold and love God, we are doing what we are created to do. Beholding in this context suggests a “holding in being” of our God. A person joys in God as God joys in him, and in this mutual enjoying, the creature marvels, for

he sees his God, his lord, his maker so high, so great and so good in relation to himself who is made, that without this the creature seems nought to itself, but the clearness and cleanness of truth and wisdom makes him to see and to be known [to know]15 that he is made for love, in which love God endlessly keeps him (W.97v.11.87 - 98.3.88).16

Like Mary at the Annunciation, in our true and wise beholding of God, we see that God is so noble, great and good to us, that we are nothing without God. We share in Truth and Wisdom; we also share in Love. We see and know that we are made for Love, and that God endlessly (without end, without limit) keeps us in Love. Being made for Love, it is of our nature to love-long for God.

Knit into God

The next segment of the Westminster passage is concerned with true and wise seeing. We are given a list of things that God “wills that we know” (the phrase is explicitly repeated four times), with “and understand” (which is not in the Paris manuscript), added on the fourth occasion. God wills that we know17 “that our soul is a life, which life of his goodness and grace shall live [leste, last] in heaven without end, loving him, thanking him and praising him” (W.98.4-9.88). Julian is using the term “soul” very simply as “life” or “being.”18 She continues: God wills that we know “that the noblest thing that he ever made is humankind” (W.98.10-12.88). Human beings are the noblest of creatures, even nobler than the angels, because “the fullest substance and the highest virtue is the blessed soul of Christ” (W.98.12-14.88). Julian

15 The Paris version has “to know” (P.xliv.306).
16 P.xliv.306.
17 My italics, to highlight the repetition.
18 Cf. Walter Hilton in the Westminster manuscript: Scale 1, W.38. Unlike Julian, Hilton describes the soul in terms of the traditional faculties of the soul: intellect, memory and will.
introduces the term “substance” to describe the essence of the soul. Included in the list of what God wants us to know is that the substance or essence of Christ’s soul has a fullness and a virtue not in anything else made by God. God wills that we know that Christ’s “dear worthy soul was precisely knit to him in the making. Which knot is so subtle and so mighty, that it is oned [in] to God, in which oneing it is made endlessly holy” (W.98.16.88 - 98v.4.89). The term “knit” can refer to the knitting together of ideas or broken bones, or to our being knit together in our mother’s womb (Psalm 139). Julian is using more the homely image of knitting with yarn, in which the knot (the joining) is so sotyl (subtle, intricate) and so strong, that the piece of knitting which is Christ, is fastened into the fabric or Being of the Godhead, being oned in to God and made endlessly holy like God is.

Furthermore, God wills that we know and understand (W.98v.5-6.89) that all the souls that shall be saved in heaven without end are knitted in this knot [with Christ], and oned in this oneing, and made holy in this holiness. And for great endless love that God has to all mankind, he makes no departing in love between the blessed love of Christ and the least soul that shall be saved (W.98v.5-16.89).21

God wants us to know and understand that we are endlessly loved the same as Christ is loved, and that we are knit with Christ in to God, oned in to the oneing of Christ with his Father, and made holy with the holiness of the Spirit.22 Julian explains that “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” (W.99.2-7.90).23 Julian

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19 Our substance is the ‘higher part’ of human nature: our essence or deepest being. Our sensuality is the ‘lower part’ of human nature: “our humanity, our body and soul, how we exist in the world.” Hide, Gifted Origins, 84. Julian teaches that we have a substantial soul and a sensual soul, and they are oned in us through Christ. Cf. “Julian’s understanding of the image of God is that it embraces the whole man, including his bodiliness, a theory which has been put forward in traditional teaching, but not very frequently.” Riehle, Middle English Mystics, 148.

20 The omission of “in” in the SIMEL translation is unfortunate. To be oned in to God offers far more than to be oned to God.

21 P.liii.369 – liv.370.

22 Cf. Jn 17:21-23. I have articulated Julian’s theology in Trinitarian terms which I believe accords with her meaning. We share in the oneness of Father, Son and Spirit.

23 Julian’s constant refrain of “all that shall be saved” means all of humankind. Although Julian is well aware of, and respectful of, Church teaching about damnation, she herself is not shown this in her showings. In this particular quotation she indicates that it is because of Christ that all souls shall be saved.
is saying that she has come to know and understand in her prayer that with Christ, she and all of humankind are knit and oned in to God, and made endlessly holy.

Two Understandings

The Trinitarian passage now moves deeply into the very heart of Julian’s teaching on meeting God. We should rejoice “highly” (W.99.7.90) that we have God dwelling in our soul, which has been made as God’s dwelling place, but we should rejoice “much more highly” (W.99.9-10.90) that our soul dwells in God who is unmade. Julian is talking about two stages of meeting God in contemplation. Firstly,

A high understanding it is inwardly to see and to know that God which is our maker dwells in our soul (W.99.15.90 - 99v.1.91).

Beginners in prayer usually pray to God as a separate entity “out there” until they are given a spiritual experience in which they inwardly “see” and “know” that God dwells within their soul (their sensual soul.) To encounter God’s presence within is a “high understanding” of meeting God and leads into a new, more intimate relationship. Encountering God’s presence within includes coming to recognize the longing within us as God’s presence.

In a further stage, God gives another gift:

And a higher understanding it is and more inwardly to see and to know our soul that is made dwells in God in substance, of which substance by God we be that we be (W.99v.2-7.91).

24 Julian here means soul as sensual soul (P.li.340).
25 Julian here refers to soul as substance. Cf. “For I saw most surely that our substance is in God. And also I saw that in our sensuality God is” (P.lv.375).
26 These are not the stages usually described by spiritual writers: purgative, illuminative and unitive.
27 I indent these small quotations because of their significance in Julian’s teaching on meeting God.
28 P.lv.371.
29 P.lv.371.
It is a higher and deeper contemplative gift of mystical understanding “to see and to know” that the substance of our being dwells in God. We have our being in God. Julian is not talking about cerebral seeing, knowing and understanding. She is trying to put words on her mystical experience of being graced with “seeing” and “knowing” that she is one with God: that she exists in God and is of God; and that her longing is God’s longing. Seeing and knowing (experiencing) our *oneness* with God takes place in prayer.\(^{30}\)

Julian’s theology is firmly based in the Johannine tradition that humankind is led by Christ in to the oneness of God: “I have given them the glory you gave to me, that they may be one as we are one” (Jn 17:22). Our deep longing for God comes from our being knit with Christ in to God in our making.

Beclosed

In the next segment, Julian describes our being *beclosyd* in God, and God in us. She tells us that

> the almighty truth of the Trinity is our Father. For he made us and keeps us in him. And the deep wisdom of the Trinity is our Mother, in whom we be all enclosed [be closyd]. And the high goodness of the Trinity is our Lord, and in him we are closed [be closyd], and he is in us. All mighty, all wisdom and all goodness; one God, one Lord and one goodness (W.99v.8.91 – 100.1.92).\(^{31}\)

Julian’s theology of the Trinity underlines the “almighty truth,” the “deep wisdom,” and the “high goodness” of the triune God, to which is added the properties of Fatherhood, Motherhood and Lordship. In the medieval world, the Father, Mother and Lord had primary caring roles. We are beclosed in the all mighty truth of the Father, in the deep wisdom of the Son, and in the high goodness of the Holy Spirit who lives

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\(^{30}\) The Westminster version omits the next small section of the long text: “And I saw no difference between God and our substance but as it were all God. And yet I understood that our substance is in God, that is to say, that God is God and our substance is a creature in God” (P.liv.371). The first sentence contains a powerful and helpful description of what Julian experiences in her meeting with God. Perhaps the Westminster author thought it too theologically confronting for the times, or that the point had already been made, which is true. Regarding the second sentence, if, as Kempster suggests, the Westminster version of Julian’s *Showings* was compiled to protect the laity from error, it is curious that it should be omitted because it certainly appears to allay fears of unorthodoxy. See Kempster, “Julian of Norwich,” 193.

\(^{31}\) P.liv.371.
within us. And the three divine Persons are beclosed in us. With scriptural connotations, the unity of the Triune God (so richly described as Truth, Wisdom, Goodness, Fatherhood, Motherhood, and Lordship) is affirmed: “one God, one Lord and one goodness.” There is oneness in God because of the mutual presence and indwelling of the three divine Persons, and, being closed in God, humankind shares in this mutual indwelling and oneness.\(^\text{32}\)

The second part of this segment also reflects the medieval understanding of the Johannine literature. Because we are knit in to Christ (W.98.14-17.88), we share in the working of the Trinity, which is the Trinity’s life of mutual giving of Self to the Other (W.100.1-9.92). We share, too, in the joy, bliss and liking of the Trinity in this working. Julian concludes, “And of all things that belong to us, it is most liking to our Lord that we enjoy in this joy, which is in the blessed Trinity of our salvation” (W.100.12-16.92). We are to rejoice that we are beclosed in the love of the Trinity, and share in Trinitarian union. In this life, we come to know the loving, joyful life of the Trinity when we are led by grace to recognize our love-longing as the love-longing of the Triune God in which we share.

**Our Soul is in God**

The final Trinitarian segment explains the connection between human wholeness (or truth) and oneness with God. According to Julian, since our soul is grounded in God, we will know both God and our soul “in one” (W.101.1-2.94). We come in to our self and to God through the longing that is given to us in our nature and by grace.\(^\text{33}\) God is nearer to us than we are to our own soul, and, to know who we truly are, that is, our identity, “we are to seek it where it is, and that is in God” (W.100v.15-16.93). The segment begins with an assertion:

I saw full surely that it is readier to us and more easy to come to the knowing of God than to the knowing of our own soul. For our soul is so deep grounded in God and so endlessly treasured that we may not come to the knowing

\(^\text{32}\) The reciprocal presence or indwelling of the three divine Persons in one another is known as the doctrine of *perichoresis*. Julian extends it to include humankind. See discussion on this doctrine in Hide, “Gifted Origins,” 118.

\(^\text{33}\) Julian’s longing is a lot more than a passive yearning.
thereof until we have first knowing of God, which is the maker to whom it is oned (W.100.17.92 – 100v.9.93).³⁴

Since we exist in God, in to whom we are knit and oned in our making, we only truly know ourselves when we know God, and ourselves in God. This is not an intellectual knowing, but more an acceptance and possession.³⁵ For human wholeness we need to desire wisely, and to truly know our own soul [selfe soule (W.101.3-4.94)]. We can only know the truth of our soul when we seek for it within our longing for God. In knowing the One, we know the other. Led by the Holy Spirit,³⁶ we learn that “God is nearer to us than our own soul, for he is ground in whom our soul stands, and he is the means [mene, means, intermediary] that keeps the substance and the sensuality together so that it shall never depart” (W.101.5-10.94). If we “seek in to our Lord God in whom [our soul] is enclosed” (W.101v.2-3.95), that is, open ourselves to God in prayer, the Holy Spirit will lead us to a true knowledge of ourselves. It is in the opening of ourselves to God that we come to know that our soul “sits in God, in true rest, and our soul stands in God in sure strength, and our soul is naturally rooted in God, in endless love” (W.101.11-15.94). Our soul that sits and stands and is rooted in God is our being which is of substance and sensuality.

Because of Christ’s sharing in both our substance and our sensuality, he is central to Julian’s understanding of our selfe soule. She sees our soul as a city: “that worshipful city that our Lord Jesus sits in, it is our sensuality, in which he is enclosed, and our natural substance is beclosed in Jesus Christ, with the blessed soul of Christ sitting in rest in the Godhead” (W.101v.9-16.95).³⁷ This important quotation sums up Julian’s teaching that Christ rests in our soul, and our soul rests in Christ in the Godhead. Because Christ’s humanity is one with the Godhead, she is “all occupied”³⁸ with the Triune God within her soul. This is immediate apophatic experience of the blessed Godhead. She is drawn into the life of the Trinity through her relationship

³⁴ P.lvi.378-79.
³⁶ Julian assigns to Christ and the Holy Spirit a similar role of working with grace.
³⁷ P.lvi.380.
³⁸ See the Paris version: “And the soul is all occupied with the blessed Godhead, that is sovereign Might, sovereign Wisdom and sovereign Goodness” (P.lxviii.431).
with Christ. Thus, to know ourselves, Julian teaches that we must first truly know that we are knit with Christ in to God, and that our soul is the dwelling-place of the Triune God.

In our longing for God, we are led through our beholding of God’s goodness into humility. Coming to a full knowing of our *selfe soule* includes coming to a true knowledge of our littleness as we seek in to the beholding of God in our prayer. It includes coming to peace with weakness and fallibility, for if we want to be at peace with our soul, having “communing and dalliance therewith” (W.101.17.94 – 101v.1.95), we need to wisely and truly know ourselves as we are. Until we are “led so deep in to God that we may verily and truly know our own soul” (W.102.2-5.96), which means wisely and truly know that we are a soul of substance and sensuality oned in to God, “it is right that we shall be in longing and in penance” (W.101v.17.95 - 102.2.96). This sort of struggle takes place in prayer, in which Christ gradually draws us to clearly know God, and ourselves in God.

Julian teaches that coming to know who we are takes place within the context of longing and trust. It is a process in which seeking for God and seeking for the peaceful, truthful, and whole possession of our self are the one search. It is a lengthy process in which, by the grace of Christ’s Passion, and by Christ’s continuing mercy and grace at work within us, our sensuality is fully “brought up into” our substance, and we are made “fully holy.”39 With Christ we are knit into God in our making and we share in the life of the Trinity. We may now examine what Julian means by seeking God.

**Seeking in to Beholding**

In a passage which is a careful compilation of three long text excerpts,40 Julian describes seeking in terms of desire. She stresses that our desires have their origin in God. Lacking spiritual vision and wisdom in this life, we can never seek or desire God until God graciously shows us something of God’s self, and then “are we stirred by the same grace to seek him with great desire so to see him more blissfully”

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39 Chapter 6 of the dissertation examines how our sensuality is brought up in to our substance in God.
40 W.80.7.52 – 82.8.56 (P.x.181; P.x.186-87; P.x.187-88).
Thus, Julian can say, “I saw him and I sought him and I had him and wanted him” (W.80.17.52 - 80v.1.53). Our continued seeking pleases God, for we “may do [no]41 more than seeking, suffering and trusting” (W.80v.6-8.53), which is a good description of longing, until we are given “the clearness of finding … through a special grace of God, when it is his will” (W.80v.10-12.53). We seek God in our faith, hope and love, and we behold God when God allows us to find the One we are desiring/seeking. Our persevering seeking can be painful to us but draws a rich reward. In our praying, the Holy Spirit teaches us how to behold God, and leads us by grace to the meekness and virtues which come of beholding God truly (W.81.8-16.54). For our part, God is most worshipped when we fasten ourselves to God alone “with true trust either in seeking or in beholding” (W.81.16.54 - 81v.1.55), which is all God asks of us. Fastening ourselves in to God alone is honouring the longing within us.

According to Julian, God requires three things of us in our prayer of seeking into beholding.42 Firstly, helped by grace and as much as we can, we are to “seek willingly and busily, without sloth … gladly and merrily without unskillful heaviness and vain sorrow” (W.81v.6-10.55). Thus, we are to pray faithfully, strenuously seeking God wherever God is to be found, and we are not to succumb to despondency.43 Secondly, for as long as our short life lasts, we are to “abide with [God] steadfastly for his love without complaining and striving against him” (W.81v.11-13.55). Thus, we are to cling to God in our longing, and remain there patiently. Thirdly we are to “trust mightily with a fully sure faith” (W.81v.15-17.55), that we will behold God, for God wants us to know that God “will appear suddenly and blessedfully to all his lovers” (W.82.1-3.56). We are to firmly trust that we will experience God’s presence. Again, what Julian is describing in these three properties of our prayer is how we pray with the theological virtues of faith, hope and love. In a

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41 SISMELOmits. Cf. P.x.186.

42 Cf. Paul Molinari interprets the three properties of seeking into beholding as three stages in contemplative development. See Julian of Norwich, 122 ff. Writing in the 1950s and placing Julian’s teaching within the spiritual thinking of that time, Molinari looks at Julian’s writings through a stages lens, placing a construct on Julian’s thought which reflects the Poulain debate of the early twentieth century. For a summary of this debate, see McGinn, Foundations, 278-79. It is no longer necessary to interpret Julian’s thought through this lens.

43 Julian berates herself for her heaviness and sorrow (P.xxvii.243).
similar manner, in the long text version, Julian describes her prayer when she is tormented by the fiend.  

Although God’s working in us is secret, it “will be perceived, and his appearing shall be swift and sudden” (W.82.4-6.56). Julian is not talking about the suddenness of the final coming of Christ at the end of time. She is talking about our receiving the grace of reverently beholding God when we suddenly know (experience) in our prayer the goodness of God. It is a gift given when God wills, and cannot be manufactured by us. Another name for this gift is contemplation. Julian concludes the passage on seeking into beholding by encouraging us to recognize and acknowledge our longing. God wants us to believe that beholding God is for all God’s lovers, because God is “full hende [merciful, gracious], homly [homely], and curteys [courteous] blessed mutte he [God] be” (W.82.6-8.56).

When the God of our love-longing takes us from actively seeking into a silent oneness, we are beseeching. The next section examines Julian’s teaching on the “right full prayer” (W.89.4-5.70) of beseeching.

**Beseeching: “Prayer oneth the soul to God”**

The quotation: “Prayer oneth the soul to God” (P.xliii.300) is to be found at the door leading from the church into Julian’s anchorage at Norwich. It recalls the first property (requirement) of our prayer discussed in the last section, and is appropriately attached to a discussion of what Julian calls “right full prayer” (W.89.4-5.70), which is prayer in all its fullness, as well as the right sort of prayer. As we saw in the introduction to this chapter, although truly saved, we do not have fullness of peace and joy in this life, and “it befalls us always the more [evermore] to live in sweet prayer, and in lovely longing with our Lord Jesus” (W.88v.6.69 - 89.1.70).

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44 “And our good Lord God gave me grace mightily to trust in him and to comfort my soul with bodily speech … my bodily eyes I set upon the same Cross there which I had seen in comfort before that time, my tongue with speech of Christ’s passion and rehearsing the faith of holy Church, and my heart fastened upon God with all the trust and my might” (P.1xx.437). Note the bodily and mental activity coupled with the fastening of the heart with all her trust and strength.

45 SISME spiritualises homly as “humble”.

46 “seek willingly and busily without sloth” (W.81v.6-7.55).
Right full prayer is a sweet sharing in lovely longing with Christ. For Julian, right full prayer is beseeching, with thanking inseparrably connected. I argue that beseeching is not “intercessory” prayer as many Julian commentators suggest.47 Beseeching is at the heart of Julian’s teaching on meeting God.

The Right Full Prayer of Beseeching

The major beseeching passage (W.89.1.70 – 91.15.74)48 begins: “Also our Lord showed for prayer, in which showing I saw two conditions49 in our Lord’s meaning. One is right full prayer. And the other is sure trust” (W.89.1-6.70). These are the two underlying conditions that we need to have present in our praying. After a brief digression on trust, which is useful because it reminds her readers that trust goes hand in hand with longing and is a crucial element of prayer, Julian engages with the condition of “right full prayer.” On such an important matter, Julian gives us Christ’s own words. In the following excerpt, in order to be true to the manuscript, it is necessary to make significant alterations to the SISMEL translation. The manuscript word and my translation of it are in brackets:

‘I am ground of your prayer [besekyng: beseeching]. First it is my will that you have it, and I make you to will it. How should it then be that you should not have your prayer for it [besekyng: beseeching], since I make you to pray [besekyng: beseech] it, and you pray [besekyst: beseech] it’ (W.89v.2-10.71).50

Our beseeching originates in Christ, who makes us will and beseech the beseeching he has already willed for us. At this point, Julian herself explains some of the phrases from the above excerpt.51 In the words: “And you pray [besekyst: beseech] it,” Julian

47 For example, in an annotation Watson and Jenkins clearly consider beseeching to be intercessory prayer: “Beseeching … holy gost intercessory prayer.” Julian of Norwich, 248.
48 P.xli.289-92.
49 Latin condicio: agreement, stipulation, circumstances, in COED, 298.
50 In the Westminster version of this quotation, SISMEL translates besekyng (or its derivatives) as “prayer,” “prayer for it,” “pray,” and “pray.” In the Paris version (P.xli.290), SISMEL uses “beseeching,” “request,” “seek,” and “seeking.” The translations suggest an understanding of beseeching as intercessory prayer. In the Paris version the use of sekyst and sekyng (as opposed to besekyst and besekyng in the Westminster) is more active than “beseeching.” It is significant that the author of the Westminster version, a manuscript for contemplatives, rearranges the phrases and uses only derivatives of besekyng.
51 I will consider the remaining phrases when Julian herself addresses them (W.92.7.76 – 92v.14.77).
describes Christ’s great pleasure in our beseeching, and the “endless reward that he will give us for our seeking [besekyngis: beseechings]” (W.89v.17.71 - 90.1.72). In the words, “How should then this be?”, Julian is shown that “it is the most impossible thing that may be that we should pray for [besoke: beseech] mercy and grace, and not have it. For all things that our Lord makes us to seek [besoke: beseech], himself has ordained it to us from without beginning” (W.90.5-11.72). Mercy and grace are the two ways that God works in our souls. In beseeching mercy and grace, we are surrendering to God’s mercy and grace. Our wills are aligned with God’s will for God longs to give us mercy and grace.

Julian then repeats, with an addition (which I have italicized), Christ’s: “I am ground of your prayer and of your beseeching” (W.90v.1-2.73), indicating a relationship between prayer and beseeching, with Christ being ground of both. Prayer and beseeching are apparently not exactly the same thing. Julian emphasises the importance of our knowing that Christ is ground of our prayer and beseeching: “And our Lord wills that this be known of all his lovers on earth. And the more that we know it, the more should we seek [besoke: beseech] it, if it [be] wisely taken. And so is our Lord’s meaning” (W.90v.2-8.73). This is a significant segment and bears pondering. Christ’s meaning is that he wants all his lovers to know (in their hearts) him as ground of their prayer and beseeching. The more that they know Christ as ground of their prayer and beseeching, the more they should beseech to know Christ as ground of their prayer and beseeching. Right full prayer “wisely taken” is beseeching in which they truly know in their hearts (experience) that their deepest desire originates in the depths of God, that is, that their longing is God’s longing.

52 “For I beheld the property of mercy, and I beheld the property of grace, which have two manners of working in one love. Mercy is a pitiful property which belongs to motherhood in tender love. And grace is an honourable [worshipful] property, which belongs to royal lordship in the same love. Mercy works [in] keeping, allowing, reviving and healing, and all is of tenderness of love. And grace works with mercy, raising, rewarding, endlessly surpassing [overpassing] that [what] our loving and our travail deserve” (P.xlviii.320).

53 Cf. “I am ground” (P.xli.291). The text and what follows (in both Westminster and Paris manuscripts) is remarkably similar to a passage placed significantly in the final Paris chapter, with the additional, “For he will have it known more than it is” (P.lxxxvi.489).

54 In the Amherst manuscript, Julian includes as prayer Pater Nosters, Aves and Credos, and prayers for our even-Christians and all humankind (A.xix.761). Julian’s use of the word ‘prayer’ as an umbrella term has already been commented on.

In explaining beseeching, Julian clearly states,

Wise seeking is a true, gracious, lasting will of the soul, oned and fastened [in to] the will of our Lord God himself. He is the first receiver of our prayer, it seems to me, and he takes it right thankfully and highly enjoys it. He sends it up above and sets it in the treasury, where it shall never perish (W.90v.8-17.73).  

Beseeching is “wise seeking.” I am beseeching when, in truth and wisdom and grace (Triune God), my soul’s will (love) is lastingly oned and fastened in to the will (love) of our Lord God himself. Mary’s beholding of her Maker with wisdom and truth leads her into beseeching: “Lo, me here, God’s handmaiden.” With great delight, God continually receives our beseeching, keeping it safely and honorably in the Divine Presence, where our beseeching fulfills all our longing, for this is true rest with nothing between my God and me (W.74v.15-16.41). Beseeching is God-given contemplation.

When we beseech (beseke), we are invited into a place which is beyond seeking, and beyond feeling. The soul’s desire (longing) is God’s desire (P.xliii.301). Drawn by its longing and its “godly will” (P.xxxvii.277), the soul fastens all its longing in to love that is deeper than can be described. Beseeching is a

56 The Paris manuscript has a significant variation: “Beseeching is a true and gracious lasting will of the soul oned and fastened in to the will of our Lord, by the sweet secret working of the Holy Spirit. Our Lord himself, he is the first receiver of our prayer [as] to my sight” (P.xli.292). There is mention of Christ, and of the Holy Spirit. By contrast, the Westminster manuscript has eliminated explicit mention of Christ and the Holy Spirit, in favour of a more apophatic approach to beseeching. The Sloane version (S.xli.564) also has a significant variation. It follows the Paris version, but the word “new” has been substituted for “true”, which downplays the endless truth of our beseeching. The Sloane definition of beseeching encourages the view that the fastening and oneing of our will into God’s will is something which happens to us at a particular point of the contemplative journey, after which it is lasting. Molinari follows this view: “and hence we may arrive at the stage in which the will is united to God.” Julian of Norwich, 108. I would argue that Julian is actually talking about beseeching as a contemplative experience of the oneing of our godly will and God’s will. Mary was beseeching at the Annunciation. Christ was beseeching in Gethsemane.

57 “be” as a prefix can mean all over, all round. COED, 116.

58 “in each soul that shall be saved is a godly will that never assented to sin nor ever shall. Which will is so good that it may never will evil, but ever more continually it wills good and works good in the sight of God” (P.liii.365).

59 Cf. “Only the touch of the Spirit can inspire a song like this, and only personal experience can unfold its meaning … It is a tune you will not hear in the streets, these notes do not sound where crowds assemble; only the singer hears it and the one to whom he sings – the lover and the beloved.” Bernard of Clairvaux: On the Song of Songs I, trans. Kilian Walsh (Collegeville, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1971), Sermon 1:VI.11.6-7.
non-active, deeply fine-tuned energy deep within, a being overshadowed, a “sweetly swallowing” (W.96v.9.85) and losing of self in God. It is being fastened into the Trinity by the knitting and oneing of one’s will (love) in to God’s. It is responsiveness, kenosis, nughting, dying. It is the prayer of the Trinity. In Showings, we see Julian’s beseeching as she is drawn from the deadly dread of her wounds and dying into the joy of true knowledge of herself in God. Knowing what is happening takes place in the soul in the midst of the heart (P.lxviii.430). According to the unknown author of the Cloud of Unknowing (late 14th century), to beseech is to

\[ \text{lene listely (incline lovingly to this meek stirring of love in thine heart and follow thereafter ... It is nothing else but a good and according will unto God, and a manner of wellpaidness and a gladness that thou feels in thy will of all that he doth. Such a good will is the substance of all perfection.} \]

Jan van Ruusbroec (1293-1381) calls it “the dark stillness in which all the loving are lost.”\(^61\) It is a loving turning inward always, becoming who we are, divine enjoyment, an abyss of namelessness.

Thanking and Joy

To experience the wise and true fastening and oneing of our will (love) in to God, is to experience great joy “with endless worshipful thanking of him” (W.91.6-7.74). And God is “full glad and merry of our prayer. He looks thereafter and he would have it. For with his grace it makes us like to himself in condition, as we be in nature” (W.91.7-13.74). Thanking and joy are integral to beseeching. Julian defines thanking as

\[ \text{a true inward knowing with great reverence and lovely dread, turning ourself with all our might into the working that our lord God stirred us to, enjoying and thanking him inwardly. And sometimes with plenteousness, it breaks out into voice, and says, ‘Good lord, grant mercy, blessed must you be’ (W.91.16.74 - 92.91v.10.75).} \]

\(^{60}\) The Cloud of Unknowing and the Book of Privy Counselling, ed. Phyllis Hodgson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1944), Chapter 49, 92.


\(^{62}\) P.xl.294.
Deeply recollected (oned in God), we are aware of what God is working within us in our beseeching, and with reverent and “lovely dread” we embrace it, so that our beseeching flows into thanking and joy. Sometimes our thanking and joy overflow and we break out in (inner) praise of God. Right full prayer is beseeching, that is, the fastening and oneing of our will (love) into God’s will (love), which flows into thanking and joy. Mary’s beseeching leads to her praising God in the Magnificat. Christ’s beseeching in the garden leads through his hard Passion to Resurrection joy.

Seeking into Beseeching

We are exhorted to pray (in this context: to beseech) “though you think it not help [savour] you” (W.91.14-15.74). We are to resist the temptation to think that we ought to be busy actively seeking, rather than allowing ourselves to rest in God. However, sometimes we are not able to beseech because our heart feels dry, or we are tempted (distracted, in torment); or our beseeching, like Christ’s in Gethsemane, does not flow immediately into thanking and joy. Then, writes Julian, our heart is driven by reason and grace to cry upon our Lord with voice rehearsing his blessed Passion and his great goodness, and so the virtue of our Lord’s words turn in to the soul and quickens the heart and enters in by his grace in to true working, and makes it to pray full blessedly. To enjoy in our lord God, it is a lovely thanking in his sight (W.91v10.75 - 92.7.76).64

Our longing, our human intelligence, and God’s Spirit send us urgently to meditate on the crucified Christ and his great goodness, where his words enter into us and work in us, leading us to Resurrection joy (contemplation) in our beseeching. Beseeching is apophatic contemplation, without images. There are times when we need to more actively seek. It is then that we pray kataphatically, turning to Christ in his Passion, and allowing him to bring us into the apophatic beseeching in which we fasten and one our love/will into God’s. This is what Julian is about when she is tempted by the devil on her deathbed. Rehearsing Christ’s Passion and the Creed draws her back into contemplative peace (P.lxx.437). God delights in our thanking and joy, and it is God’s grace working in us which brings this about in our beseeching.

63 Our experience tells us that thanking and joy are the same thing.

64 P.xl.294-95.
In Julian’s right full prayer of beseeching (with thanking and joy), our will (love) is worked into God’s will (love). In the right full prayer of beseeching, oneing takes place. My understanding of Julian’s beseeching is not commonly held by Julian scholars.65

Three Things Belonging to Our Prayer

In a short passage (W.92.7.76 – 92v.14.77),66 significantly following straight on from her teaching on beseeching in both the Westminster and the long text versions, Julian sums up her teaching on right full prayer by explaining the remaining phrases in the words shown her by Christ in the key excerpt on beseeching (W.89v.3-10.71). As a good teacher reinforcing the lesson just taught, Julian begins: “God wills that we have true understanding … in three things that belong to our prayer” (W.92.7-11.76).

The first thing we are to truly understand is “by whom and how that our prayer springs” (W.92.11-13.76). Julian refers us to two of the phrases given her by Christ: “I am ground” (W.92.14.76)67 and “First, it is my will” (W.92.16.76).68 Because of God’s goodness, human beings are grounded in the eternal Being of God by being knit in to Christ. Julian reaffirms that our beseeching has its ground or origin in Christ, and it is given to us because of God’s goodness (love/will). Meeting God in this life is an organic movement, beginning with our desires, which originate in the ground of God’s love-longing.

65 Cf. “For prayer (oratio) meant ‘interceding with God,’ asking – or, as Julian calls it, ‘beseking.’ the natural expression, in practice, of her seeking. This is clearly the sense in which Julian writes of prayer in her Revelation: prayer, that is, as distinct from contemplation, as seeking is distinct from beholding. Julian’s ‘evencristen’ are ‘besekers,’ even if not, therefore, less than contemplatives.” Turner, Julian of Norwich, 149-50. I disagree with Turner’s definition of “prayer (oratio)” as intercessory seeking or beseeching (with seeking and beseeching understood to be the same thing). I have argued that Julian’s seeking is active prayer (oratio), which may flow in to beseeching, which is contemplation (contemplatio).

66 P.xlii.295-96.

67 “I am ground of your prayer [besekyng, beseeching]” (W.89v.3-4.71). For discussion of “ground” see Chapter 3, 74, N.33.

68 “First it is my will that you have it” (W.89v.4-5.71).
The second thing we are to truly understand is “in what manner and how we should pray” (W.92.17.76 – 92v.1.77). Julian refers us to Christ’s words: “I make you to will it” (W.92v.5.77). She explains that Christ makes us want to beseech, in which, by Christ acting in us, “our will be turned into the will of our Lord God enjoying” (W.92v.2-3.77). Because Julian writes this in the context of a passage which provides a summary of her teaching on the right full prayer of beseeching, it would seem that Julian is talking specifically about the surrendering involved in beseeching, rather than the oratio stage of lectio divina. This is confirmed when we turn to what Julian writes about the third thing belonging to our prayer.

The third thing we are to truly understand is “the fruit and end of our prayer” (W.92v.7.77). The fruit and end of our prayer and beseeching is “to be oned and like to our Lord in all things” (W.92v.8-9.77). The organic movement into oneing with God begins with active desires, and Christ takes us through our longing into the surrendering of beseeching in which we become one with him. If we are one with Christ, then we are like him in all things. We are to experience this. This is the meaning of the “lovely lesson” (W.92v.11.77) on beseeching, and the purpose of this showing. In our nature, God “made us so noble and so rich that we work his will and his worship evermore” (P.lvii.384). In the wound of willful longing to God, our godly will enables us to responsibly participate in our oneing with Christ when we follow the longing of our heart and give ourselves to praying and beseeching. We are to be encouraged by the knowledge that Christ will graciously help us, and “make it so as he says himself, blessed must he be” (W.92v.12-14.77).

Julian returns now to the second condition or stipulation of our praying. This is sure trust. Julian sees beseeching and sure trust as contemplative dimensions of all of our praying, although not all of our praying may contain them. Trust accompanies our longing as it flows through seeking and into beseeching.

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69 “I make you to will it” (W.89v.5-6.71).

70 See W.89.6.70.
This passage (W.92v.15.77 – 94v.3.81) correlates with a single segment from the long text version (P.xlii.296-98). It is Christ’s will working in us that “our prayer and our trust be both alike large” (W.92v.16-17.77). Not only are our prayer and trust to be like each other in largeness, but they are to be large like Christ’s prayer and trust. If we have large trust, we give God full worship in our prayer, and we avoid delaying and hurting ourselves. Lack of trust indicates that we know not truly that our Lord God is ground himself of whom our prayer springs. And also … we know not, that it is given to us by his grace of his great and tender love. For if we knew this, it would make us trust in having our Lord’s gift [to have of our Lord’s gift] all that we desire (W.93.6-14.78).71

In explaining these words, Julian refers once more to mercy and grace. In our beseeching, we surrender ourselves to the mercy and grace of God, who is the ground of the surrender of our beseeching. If we are tempted to think our need for mercy and grace is unanswered, we are not to become discouraged, but to trust that God has something better in mind. Our trust comes from knowing that we have our being in Christ (W.93v.10.79 - 94.1.80).

The passage concludes: “By the gracious light of himself” (W.94.1-2.80), God wills that we have understanding of three amazing things: our creation, our redemption, and all that God has lovingly given us (W.94.5-11.80). It is to be for us as if 72 we hear God saying, “Behold and see that I have done all this before your prayer, and now you are, and you pray to me” (W.94.12-15.80). We are also to behold and see our neediness. Led by the Truth and Wisdom of the Trinity, we are graced with meekness and are able to trust in God. Trusting like this is beseeching: the true, wise, gracious and lasting oneing and fastening of our will/love in to the will/ love of God.73 The two conditions of our praying reflect the unity of the theological virtues, because beseeching is faithful love/will, and sure trust is hope.74

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71 P.xlii.296.
72 “as if”: monastic exegetical method.
73 The Paris version of this passage continues on, further supporting my interpretation: “And in the beholding of this with thanking, we ought to pray for the deed that is now being done, and that is, that
Beseeching *Ones* Us in to God

The next Westminster passage (W.94v:2.81 – 97:6.86) correlates with P.xliii.301-4 except for the first three words of the first sentence which are found in P.xlii.298. The Westminster sentence most likely contains editorial error, but it is obviously meant to be about coming in to the beholding of God because the passage it introduces is about beholding God when beseeching *ones* us in to God.

In the right full prayer of beseeching, “we see not for the time what more we should pray, but all our intent, with all our might is set wholly into the beholding of him” (W.94v.4-8.81). This prayer, writes Julian, is

a high and unperceivable prayer, to my sight. For all the cause why we pray is oned into the sight and the beholding of him to whom we pray, marvelously enjoying with reverent dread and such great sweetness and delight in him that we can not pray for anything [literally, we can not pray no thing] but as he stirs us to at the time [literally, as he stirs us for the time] (W.94v.9.81 – 95.2.82).

The right full prayer of beseeching is “a high and unperceivable prayer.” This prayer is not in the realm of the sensory: it is contemplation. We reverently behold God with great delight, and God’s movement within us is our prayer. When we “plainly behold [God], by special grace, seeing no other needs,” then we follow him and he draws us into him by love” (W.95v.5-8.83). The more we see God in this way, the more grace kindles our desire for God (W.95.3-5.82), that is, the greater is our longing. But when we are “tempested and troubled, and left to [ourselves]” (W.95.9-11.82), God follows us and helps our desire, that is, encourages our longing, while we he rule and guide us to his honour in this life and bring us to his bliss, and therefore he has done all” (P.xlii.298).

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74 Cf. A.xix.760-61.
76 The SISMEL translation misleadingly implies active intercessory prayer.
77 Cf. John of the Cross describing the birth of the Bridegroom in the soul: “Ah! Gentle and so loving you wake within me, proving that you are there in secret and alone” (L.F.4).
78 “seeing no other needs” means we are satisfied, lack nothing, have no interest in anything else. It is not intercessory.
in our prayer make ourselves “supple and compliant” (W.95.13.82) to God so that we may be brought in to the right full prayer of beseeching and the “high and unperceivable” prayer of beholding. As already commented on, our efforts do not earn God’s grace: God is always “alike in love” (W.95.16.82). Julian comments that she “saw and felt that his marvelous and his fulsome goodness fulfils all other strength” (W.95v.8-11.83), which means that Julian knows from personal experience that it is God’s goodness that empowers us to love God with all our heart and soul and strength (Dt 6:5). The Trinity’s “continuing working in all manner of things” (W.95v.12-13.83) is beyond our imagination, understanding and thought (W.95v.15-17.83).

At this time, we “can do no more but behold him and enjoying with a mighty desire to be all oned into [in to, in to] him and listen [entende, be attentive] to his wooing and enjoying in his love and delight in his goodness” (W.96.1-6.84). Julian is describing experiencing the reality of God in the bridal mystical tradition of the Song of Songs. She continues,

By his own sweet grace we shall in our own meek continuing prayer coming to [com/mun/yng vnto, communing unto] him now in this life by many privy touchings of sweet spiritual sights and feeling measured to us as our simpleness may bear it. And this is wrought and shall be, by grace of the Holy Spirit. So long until we shall die in longing for love (W.96.7-17.84).

When, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we commune with God “in our own meek continuing prayer,” we are engaging in beseeching, by which we enter into the delightful contemplation of God, and will ever do so until we “shall die in longing for love.” Julian touches once more on the true reality of our existence: we are made for Love, and shall not rest until we are fully oned in to Love. She describes oneing as coming in to God:

And then shall we all come into [in to, in to] our Lord ourself [our selfe, our self] clearly knowing, and God fulsomely having, and we endlessly be had

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80 The manuscript shows a stop mark here. I have replaced the SISMELE translation’s comma with a full-stop. We are to long until we shall die in longing for love.
81 P.xliii.303-4.
82 Commune: “share one’s intimate thoughts or feelings with; feel in close spiritual contact with. Origin ME: from Ofr. comuner ‘to share’, from comun.” COED, 289.
83 Cf. John of the Cross on the death of love: LF.1.30-34.653-56.
Julian reiterates that the fulsome (abundant) having of God is associated with the knowing of our self. She describes the fullness of mystical experience in terms of the spiritual senses. Our deepening relationship with Christ results in an interior reordering which includes a recovering of our spiritual senses, and enables us to enter into the life of the Trinity. Thus shall we see (experience/know) God, face to face (with immediacy), homely (as family) and fulsomely (abundantly).

This passage concludes with an important comment. Our endless and most fulsome beholding of our Maker is in the beatific vision, but even in this life, God “of his special grace will show him [himself] here” (W.96v.17.85 – 97.1.86). In the showing of this, God “strengthens the creature above the self, and he measures the showing after his own will, as it is most profitable at the time” (W.96v.1-6.86). Julian teaches that we experience oneness with God in this life, in the Holy Spirit’s graced touches. We meet God both in our longing and in the showings (graced touches) he gives to each of us.

**Concluding Comments**

Julian’s prayer for the wound of willfull longing to God comes from her desire for oneness with God. She teaches that it is of our very nature to long for God: we cannot find our rest in anything less than God because our being is grounded in God. Julian discovers in the crucified Christ that her thirst for God comes from God’s thirst for her. She longs to be filled with the love-longing of the Trinity. In our life of longing love, we are “suddenly” gifted with touches of God’s love as we are tenderly

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84 P.xliii.304.
85 Drawing his inspiration from Scripture, Origen (ca. 185-ca. 254) was the first to formulate a doctrine of the spiritual senses, with all five senses being possessed only by the perfect, and continuing in heaven. See Karl Rahner, “The ‘Spiritual Senses’ According to Origen,” *Theological Investigations XVI* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1979), 81-103. According to Bonaventure (1217-74), “as one enters more fully into relationship with Christ, one’s spiritual senses are recovered. In this way, the presence of God is truly experienced within.” Ilia Delio, *Simply Bonaventure: An Introduction to His Life, Thought, and Writings* (New York: New City Press, 2001), 108.
86 P.xliii.304.
led by Christ our Mother towards “dying longing for love” (W.96.17.84) and into the bliss of endless oneness with God. All our being is in God. It always has been, and endlessly will be.

It is Julian’s longing for oneness which leads her to actively seek God in a life of prayer: “Prayer oneth the soul to God” (P.xliii.300). God’s goodness overflows to us in mercy and grace, which leads us to behold God’s great and loving goodness and our own littleness. The beholding of God’s goodness brings us to true meekness, which enables us to beseech: to truly and lastingly fasten our will (love-longing) in to God’s will (love-longing). The right full prayer of beseeching is contemplation in which “we see not for the time what more we should pray, but all our intent, with all our might is set wholly into the beholding of him” (W.94v.4-8.81). In beseeching, we enter God’s dark stillness, an abyss of self-surrender to Love. In this place, there is thanking and joy.

In this chapter, examining passages from the Westminster version of Showings with a lectio divina methodological approach has led to a unique interpretation of Julian’s teaching on prayer. What emerges is a deeper understanding of Julian’s teaching on meeting God than is immediately obvious in the more complex long text versions. It becomes clear that Julian’s Showings contains a deeply apophatic understanding of meeting God. My findings support the view that the Westminster version of Showings was compiled for contemplatives.

Given the underpinnings provided by the present chapter, we are now ready to examine Julian’s wound of contrition. The next chapter discusses how Christ is our wound of contrition who mercifully and graciously restores our sensuality to oneing with our substance. It is in our woundedness that we are transformed.
CHAPTER 6

WOUND OF CONTRITION

‘My dear darling,
I am glad you have come to me in all your woe.
I have always been with you
and now you see me loving
and we are oned in bliss’ (P.xl.286).

Introduction

This chapter examines Julian’s teaching that Christ is our wound of contrition, and that in him, and through the working of the Holy Spirit, our sensuality is healed and we are oned in to God. The chapter includes some final comments on Julian’s teaching and completes the research of her mystical writings.

From the showings of Christ’s Passion, and her many years of prayerful reflection on them, Julian discovered that God is at the heart of our wound of contrition, which is the woundedness we experience in our sensual being. Meeting God fully, or our oneing in to God, requires that our sensuality be at rest with our substance which is in God. While our substantial self remains always at rest in our Maker, in this life our sensual self is customarily distracted and led astray by what is not God, which Julian calls sin. Julian understands that the whole Trinity is involved in healing our wounded sensual selves, but that the particular roles of Brother, Saviour, and Mother, as well as Spouse, are assigned to the second Person. Christ has taken on himself our wound of contrition. Having suffered and died for us, he now works in us with mercy, and, with and through the Holy Spirit, does the Father’s will by lavishing grace upon us. Contrition is the grace by which we know that something is amiss with us, and that we need to do something about it. The grace of contrition causes in us a state of sorrow, shame, and confusion, coupled with a reaching out in hope for forgiveness and peace. It is by contrition that “we are made clean” (P.xxxix.283) for heaven. To be clean is to be pure in heart. Brendan Byrne describes the pure in heart as “those totally dedicated to God and God’s cause, with no

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1 Gregory the Great describes contrition as one of the two aspects of compunctio. See Chapter 1, 8.
concealed loyalties to other allegiances on the side.”2 In the wound of contrition, Love leads us to deal with our “concealed loyalties” and our “other allegiances on the side,” so that we may love God with all our heart, soul, and strength (Dt 6:5).

**Christ is Our Wound of Contrition**

In Chapter 4, Christ was described as our wound of compassion, a Lover inviting humankind into his heart where there is room for all. Chapter 6 now describes Christ as wound of contrition, Brother and Saviour who willingly for love takes upon himself humankind’s pain, and Mother of mercy who painfully but joyfully bears us and brings us to bliss. Julian sees Adam’s sin as causing “all that is not good. And the shameful despite3 and the utter noughting that [Christ] bore for us in this life and his dying and all his pains, and passion of all his creatures ghostly and bodily” (P.xxvii.243). In a brief and compassionate “touch” (P.xxvii.244), Julian beholds all of humankind’s pain that ever was or shall be, with Christ’s pain surpassing all. She understands Christ’s “utter noughting,” or emptying, as what he bore on behalf of the freeing of our sensuality from what holds it apart from God.

In the eighth showing, Julian comments that “He who was highest and worthiest was most completely despoiled and most utterly humiliated” (A.xi.741). Of all those who suffer, of all those abused, Christ suffered and has been abused the most:

> 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. For in as much as our Lady sorrowed for his pains, so much suffered he sorrow for her sorrows. And moreover inasmuch as the sweet manhood of him was worthier in nature for as long as he was mortal he suffered for us, and sorrowed for us. And now he is uprisen and no more mortal, yet he suffers with us still (P.xx.223).

Julian understands that Christ bore the suffering of everyone’s sin and sorrow, and she learns that his worthier nature means that he suffered more than others suffer. Although Christ is now risen, with his earthly Passion over, he still suffers with us

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and will continue to do so until the last one has come to bliss. For “kindness and love,” Christ suffers for and with us as our wound of contrition.

Julian teaches that there are three ways of beholding Christ’s Passion: we behold Christ’s suffering, his love, and his joy. When we behold Christ’s suffering, we behold “the hard pain that he suffered with contrition and compassion” (P.xx.224). The Middle English text makes it clear that it is Christ who suffered with contrition and compassion.4 Similarly, in Matthew’s Gospel, John the Baptist was reluctant to baptize Jesus in the Jordan, but Jesus identified himself as a sinner amongst sinners, and insisted (Mt 3:14-15). Christ is one with us in suffering.

The Lord and the Servant

The mysterious parable5 of the lord and the servant (P.li.329-56) holds the key to understanding that the mystery of suffering and sin is contained within Trinitarian love, and that Christ, our Brother and Saviour, has taken upon himself our wound of contrition. When Julian solves the riddle of the parable, she sees that Christ has “taken upon himself all our blame. And therefore our Father neither may, nor will assign more blame to us than to his own dear worthy Son Jesus Christ” (P.li.347-48).6

In the parable, the servant, trying to please the lord, falls in to the dell and suffers greatly because he cannot see the lord. When we fall into sin we are blind to God’s goodness and suffer greatly. The Son shares humankind’s suffering because in his Incarnation he “fell with Adam into the abyss of the maiden’s womb” (P.li.347), in which falling “he took great injury” (P.li.352). As man his task was to “suffer all men’s pains without sparing him” (P.li.352), and he did not rise until “his body was slain and dead … yielding his soul into the Father’s hand with all mankind for whom he was sent” (P.li.353). In Christ’s dying, he “went in to Hell. And when he was there, then he raised up the great root out of the deep deepness, which rightly was knit to him in high heaven” (P.li.353). This great root was humankind, which was brought

5 In the long text Julian uses the medieval exegetical method of presenting an exemplum as an allegory. She processes its meaning in lectio divina.
6 Our sins do not bring divine wrath down upon us.
out of Hell and restored to its rightful place; it was also the treasure that the lord ardently desired and waited for. Now the Son stands before the Father as an equal, and sits with him in joy, and we are his crown: “the Father’s joy, the Son’s honour, the Holy Spirit’s liking, and endless marvellous bliss to all who are in heaven” (P.li.355). The bridal imagery\(^7\) of the Song of Songs, where the Lover comes to his beloved garden (Sg 4:16; 6:2), and his Beloved responds, “I belong to my love, and my love to me” (Sg 6:3) is echoed in this final scene of the parable, where now is “the spouse, God’s Son in peace with his loved wife, who is the fair maiden of endless joy” (P.li.356).

The parable provides a powerful meditation on Christ as our Brother, Saviour, and Spouse. In it, we discover that God, in Christ, is our merciful wound of contrition, who restores us to our proper place before God, and God to God’s proper home in us. In Julian’s solving of the riddle of the allegory, she is able to come to peace in her struggle to understand her showings. She moves (is led) in *lectio divina* to her theology of the motherhood of God. Although the Westminster manuscript does not include the parable of the lord and the servant, it does include a lengthy passage on the motherhood of Christ. Because of its importance in Julian’s theology, I have made it a separate section.

**Christ is Our Mother of Mercy and Grace**

This passage (W.102v.8.97 – 111v.6.115) appears prominently towards the end of the Westminster version of *Showings*, and also in the long text versions.\(^8\) The passage contains Julian’s unique contribution to a theology of God as Mother, and would seem to be the fruit of Julian’s spirituality in her mature years. The understanding of God as Mother as well as Father is not exclusive to Julian,\(^9\) but in

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\(^7\) Hide, *Gifted Origins*, 129.

\(^8\) The Westminster passage contains parts of P.lix, all of P.lx, most of P.lxi, and a small portion of P.lxiii.

\(^9\) Margaret Palliser comments: “Aside from obvious scriptural allusions to God as mother [Deut 32:11; Isa 49:1.14-15; 66: 11-13], Christ as mother [Heb 5:12; Matt 23:37], and wisdom as mother [Sir 15:1-2; 24:24; Matt 11:19; Luke 7:35], there are various examples of this theme in such authors as Clement of Alexandria, Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose, John Chrysostom, Jerome, Anselm, William of St. Thierry, and Bernard.” *Christ, Our Mother of Mercy: Divine Mercy and Compassion in the Theology of the Shewings of Julian of Norwich* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1992), 110, N.10. See Caroline Walker
her Showings, and particularly as highlighted at this point in the Westminster version (with all that has gone before), the point is strongly made that knowing the maternal properties of God is significant for our meeting God in contemplation.

Julian is quite sure that “as truly as God is our Father, so as truly God is our Mother” (W.102v.8-10.97), because she saw it in all her showings, especially the twelfth, in which she was given an ineffable sight of Christ’s divinity. In this particular showing, often “our Lord Jesus said ‘I it am, I it am, I it am’”\(^{10}\) (P.xxvi.241), and his words included those she now quotes, some for the first time:

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\text{‘I it am, the might and goodness of Fatherhood } \text{[fadirhed, fatherhood]}; \text{ I it am, the wisdom and the kindness of Motherhood; I it am, the light and the grace, that is all blessed love [Love]; I it am, the Unity; I it am, the high sovereign goodness of all manner of things; I it am, that makes you to love; I it am, that makes you to long, the endless fullness of all true desire’ (W.102v.13.97 – 103.7.98).}^{11}
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Our whole being is held within the great ‘I it am.’ When we, like Mary, behold the goodness of God which is in everything, and which makes us to love, and to long, and to desire, we begin to understand the truth of the paradox that “there the soul is highest, noblest and worthiest, where [there] it is lowest, meekest and mildest” (W.103.8-10.98). From our substantial grounding in God, our sensuality draws all its virtues “by right of nature, and by helping and granting mercy and grace without which we may not profit” (W.103.13-16.98).

Adding to the Paris version, the Westminster author now introduces our Mother as “Jesus Christ, the Second Person in the Trinity in whom is the Father and the Holy Spirit” (W.103.17.98 – 103v.2.99). This theological addition compensates for an omitted Trinitarian segment (P.lix.397-98), and indicates an emphasis on our remembering that where Christ is spoken of, there is the Triune God. Julian understands that Christ is our Mother because he is “truly our Mother in nature of our first making. And he is truly our Mother in grace, by taking of our made nature”

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Bynum’s examination of the theme of divine motherhood in the late medieval context. *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), Chapter IV.

\(^{10}\) Ex 3:14

\(^{11}\) P.lix.396.
Thus, although all three Persons of the Trinity are inseparably involved in our creation and salvation, Julian sees a special role for the Second Person. Palliser comments: “Christ’s motherhood of mercy, i.e., his taking on sensuality, stands at the heart of his working of our salvation: for Christ to be our brother is to be our mother, and to be our mother is to be our savior.”

Julian specifies three ways of beholding motherhood in God: firstly, as “ground of our natural making;” secondly, in the “taking of our nature, and there begins the Motherhood of grace;” and thirdly, in the “Motherhead [Motherhood] of working,” in which grace spreads endlessly (W.103v.6-17.99). Patricia Donohue-White explains these three ways of beholding divine motherhood:

First … the Trinitarian work of creating – what I call Trinitarian ‘womb-work’- that culminates in the incarnation. Secondly, there is the work of redeeming that begins with incarnation and culminates and climaxes in the hard labour of Jesus’ birthing/dying on the cross. The third and final stage consists in the work of sanctifying, that comprises the long process of nurturing, raising and educating a child and is completed eschatologically with the mother leading the child back to the place of origin, that is, back to the Trinitarian womb.

There is a special role for Christ in the Triune God’s creating, redeeming and sanctifying of us, in which “all is one love” (W.104.1.100).

Julian explains how “we are brought again by the Motherhead of mercy and grace into our natural state, where we were made by the Motherhead of kind love, which natural love that never leaves us” (W.104.5-11.100). God wanted to be “our Mother in all things” (W.13-14.100), because a mother’s service is “nearest, for it is natural, readiest, for it is most of love, and surest for it is of truth” (104v.4-8.101).

The second Person of the Trinity humbly took on our human condition because the role of being our Mother could be fully filled by “Christ Jesus, God and Man alone” (W.104v.10-11.101). Christ is our true Mother who brings us to spiritual birth, bearing us “to joy and to bliss, and endless living, blessed must he be” (W.104v.15-17.101). Christ carries us within him in love, bringing us to birth in “the sharpest

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12 Palliser, Christ, Our Mother, 115.

throes and the most grievous pains that ever were or ever shall be” (W.105.3-6.102). Birthing us to bliss cost him his life, and yet he can say, “If I might suffer more I would suffer more” (W.105.12-14.102). Christ dies now no more, but does not “cease working [stynt of workyng]” (W.105.14.102).

Motherly love binds Christ to ceaselessly care for us: “the dear worthy love of Motherhead has made him debtor to us” (W.105v.1-3.103). Even more than a natural mother who feeds her child with her milk, he provides us with nourishment from himself: the Blessed Sacrament of his Body and Blood. In this, and with “all the sweet sacraments he sustains us well mercifully and graciously” (W.105v.11-13.103). The motherly function of “full courteously and full tenderly” (W.105v.7-8.103) feeding us with himself in word, sacrament and goodness is performed by Holy Church, for “all the goodness that is ordained in Holy Church to you ‘I it am’” (W.106.3-5.104). Our natural mothers hold us to the breast, but Christ our spiritual mother leads us in to his side (wound), where there is a place for us beclosed in his heart. We are “shown therein part of his Godhead. And [and] heavenly joys and spiritual sureness of endless bliss” (W.106.10-13.104). Mother Jesus leads us in to contemplation of the transcendent God. Thus, through Christ’s mothering of us in the Church and in our praying/contemplation, he leads us back to our true home in God.

Having contrasted natural and spiritual motherhood, Julian now claims that, although our natural birth is “little, low and simple” compared with our spiritual birth, natural motherhood in itself is divine, because to the property of Motherhead belongs natural love, wisdom and knowing, and it is God. For though it be so that our bodily bringing forth be but little, low and simple in reward [rewarde, regard] of our spiritual forthbringer, yet it is he that does it in the creature, by whom that it is done (W.106v.5-14.105).14

Motherhood is a property belonging to God, in which humankind participates. All motherhood is God.15 Because of sharing the divine property of motherhood, the


15 Julian teaches that God is in our sensuality as well as our substance: “And then saw I that when compassion for his even Christians flows naturally from a man who is in charity, this is Christ in him” (A.xiii.749). Cf. Fatherhood and nuptial divine archetypes. Stein, Science, 242-43.
natural mother understands and knows her child, and she “keeps it full tenderly” (W.106v.17.105). As the child grows, the loving mother changes her way of tending it. She “[sufferith it to be chastisyd] in breaking down of vices to make the child receive virtues and grace” (W.107.6-10.106). Although it is the child’s mother interacting with the child, “this working with all the others that are good our Lord does in them by whom it is done” (W.107.10-13.106). Julian has already told us that Christ’s motherhood is “spread” (W.103v.15.99) to us through Holy Church. Now she teaches that, because of the oneing of natural and divine motherhood, the grace of Mother Jesus is spread to us through our natural parents. So much so, that through the “blessed love Christ works in us” (W.107v.6-7.107), fastening our love into him, or honouring our father and mother, are the same. Julian understands that Christ “our kind mother, our gracious mother … would all wholly become our mother in all things” (W.104.11-14.100). She sees and understands this “in all. And namely in the high plenteous words where he said, ‘I it am, that you love’ (W.107v.8-11.107). God is integrally and inextricably within our human, sensual life. In this non-dualist approach, God and our sensuality are one. Thus it is that we recognize and experience God in babies, in acts of kindness, in love. We are sometimes able to “see” the divine, as well as a fullness of the natural, coexisting in those human beings who “know” God and themselves. Contemplation (meeting God) is the start of heaven. There is no here and there. A strong awareness of this is demonstrated in certain medieval artworks.

In our spiritual bringing forth, in which there is “more tenderness in keeping without comparison” (W.107v.13-14.107), Christ our Mother

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16 To say that she suffers the child to be chastised is very different from saying she chastises the child. The mother suffers for her child in pain. Cf. “[Mary] was so oned in love that the greatness of her love was the cause of the greatness of her pain. For in this I saw a substance of natural love continued by grace” (P.xviii.215).

17 To fulfil the fourth commandment and to love God are the same.

18 My italics.

19 Cf. “To the one who experiences it, it seems that heaven begins on earth, though the disproportion between this world and the next remains.” Michael Casey, A Guide to Living in the Truth: Saint Benedict’s Teaching on Humility (Liguori, MI: Liguori/Triumph, 1999), 186.

kindles our understanding. He aids our ways, he eases our conscience, he comforts our soul, he lightens our heart and gives us in part knowing and loving in his blessed Godhead, with gracious mind in his manhead and his blessed Passion, with courteous marveling in his high overpassing goodness. And makes us to love all that he loves, for his love, and to be pleased with him and with all that he does and in all his works (W.107v.16.107 – 108.13.108).21

Christ is intimately involved as he kindles, aids, eases, comforts and lightens. He gives the gifts of “in part knowing and loving in his blessed Godhead,”22 and of “gracious mind in his manhead and his blessed Passion.” The “courteous marveling in his overpassing goodness” is the grace of Mary’s reverent beholding. To “love all that he loves, for his love” is the grace of beseeching. When we are “pleased with him and with all that he does”23 and in all his works,” we are being graced with thankfulness and joy.

Julian turns to what our mother’s role is “when we fall” (W.108.14.108). It is significant that the word “sin” appears only twice in the Westminster version of Showings and this in the single context that God (All-Goodness) does all. Here, without mention of “sin,” and in the context of Christ’s motherhood, Julian invites us to examine our “falling.” When we fall, Christ hastily “raises us up by his lovely calling [beclepping, embrace] and his gracious touching” (W.108.14-16.108), and then, strengthened, we “willfully choose him by his grace to be his servants and lovers lastingly without end” (W.108v.1-4.109). We recall the long text’s account of Julian’s choosing Christ for her heaven (P.xviv.219). But, she continues, “after this he allows [sufferith] some of us to fall more grievously and more hard than ever we did before, and then we think, who are not all wise,24 that all were nought that we have begun” (W.108v.4-11.109). This relates to Julian’s experience of despair after the fifteenth showing, when she denies her showings and says she has been raving (P.lxvi.426).

Julian is well qualified to advise:

21 P.lxi.405.
22 John of the Cross defines knowing and loving God as contemplation. See SC.27.5.582.
23 The phrase “with all that he does” is not found in the other versions of Showings. It provides a link with the next section, pointing us back to a key reference on God as the doer of all things.
24 We are not God. Gentle self-mockery?
But that is not so, for we need to fall and it is necessary for us to know it and to see it. For if we do not fall, we should not know how feeble and how wretched we are of our self. Also it is necessary to see our falling, for if we see it not, though we fall, it should not profit us (W.108v.11.109 – 109.3.110).25

As a general rule, we fall, and then we see it, and “through that sight by the mercy of God are we low and meek” (W.109.5-6.110). It is in being shown our weakness that we are led to true humility, which, we recall, enables us to beseech.

An earthly mother may leave us to perish (Is 49:15), but not our “heavenly Mother Jesus Christ … for he is all mighty, all wisdom and all love” (W.109.8-12.110).26 In seeing our wretchedness, we are “so much afraid [sore a dred] and so greatly ashamed of our self” (W.109v.16.110 – 109v.1.111), that we do not know where to put ourselves, but we are not to run and hide. We are to be as a child, who “runs quickly to his mother, and if it may do no more, it cries on the mother for help with all its might” (W.109v.9-12.111). With heartfelt contrition, aware of our wretchedness and our inability to help ourselves, we beg our Mother for mercy and grace. If our suffering continues, we are to trust that our kind and faithful Mother remains compassionately with us (is suffering with us), and is leading us to a better time and more profit.

In our sorry predicament, we are to cling to the faith that Holy Church professes, and find in Holy Church “our dear and worthy Mother in solace of true understanding with all the blessed common” (W.110v.1-4.113). We are to strenuously cling to our faith: it is “good and gracious to will meekly, and mightily, [ ]27 fastened and oned to our Mother Holy Church that is Christ Jesus” (W.110v.10-13.113). Recognizing Jesus in the community of Holy Church, we confess our falling and are absolved, washed clean by the deluge of blood and water flowing from Christ’s wounds. Mother Jesus is our kind nurse, ever busy with our care, tending our needs with mercy and grace. It is as if our spiritual mother has nothing else to do but look

25 P.lxi.406-7. The Westminster omits a Paris segment between “our self” and “Also.”

26 We are beclosed in the Trinity.

27 We are to cling to faith with all our might (W.109v.11-12.111). I have removed SISSEL’S inserted “to be” which takes the emphasis off faith and on to the institutional Church.
after us and bring us to the bliss of heaven.  

He wants us to “love him sweetly and trust in him meekly and strongly [myghtyly]” (W.111.14-15). Just as we are to cling in faith to our Mother Jesus with all our might, so too are we to love and trust him mightily. We are graced with the theological virtues of faith, love and hope by our kind nurse who says, “I keep you most surely” (W.111.17.114 – 111v.1.115).

A small segment from the long text’s sixty-third chapter concludes the passage on Christ our Mother. It reads: “Furthermore, a natural child despairs not of the mother’s love, and naturally presumes not of itself, naturally the child loves the mother, each of them loves the other” (W.111v.1-6.115). Our approach to God is to be that of simple children (Mt 18:1-4). We are returned to the key issues introduced in the Westminster version’s opening passage on the maiden’s reverent beholding. We are to behold God’s goodness, and our littleness, ever mindful that we are beclosed in love. Thus concludes the Westminster manuscript’s amazing discussion of our “falling.”

Healing Our Sensuality

Christ is our Mother who bears us to bliss. Bearing us to bliss is an ongoing task involving the healing of our sensuality by God’s mercy and grace, which work together.  

God’s View of Human Salvation

It is helpful to consider Julian’s teaching on God’s attitude to humankind’s salvation. In our very nature we are grounded in God and are able to receive the gifts of mercy and grace which will bring us to endless life (P.lv.375). The process of oneing our sensuality to our substance begins at conception:

And that time that our soul is inspired in our body, in which we are made sensual, immediately mercy and grace begin to work, caring and keeping us with pity and love. In which working the Holy Spirit forms in our faith

28 Cf. John of the Cross writes that in the state of mystical marriage the soul feels so cared for that it is as if God has nothing else to do but tend it (L.F.2.36.672).

29 Christ works in us through “Charity given” (P.Ixxxiv.487) which is the grace of the Holy Spirit.
the hope: that we shall come up above to our substance into the virtue of Christ, increased and fulfilled through the Holy Spirit (P.lv.374-75).

Instilled in us from the beginning, are the gifts of faith, hope and love which lead us in to God, apart from whom we cannot rest. From conception, mercy and grace work in us, “caring and keeping us with pity and love.” Julian sees the healing of our sensuality from God’s point of view. Our sinfulness provides the opportunity for growth in knowledge and acceptance of the truth of our littleness: that we are not perfect and never will be until we “shall come up above to our substance into the virtue of Christ, increased and fulfilled through the Holy Spirit.”

Julian is sure that God “does no sin” (W.82v.17.57) for there is no evil in God. Although sin is “no deed” (W.83.2.58), it is the “sharpest scourge that any chosen soul may be smitten with” (P.xxxix.281). It is to be avoided as the worst of evils, but in constantly falling and rising we learn meekness so that we can beseech, that is, wisely, truly, and lastingly fasten and one our will/love into God’s. The suffering involved in our failings, or sins, is therefore behovely, a part of the story of our salvation. Julian is shown that “God is that goodness that may not be wrathful [for] God is nought but goodness. Our soul is oned to him in unchangeable goodness” (P.xlvi.312). She also comes to understand that “sin is no shame, but worship to man” (A.xvii.757). As happened for David, Peter, Paul, Thomas, and the Magdalen, God leads us from sin to greater grace than we would have had if we did not fall. In the Holy Spirit’s gracing of us with contrition, our sins teach us humility, without which we will never see or know God.


31 Cf. “Ah, wretched sin! What art thou? Thou art nought. For I saw that God is all thing – I saw not thee” (A.xxiii.775). Cf. “In the tradition of Augustine, Julian differentiates between the being of God and the nonbeing of sin … sin will lead sinners to what does not exist. Sin results in an abyss of nothingness and disorder.” Hide, Gifted Origins, 68.

32 Cf. “that sin is behovely means that sin is needed as part of the plot.” Turner, Julian of Norwich, 51.
Contrition as *Lectio Divina*

Even in our sins we are never separated from God and God’s working in us. Julian describes this in some detail, and for clarity I provide the Middle English words in places:

And this is the sovereign friendship of our courteous Lord, that he keeps us so tenderly while we are in our sin. And furthermore he touches us most secretly and shows us our sin by the sweet light of mercy and grace. But when we see our self so foul, then we think that God was wrathful against *were wroth wt* us for our sin. Then are we stirred by *of* the Holy Spirit by contrition into *in to* prayer and desire to amend our life *amending of oure selfe* with all our might to slake the wrath of God until *unto* the time that we find peace in our soul *[a rest in soule]* and softness in our conscience. And then we hope that God has forgiven us our sin. And it is true. And then our courteous Lord shows himself to the soul merrily and with most glad cheer, with friendly welcoming, as if it had been in pain and in prison, saying thus, ‘My dear darling, I am glad you have come to me in all your woe. I have always *evyr* been with you and now you see me loving and we are oned in bliss’ (P.xl.285-86).

Julian’s description of the gracious action of the Holy Spirit includes showing to us the falsity of our point of view, specifically in our God-image: we think God is angry with us. She describes this “wrathful” God as actively keeping, touching, showing, stirring, forgiving, appearing, welcoming and rewarding. The grace of contrition includes stirring us “[in to] prayer and desire [amending of oure selfe] with all our might.” This prayer and desire is *oratio* that flows from the graced *lectio* of, and *meditatio* on, our painful predicament. In *oratio* we are led to hope (trust) that we are forgiven, and we know (experience in ourselves) that this is true when we are brought in to *contemplatio*, where “our courteous Lord shows himself to the soul merrily and with glad cheer.” When the grace of contrition has completed its work, our blindness is gone. We feel warmly welcomed, “as if” returning to life and light from pain or prison. We feel God’s delight. We realize that God has been with us all the time, and ever shall be. We *see* that God loves us. To contemplate God loving us is heaven on earth.

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33 “I saw truly that our Lord was never wrathful, nor ever shall be. For he is God, he is Good, he is Truth, he is Love, he is Peace, and his Might, his Wisdom, his Charity, and his Unity allow him not to be wrathful” (P.xlvi.312).
The Fear of God

The oneing of our sensuality in to our substance requires that our fear of God be a particular sort of fear which is allied with love. Julian has much to say about fear in her writings. In the final chapter of the Amherst short text version of Showings, Julian looks at four fears, which she calls “dreads,” and how they impact on our meeting of God. In the long text versions, she elaborates considerably on these dreads. Two of these dreads are useful, the third is “deadly” dread which is to be avoided like the plague, and the fourth is reverent dread (see Mary’s reverent dread, Chapter 3, 74-75) which Julian tells us to pray for.

The first dread is the fear of being attacked or assaulted. This is the fear which comes “suddenly through frailty” (P.lxxiv.452). When faced with confronting situations, our timidity leads us to act, or not act, in ways we wish were different, and later mourn. We are afraid of what is asked of us. This dread is useful because it “helps to purge man, as does bodily sickness or such other pain that is not sin. For all such pains help man, if they are patiently taken” (P.lxxiv.453). While this fear may cause us anguish, it can also teach us virtue.

The second dread is also useful because it is a fear of pain “whereby man is stirred and wakened from the sleep of sin” (P.lxxiv.453). The fear of “bodily death, and of ghostly enemies … stirs us to seek comfort and mercy from God” (P.lxxiv.453). This dread “helps us as an entrance and enables us to have contrition by the blessedful touching of the Holy Spirit” (P.lxxiv.453). A fear of pain is helpful for repentance and contrition.

The third dread is described as “doubtful dread in as much as it leads to despair” (P.lxxiv.453). Of doubtful dread (or deadly dread) in which we doubt God’s goodness, Julian writes, “I am sure that God hates all doubtful dreads” (A.xxv.781). Doubtful dread is such that “God will have it turned in us into Love, by true knowing of Love, that is to say, that the bitterness of doubt is turned into sweetness of natural Love by Grace. For it may never please our Lord that his servants doubt in his Goodness” (P.lxxiv.453-54). According to Julian, it is about the knowledge of God’s love that we are most blind: “some of us believe that God is all Mighty and may do
all. And that he is all Wisdom and can do all. But that he is all Love and will do all,
there we fail. And it is this unknowing that most stops God’s lovers, to my sight”
(P.lxxiii.451). 34 We do not believe or know that God is Love. We cannot let go of a
preoccupation with self and failings. We fear that, instead of loving us, God is
displeased and does not forgive us. 35 We take this concentration on our wretchedness
as coming from humility, but it is out of “foul blindness and weakness” (P.lxxiii.452),
which should be rejected like any other sin, because it is denying the goodness of
God. In recognizing God’s everlasting love, we please God, and all which is opposed
to this is “from the enemy” (A.xxxv.779). Blindness to God’s love and goodness
causes humankind’s deepest suffering and lack of rest and peace.

Doubtful dread is involved in what Julian calls the two sicknesses of
impatience and despair. People who ardently seek and desire God are tempted to
impatience (to lose faith) when they forget God’s endless love for them, and to
despair (to lose hope) when they are discouraged by their pain or their failings
(P.lxxiii.450). The two sicknesses are related. Julian’s experience of saying she is
raving when she is swamped by bodily and spiritual suffering after the fifteenth
showing is a classic example of the sickness of impatience: she loses faith in her
showings. She then spends the night fending off the temptation to despair. 36 In
Julian’s showings, Christ gently directs her attention to his own patience in suffering
his hard Passion, and the joy he experienced in it because of love. She is to take her
vision of Christ’s Passion and “study it, and keep yourself in it, and comfort yourself
with it and trust in it and you shall not be overcome” (P.lxxi.440). 37

34 This assertion is strongly Trinitarian: God is “all Mighty,” “all Wisdom,” and “all Love.” It also
refers to the Trinity’s involvement in making all things well: the Father “may” make all things well; the
Son “can” make all things well; and the Holy Ghost “will” make all things well (A.xv.751-52).

35 Julian’s contemporary, the author of The Cloud of Unknowing advises his readers to “bravely step
above [obsession with sins] with a fervent impulse of love, and tread it down under your feet. And try
to cover them with a thick cloud of forgetting … Try to look over their shoulders, as it were, as though
you were looking for something else: that something else is God, surrounded on all sides by the cloud
of unknowing”. Walsh, Cloud of Unknowing, 180-81.

36 “My bodily eye I set upon the same Cross … my tongue with speech of Christ’s passion and
rehearsing the faith of holy Church and my heart fastened upon God with all the trust and my might”

37 To keep one’s eyes on the love of God as revealed in Christ’s cross is standard mystical advice. In
the thirteenth century, Clare of Assisi advised Agnes of Prague to “gaze upon [Him], consider [Him],
contemplate [Him], as you desire to imitate [Him].” “Second Letter to Blessed Agnes of Prague,” in
Armstrong and Brady, Francis and Clare, 197.
Of the fourth dread, Julian writes that “there is no dread that fully pleases God in us except reverent dread and that is soft” (P.lxxiv.454). To understand what Julian is saying about reverent dread, we need to start with what Scripture tells us about the fear of the Lord. Beginning with the wisdom literature, the fear of the Lord implies reverence and devoted obedience to God. In the wisdom book of Ecclesiasticus, the fear of the Lord is the basis, the fullness, the crown and the root of wisdom, and gives “happiness and joy and long life” (Si 1:12). In the prophetic book of Isaiah,

A shoot springs from the stock of Jesse,  
a scion thrusts from his roots:  
on him the spirit of Yahweh rests, 
a spirit of wisdom and insight,  
a spirit of counsel and power,  
a spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Yahweh.  
[The fear of Yahweh is his breath.] (Is 11:1-2).

The fear of the Lord is the spirit of Yahweh within Christ: his “breath.” This breath is the Holy Spirit who is also described as the Love between Father and Son in the Trinity. When Christians pray for the gifts of the Spirit, the gift of the fear of the Lord for which they pray is the gift of Love. In the New Testament, Jesus proclaims God as Father who reveals himself to children (Mt 11:25). In the love of children for their father, there is no place for servile fear (1 Jn 4:18). Fear of God is inseparable from love of God. According to Julian, both love and fear are given to us in our nature: “Love and Dread are brothers, and they are rooted in us by the goodness of our Maker, and they shall never be taken from us without end” (P.lxxiv.454). It is right that we both fear God for God’s lordship and fatherhood, and love God for God’s goodness. Fear without love, even if disguised as holiness, is not true fear, and is to be recognized and avoided (P.lxxiv.455). Reverent dread is a mixture of reverence and love.

In trying to understand what Julian means by reverent dread, it is helpful to re-examine Julian’s account of Mary’s reverent beholding in the first segment of the

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38 The Jerusalem Bible (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), 1037, N.1h. The following two quotations are from this version.
39 See Si 1:11-20.
40 To revere is to love and respect deeply, to admire, to honour greatly, to venerate, to regard with respect tinged with awe. See COED, 1231.
Westminster version of *Showings*,\(^4\) but to do so this time in the two contexts in which the parts of the segment occur in the Paris long text version. The first part of the segment occurs in the fourth chapter, at the time of the first showing of Christ’s Passion, and immediately after the Trinity fills Julian’s heart with the joy of heaven. Her response is to cry out, “*Benedicite dominus*’... *for reuerence in my menyng*” (P.iv.156-57), and she is “greatly astounded out of wonder and marvel that he who is so revered and so awesome would be so homely with a sinful creature living in this [wretched] flesh” (P.iv.157). Julian considers that the showing is to give her comfort in her dying.

It is precisely at this point that she is given to see “in part the wisdom and truth of [Mary’s] soul, wherein I saw the reverent beholding with which she gazed upon her God, who is her Maker, marvelling with great reverence that he would be born of her who was a simple creature of his making” (P.iv.158). The parallel between Mary’s experience and Julian’s is striking. Because of Julian’s astounding experience of the awesome God’s homely loving in her soul, she can now understand Mary’s reverent beholding and marveling; and Julian finds authentication and clarification of her own experience in Mary’s. It was Mary’s wisdom and truth, “knowing the greatness of her maker and the littleness of herself who is made [that] made her to say full meekly to Gabriel, ‘Behold me here, God’s handmaiden’” (P.iv.158). Mary’s reverence leads to meekness, and to oneness with God’s will. Julian calls this beseeching. She sees the parallel between her own experience of beholding God with reverence and love, and Mary’s. By putting them together in her long text, she shares her insight with us: that our experience of reverent love of God is like Mary’s at the Annunciation.

The placing of the second part of this Westminster segment in the seventh chapter of the long text version is equally significant. In the sixth chapter, Julian describes at length and fulsomely the homely and overpassing love of our Maker for us, finishing with, “For of all things, the beholding and the loving of the Maker makes the soul to seem the least in its own sight and most fills it with reverent dread and true meekness and with plenty of charity to his even-Christian” (P.vi.168). Once more,

\(^4\) Chapter 3, 73-76.
immediately, “to learn us” (P.vii.168), God shows Mary to Julian. Mary’s wisdom and truth made her reverently behold God as so great, high, mighty and good, that this “greatness and [this nobleness] of her beholding of God fulfilled her [of] reverent dread” (P.vii.168-69). To be fulfilled of reverent dread suggests a marvelous fullness of loving reverence for God. From this flowed a second marvelous state. Mary saw herself “so little and so low, so simple and so poor in [regard to] her God, that this reverent dread fulfilled her with meekness” (W.73.9-14.38). I suggest that being “fulfilled” of reverent dread and meekness is actually one fulfillment and is profound contemplation. Instead of the text relating Mary’s meekness to her “Fiat” (as in the first part of the Westminster segment), this time we are told that “by this ground [Mary] was fulfilled of grace and of all manner of virtue, and surpassed all people [creaturys]” (W.73.14-17.38). Only Christ himself is greater.

Once again a Marian meditation explains Julian’s previous comments, in this case that the “beholding and the loving of the Maker makes the soul to seem the least in his own sight and most fills it with reverent dread and true meekness and with plenty of charity to his even-Christian” (P.vi.168). Julian’s “plenty of charity” is the same as Mary’s “all manner of virtue.” In Mary’s loving reverence for God she is “fulfilled of grace” and exalted. Thus she sings in the Magnificat of the greatness of God who is the greatness in her. In Mary’s reverent beholding of God, she loses sight of herself as apart from God. Being fulfilled with reverent dread and meekness means that she is beclosed in her Maker, the Holy One. Julian is telling us this because she has experienced it herself and she believes it can be the experience of all of us.

Reverent dread is reverent loving or loving reverence, and demonstrates that, for Julian, God is both transcendent and immanent. It is to be the mark of our attitude and relationship with God. The significant thing about reverent dread is that it flows from knowing God’s love for us. We so trust God that we “fall” (P.lxxiv.455) in to God with our whole heart (Dt 6:5). Falling implies a giving of self in trust. It is seeking in to beseeching in which our love/will is oned in to God’s. God wants us to have the trust of a child in its mother. We are to “desire of our Lord God to dread him reverently and to love him meekly, and to trust in him mightily. For when we dread him reverently and love him meekly, our trust is never in vain … [or] misruled” (P.lxxiv.456). We greatly need to pray “to our Lord for Grace that we may have this
reverent dread and meek Love of his gift in heart and in work, for without this no man may please God” (P.lxxiv.457). These words underline the importance Julian places on these gifts for our meeting of God. The fear of God we have in this life is the same as what it will be in heaven when we meet God face to face: “gentle, courteous, most sweet; and thus we shall in love be homely and near to God. And we through [in] dread are gentle and courteous to God, and both in the same manner are alike” (P.lxxiv.456). Julian’s reverent dread is reverent loving, into which we are invited in this life.

Christ is the Remedy

In our nature (creation), and by mercy and grace, our Maker, Keeper and Lover draws us into oneing in this life, and the fullness of oneing in the next. But how do we reconcile this with the difficulties of daily living? Julian was well aware of suffering in her life. She asks how she can go on living with human suffering, her own pathetic weaknesses, and, especially, her unfulfilled desires for God (P.lxiv.417). Christ comforts her, and encourages her to be patient, in these words:

Suddenly you shall be taken from all your pain, and from all your sickness, from all your illness [disease, distress] and from all your woe, and you shall come up above and you shall have me to your pay [mede, meed]42 and reward, and you shall be filled with joy and with bliss, and you shall never more have any manner of pain, neither any manner of sickness, nor manner of misliking, nor no wanting of will, but be ever in joy and bliss without end. What should it then grieve you to suffer a while, since it is my will and my worship? (W.112.9.116 – 112v.7.117).

Christ reminds Julian of her final end, which is endless, blissful oneing in to him. She can hold on to these words of comfort because already in this life she has experienced being suddenly oned in to Christ in contemplation. (P.lxiv.417-18). When Julian was at the point of death, she was suddenly taken from pain (P.iii.154), and her showings of God’s love began. Showings contains many instances of Julian being graced with insights and touches of love. She experiences God “suddenly” in this life, which enables her to wait patiently for the next. She is told to hold fast to what she has been shown and she will not be overcome (P.lxx.440). Meeting God is not just for after

42 Cf. We are Christ’s meed (W.85.8.62).
death. She is to make use of her pain to wisely seek in to God, until the day of endless thanking and joy dawns.

Julian tells us that, although he endured his Passion but once, Christ now suffers with us (P.xx.223), and that we are to be like Christ and, for love, make light of our sufferings. We do not need to take on extravagant penances for our sins, but to “meekly and patiently bear and suffer with penance what God himself gives us with remembering [mynde] of his blessed Passion” (P.lxxxvii.465-66). In our pain we are to draw strength from being mindful of Christ’s Passion. We are to know that this life is profitable for us, and that we have a marvelous remedy to ease our pain:

All this life is profitable penance. This place is a prison. This life is penance, and he desires [will] that we enjoy in the remedy. The remedy is that our Lord is with us, keeping us, and leading in to fullness of joy. For this is an endless joy to us in our Lord’s meaning, that he, who shall be our bliss when we are there, is our keeper while we are here, our way and our Heaven, in true love and faithful trust (P.lxxxvii.466-67).

Christ is always with us as our keeper (with mercy and grace), our way (model), and our heaven (joy). We find Christ in “true love and faithful trust” (faith, hope and love). This is to be an endless joy to us. Julian assures us that “if we know him and love him, and reverently dread him, we shall have patience and be in great rest” (P.lxv.424).

We may therefore view the wound of contrition in terms of our living contemplatively with Christ in our suffering, weakness, and longing for God. In this life, the God who created and redeemed us, works as our mother to return us to the place of our origin, which is God. It is precisely through our suffering, our weakness, and our longing for God that this happens. Suffering with love transforms us. With liberal gifts of mercy and grace, Christ works in us, oneing our will/love in to God’s will/love. When we live contemplatively, we do not grieve unnecessarily in our difficulties, because Christ suffers with us.

One cannot help but be struck by the beauty of Julian’s teaching on how our sensual self-soul is healed, and we are led in to God. From God’s point of view, we are beloved children being carefully shepherded to blissful fulfillment. The very
process of contrition leads us into meeting God. God works in our fears, graciously opening to us the reverent love we will enjoy in heaven. Because Christ is with us, there is joy (and profit) in the suffering of this life.

**Oned into God**

So far this chapter has examined Christ as our wound of contrition. We have also considered Julian’s teaching on Christ our Mother of Mercy and the healing of our sensual self-soul. The comments in this final section extend to all three wounds and draw my research of Julian’s mystical writings to a close.

Contrition, compassion, and longing to God are “three ways as I understand whereby all souls come to heaven” (P.xxxix.283). They are “medicines” (P.xxxix.283) by which our sensuality is healed, our love is enkindled, and our desire for God is satisfied. The active ingredient of these medicines is Christ, who, with his Spirit, draws us into God. Julian teaches that “those to whom our Lord wills, he visits with his special grace with such great contrition, and also with compassion and longing to God, that they are suddenly delivered from sin and pain, and taken up to bliss, and made even with the saints” (P.xxxix.283). By this she means that in this life we suddenly know Christ within our powerful experiences (wounds) of sorrow, love and longing, and this for us is bliss as experienced by God’s holy ones. Julian’s Showings are a record of her knowing of Christ in her own wounds. She experiences Christ’s wounded heart as the wound of compassion into which she and all of humankind are invited. She knows that her longing for God is grounded in God’s longing for her. She comes to know Christ as her Beloved, who, through his Passion, and by mercy and grace, heals her sensual self-soul and onen her into God.

We recall that in Julian’s anchorage the quotation: “Thou art enough to me” (P.v.162) is inscribed on a memorial stone placed directly beneath the stone crucifix and the first quotation: “Lo, how I loved thee.” Spending prayerful time in Julian’s anchorage encourages one to progress from the first quotation to the second. When we are convinced of the amazing truth that God loves us, we do indeed respond that God is our All, and we desire to be noughted of all that may come between God and us. Thus we desire that our sensual selves be purified of all that is not God. “Thou art
enough to me” (or similar) occurs like a refrain in the Paris, Sloane, Westminster and Amherst manuscripts. It is there because it was a mantra for Julian, and it functions in the text as a constant call for radical conversion. In Julian’s anchorage, we are also conscious of the quotation at the door: “Prayer oneth the soul to God.” I believe that the three quotations sum up Julian’s message: We are the beloved of God. God is our All in All. God meets with us in the meeting tent of our prayer, and ones us in to Godself.

Christ shows Julian that “it is the fullest pleasure to him, that an innocent [sely: simple] soul come to him nakedly, plainly and humbly” [homly: in a homely way, familiarly]. For this is the natural yearning of the soul by the touching of the Holy Spirit” (W.75v.6-11.43). In our nature, we have the Love-instilled desire for union with God, and in our prayer we can approach simply, without pretence or fabrication, in our naked poverty and need, as we would approach a loving family member. Julian does just this as she prays,

‘God, for your goodness, give me yourself. For you are enough for me and I may not ask anything that is less, that may be fully worthy of [full worshyppe to] thee. And if I ask anything that is less, I am always wanting. But only in you I have all’ (W.75v.13.43 - 76.2.44).

With the directness and confidence of a child, aware of her neediness and knowing that in God she has all that she longs for, Julian precociously asks God for nothing less than God’s self. She dwells on the “words, ‘God of your goodness’… [as being] full lovesome to the soul, and full nigh touching the will of our Lord” (W.76.3-6.44), which points to the classic understanding of will as love, and suggests the bond of love which exists between God and the soul. The “highest prayer” (W.78.2-3.48) is to pray as a simple child who knows and trusts in God’s goodness. God’s goodness is present in our every need and brings us to life. It is God’s goodness that human nature

43 SISMEL spiritualizes the translation of homly. I consider “homely” to hold the nuance that Julian intends.
44 The Paris long text version reads: “for this is the natural dwelling of the soul by the touching of the Holy Ghost” (P.v.161). For “yearning” and “dwelling” to be interchangeable suggests an understanding of yearning as God’s presence in the soul’s love-longing.
45 P.v.162.
46 Julian’s words are addressed to Christ, in whom she comprehends the Trinity: “For where Jesus appears the blessed Trinity, to my sight, is understood” (P.iv.156).
seeks. It will bring us to “know our God truly, that has us all be closed in him” (W.78.10-12.48).

In the eighth showing, after Julian’s heart dilates with loving compassion for Christ, and in her suffering with him (greater than any other pain), she chooses him as her heaven (enough for her) and forever after finds comfort in reflecting on what must have been a profound mystical experience of embracing Christ’s cross in her own suffering. Later in the long text, Julian returns to this particular showing. Christ suffered in his lower part, his sensuality, while “the higher part was ever in peace with God, in full joy and bliss” (P.lv.377). The higher and lower parts in Christ are one soul. As we saw in Chapter 4, Julian herself experiences this paradox of suffering and joy in her compassion for Christ. When her body is “fulfilled with feeling and experience [mynde] of Christ’s Passion and his dying” (P.lv.378), she simultaneously experiences Christ’s joy (in oneness with her Lover), so powerfully that she is unable to look away or separate herself from Christ’s sufferings which she herself is suffering with him. There are two teachings contained in Julian’s choosing of Christ for her heaven. Firstly, the choosing of Christ to be the love of her heart is a God-given mystical moment of radical conversion. Choosing Christ is how she will live her life henceforth, an ongoing affair of the heart: she learns that she is “evermore … to choose Jesus only as [her] heaven, in good and in ill” (P.xviv.220). Secondly, the spiritual joy of embracing the crucified Christ occurs within the embracing of her own suffering. By gazing on Christ’s Passion in the context of her own human suffering, Julian meets Christ in a oneness of loving compassion and shares his peace and joy.

For Julian, meeting God is oneing, which is a term denoting both existing “oneness with”, and “oneness with” being brought about. The term oneing describes how we exist in God. Like the oneing of our substantial self, the oneing of our sensual self in to God is the working of the whole Trinity, one God one Lord (P.lviii.390). In “the knitting and in the oneing he is our very true spouse, and we his loved wife, and his fair maiden, with which wife he was never displeased. For he says, ‘I love you,

47 Chapter 4, 86-87.
48 “And I assented fully with all the will of my heart to be at God’s will” (P.iii.152).
49 Chapter 1, 12, N.27.
and you love me, and our love shall never be parted in two’” (P.lviii.390). Our meeting with the transcendent God is to be a meeting between a true spouse and his fair maiden in a marriage of love which shall never be sundered. Like John of the Cross, Julian understands union with God in terms of bridal mysticism.

**Concluding Comments**

This chapter has examined Julian’s teaching that Christ is our wound of contrition as Brother, Saviour, Mother and Spouse. In Christ, and through the working of the Holy Spirit, our sensuality is healed and we are oned into God. It is in our weakness and suffering (our wounds) that we are transformed.

In *Showings*, Julian tells us what she knows from her own experience about meeting God. She knows Jesus the Christ as the Revelation of God’s Love, and her Way in to the life of the Trinity. She knows herself to be beloved by God. She knows God as the ground of her longing and desire, and of her beseeching (contemplation). She knows God wants her to be happy and at peace, and all that is contrary to this is of the enemy. She chooses Jesus for her heart, which means embracing Love, and includes both joy and suffering. She lives beclosed in the Triune God, knowing that the Triune God is beclosed in her. In contemplation, she experiences oneing with God in this life. It is in a lifetime of prayer that Julian comes to see, know and understand what her showings teach her.

It is in our own prayer that we will find meaning in Julian’s writings. She tells us to “set the point of our thought in this blessed beholding, as often as we may, and as long” (W.112v.8-11.117). We are to behold God’s goodness (1Jn 4:16). We are invited into oneing with God. As Julian says, her text is “begun by God’s gift and his grace but it is not yet performed” (P.lxxxvi.488-89).

We turn now to the mystical writings of John of the Cross.
PART III

JOHN OF THE CROSS
CHAPTER 7

WOUNDED WITH LOVE

If you should find my love, what are you to tell him?
– That I am sick with love! (Sg 5:8).

Introduction

Part III of this dissertation examines what John of the Cross writes about wounds, which he understands as wounds of love and a place for meeting God. John’s wounds of love are intimately connected with a desire and longing not unlike Julian’s. In keeping with the scope of the dissertation, interpretation of John’s mystical writings has a primary focus on the Spiritual Canticle and Living Flame, because these are texts in which wounds figure prominently in John’s teaching on the mystical journey to transforming union. Selected passages from other texts are incorporated. The present chapter begins with an examination of bridal mysticism and then focuses on stanzas one to twenty-one of Spiritual Canticle, which hold John’s teaching on the bride’s state as she anxiously seeks her Beloved. Chapter 8 considers stanzas twenty-two to forty which describe the bride’s transformation in God in the mystical marriage. Chapter 9 examines Living Flame, which treats “of a love deeper in quality and more perfect within this very state of transformation” (LF.Pro.3.639). In Chapter 10, the fourth chapter of Part III, still primarily (but not entirely) focused on the Spiritual Canticle and Living Flame, I suggest that three wounds of love are found in John’s writings, and that these wounds are highly significant for John in his theology of meeting God as a paradox of suffering and delight.

John’s theology and writings emanate from his experience of God as Lover. We learn from John’s Romances, composed in his prison, that he understands that humankind is the Son’s bride, “who by your grace will earn the right to be with us, with us to dwell” (Romances 3, 47). The Incarnation is God entering humanity to marry us. John experiences his relationship with God as a romance, as being wooed by his Beloved, hence his choice of the language of bridal mysticism to explain his
experience. In Edith Stein’s writing on John’s *Spiritual Canticle*, she explains that John’s language reflects an understanding that the relationship of the soul to God as God foresaw it from all eternity as the goal of her creation, simply cannot be more fittingly designated than as a nuptial bond. Once one has grasped that, then the image and the reality directly exchange their roles: the divine bridal relationship is recognized as the original and actual bridal relationship and all human nuptial relationships appear as imperfect copies of this archetype – just as the Fatherhood of God is the archetype of all fatherhood on earth.¹

John uses the language of bridal mysticism because it expresses the reality of his relationship with God. Andrew Louth supports this view when he comments that “the tradition of treating the Song of Songs as a celebration of God’s love for the Church, or for the individual soul, was long established among Christians. All John has done, one might say, is to take it quite seriously.”² Rather more guardedly, Iain Matthew writes,

Juan’s attraction to the nuptial symbolism (rooted in mystical tradition) manifests his Biblicism … Perhaps Juan’s celibacy consecrated the nuptial image further. He says that God’s love for the soul exceeds that of madre, hermano, amigo (CB 27.1). Juan had enjoyed each of these relationships fulfillingly; for him, the only unknown of spousal love allows the ineffability of the divine.

Juan relishes the human ideal. Its warmth – its romanticism – evidently responds to Juan’s own experience of God, since he capitalizes on it so freely.³

Because of the properties of language, it is generally accepted that nuptial language not only reflects thought and feeling, but is capable of shaping thinking and feeling. I suggest that for John even more is involved. Firstly, it is probably significant that John was born of love and raised in love, and that he possessed the soul of a poet. Secondly, we recall John’s study of the Pseudo-Dionysius when he

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³ Iain Matthew, “The Knowledge and Consciousness of Christ in the Light of the Writings of St John of the Cross” (D.Phil. diss., University of Oxford, 1991), 194. Matthew chooses not to engage with the bridal mysticism in John’s writings. He interprets the relationship of the bride to God as filial, in the Johannine terms of being set with Christ “in his filial stance before the Father, in a love that exists only as the bond between this Son and that Father.” (243). I suggest that too much contemporary scholarship regards bridal mysticism only as genre and does not engage with it as expression of reality.
wrote his thesis on contemplation at the university of Salamanca. The Pseudo-Dionysius wrote of God as the ‘eros-desire.’ John recognised God as the desire/Desire that was in himself and that this embraced the whole of his being, body and soul, including his sexuality. John adopted the medieval literary convention of bridal mysticism because this was how he experienced his relationship with God, and he saw this relationship celebrated in the Song of Songs. He loved his Beloved with the whole of his being, and he experienced the love of his Beloved in the whole of his being. It would seem that John found kindred souls in medieval mystics such as Mechthild of Magdeburg and Gertrude of Helfta who similarly used nuptial language to describe their experience of God. There are resemblances in their writings, some of which are noted in this dissertation. John carries the bridal mystical tradition into post-Tridentine times. Although some may initially consider my claims to be bordering on the outrageous, I suggest that they make complete theological sense and are borne out in John’s writings and in contemporary theology.

The original name of John’s *Spiritual Canticle* poem was *Canciones entre el alma y el Esposa* (*Songs between the Soul and the Bridegroom*). It is significant that the poem was born in 1578, in the place of John’s extreme suffering, his prison cell in Toledo. In this seemingly unlikely place, something very special, and paradoxical, happened and the stanzas of the *Spiritual Canticle* record it in the language and imagery of the *Song of Songs*. What happened in that cell is suggested in the Prologue of John’s commentary on the *Spiritual Canticle*, where he writes,

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4 Chapter 1, 21.
5 Chapter 1, 8-9.
6 See Chapter 1, 26. Cf. “Fr Francisco Ribera, as confessor to Teresa of Avila, recommended her to take Gertrude as spiritual mistress and guide.” Winkworth, introduction to *Gertrude of Helfta*, 43.
7 Cf. Being in love with God is operating at the highest level of consciousness. It is “the intertwining of two lives. ” “It is other-worldly falling in love ... total and permanent surrender without conditions, qualifications, reservations.” Lonergan, *Method*, 106, 33, 240.
8 While in prison, John composed the first 31 stanzas of the *Spiritual Canticle* (others followed), together with his *Romances* (based on the prologue to John’s Gospel), *Rivers of Babylon*, and the *Song of the soul that rejoices to know God by faith*. Following requests for an explanation of the stanzas, John wrote the first redaction of the *Spiritual Canticle* commentary in 1584, and the second redaction (with altered stanza order and extra stanza), which I use except where indicated, in 1585-86. John’s *Spiritual Canticle* has an affinity with secular love poetry of the time and is based on the scriptural *Song of Songs* which John knew by heart.
These stanzas … were obviously composed with a certain burning love of God … [and it] would be foolish to think that expressions of love arising from mystical understanding, like these stanzas, are fully explainable … [for] who can express with words the experience he imparts … [or] the desires9 he gives (SC.Pro.1.469).

In addition to acknowledging the ineffable dimension of his task, John says that he is not explaining his stanzas for intellectual understanding because mystical wisdom

which comes through love and is the subject of these stanzas, need not be understood distinctly in order to cause love and affection in the soul, for it is given according to the mode of faith through which we love God without understanding him (SC.Pro.470).

Thus, John’s words will speak to the heart and are meant for all who search in faith for mystical truth, and not just for trained theologians. We are to hear God speak to us individually. John allows for other meanings besides those he proposes in his commentary. He further comments that he will treat of prayer and its effects, not for beginners who already have much help available to them, but for those who, like the recipient of his commentary, Madre Ana de Jesús, prioress of the Discalced Carmelite nuns in Granada (1584), have been led further. Although the prioress is not trained in scholastic theology, John says that she is “not wanting in mystical theology, which is known through love and by which these truths are not only known but at the same time enjoyed” (SC.Pro.3.470). Mystical knowledge is gained through love, not intellectual exercise.10

Figure 5 provides a facsimile of the opening stanzas of the Cántico Espiritual in the second redaction manuscript (1585-86). Cántico y Poesías: Manuscrito de Jaén, Volume I (Madrid: Junta de Andalucía/Turner Libros, 1991), 5r.

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9 This is John’s ‘eros-desire.’

10 Cf. “[God] can certainly be loved, but not thought. He can be taken and held by love but not by thought.” Walsh, Cloud of Unknowing, 130.
In the first stanzas of the *Spiritual Canticle*, we find a close connection between John’s wounds of love and what Julian calls love-longing for God. John commences his “love songs between the bride and Christ, the Bridegroom” (SC.Title.1.477) with a stanza which tells of the bride who has been wounded in her heart with love for her Lover. She longs for union with her Bridegroom, and for the sight of him for whom she has detached herself from all else, but he is absent. The bride’s spiritual quest is a loving search for the Beloved who has wounded her with love. The commentary on this stanza provides an outline of the journey to transforming union. In asking “Where have you hidden?” the bride is ultimately expressing her desire for the “manifest presence and vision of [God’s] divine essence” (SC.1.4.479) of the next life. The bride is seeking Christ, the Word, whose hiding place is, “as St. John asserts (Jn 1:18), the bosom [heart] of the Father” (SC.1.3.478), while the Father’s own “place of pasture” (SC.1.5.479) is in his only Son (Sg 1:7).

In order that “this thirsting soul might find her Bridegroom and be united with him in this life through union of love insofar as possible, so she might slake her thirst with the drop of him that can be received in this life” (SC.1.6.480), she must find where he is hidden. Very clearly, right at the outset, John announces where the Bridegroom is to be found:

> It should be known that the Word, the Son of God, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is hidden by his essence and his presence in the innermost being of the soul. Individuals who want to find him should leave all things through affection and will, enter within themselves in deepest recollection, and let all things be as though not … God, then, is hidden in the soul, and there the good contemplative must seek him with love, exclaiming: ‘Where have you hidden?’ (SC.1.6.480).

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11 Cf. Tyler interprets the opening stanzas of the *Spiritual Canticle* in terms of humankind’s “deep festering and painful spiritual wound.” *John of the Cross*, 41. Tyler comments that John’s theology “begins with a wound, the sense somehow that God has left us, a sense of dissatisfaction or failure,” 41. Given John’s comments on who he is writing the *Spiritual Canticle* commentary for (those who pray) and why (to help them with prayer), I interpret the opening stanzas, and the starting point of John’s theology, in virtue of God’s initiative (Jn 1) in gently wounding/touching us with love and drawing us through our God-given desires into transforming union. John’s theology emanates from his experience of God as Beloved. He sees wounds as gifts of his Beloved to him.

12 Both John and Julian describe the soul’s longing for God as thirst.
In the second redaction of the *Spiritual Canticle* commentary, John inserts six new sections on this key theme of finding God “in the innermost being of the soul … in deepest recollection.” John uses the term “recollection” frequently in his writings and defines it as “loving attentiveness to God.” Since the bride herself is her Spouse’s “dwelling and his secret inner room and hiding place” (SC.1.7.480), this is where he must be sought and enjoyed, in her interior recollection and desires, for he is never absent from her (SC.1.8.480). She will experience him in hiding if she “enters the hiding place” (SC.1.9.481) by closing the door on all else and remaining hidden with him in prayer. Like Moses hiding in the cleft in the rock when God passed by (Ex 33:22-23), the bride is to hide in Christ, in a life imitating that of her Spouse, so that God “will bring her to the high perfection of union with the Son of God, her Bridegroom, and transformation in him through love” (SC.1.10.481).

John advises the bride-soul to seek her hidden Spouse in faith and love, without desiring to find satisfaction in anything, or delight, or desiring to understand anything other than what [she] ought to know. Faith and love … will lead [her] along a path unknown to [her], to the place where God is hidden … In dealing with these secrets and mysteries of faith, the soul will merit through love the discovery of the content of faith, that is, the Bridegroom whom she desires to possess in this life through the special grace of divine union with God … and in the next life through the essential glory, by which she will rejoice in him, not in a hidden way, but face to face [1Cor 13:12] (SC.1.11.482).

For John, it is a quest involving the theological virtues of faith, hope and love, and he often mentions together the essential roles of faith and love, as he does here. It is a mystical journey in which the bride is to seek God in the darkness of faith, and to “love and delight in what [she] cannot understand or experience of him”

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13 SC.1.7-12.480-83.
14 Cf. “Preserve a loving attentiveness to God with no desire to feel or understand any particular thing concerning him” (S.88.92); “Recollection … is one of the most frequently used words in the language of sixteenth century spirituality. The Franciscans probably used it most. Teresa met it in the Third Spiritual Alphabet of Francisco de Osuna. In the spiritual classics recollection is identified with union with God. It does not in the first place describe a human activity, but God’s action.” Federico Ruiz, *St John of the Cross: The Saint and His Teaching* (Darlington: Carmel, 1988), 62. John returns to the theme of recollection at key points in his commentary and finishes with it.
15 In the *Ascent* and *Dark Night* commentaries, John teaches how to enter the hiding place, the silence in which is heard God’s Word. Cf. S.100.92.
(SC.1.12.482), for the closer she approaches to him, the less distinct is her understanding of him (SC.1.12.482). The bride continually asks “Where have you hidden?” because “even in the state of union he is still hidden from her, in the bosom of the Father ... which is how she wants to enjoy him in the next life” (SC.1.11.482). In these early paragraphs of the commentary, John outlines his theology.

Christ, the Bridegroom, is likened to the stag, who visits the bride to “gladden and liven” (SC.1.15.484) her, and then vanishes. Since the bride loves nothing apart from her Beloved, she finds no rest in anything and is left continually grieving his absence and hoping for what she lacks (SC.1.14.483). This moan held within the bride’s heart arises from where love has wounded her, “and it ever cries out in the feeling of his absence; especially when [she], after the taste of some sweet and delightful communication of the Bridegroom, suffers his absence and is left alone and dry” (SC.1.14.484). These visits of the Bridegroom to the bride/soul are secret touches of love that pierce and wound it like fiery arrows, leaving it wholly cauterized by the fire of love. And these wounds, mentioned here, are properly called wounds of love. They so inflame the will in its affection that it burns up in this flame and fire of love. So intense is this burning that the soul is seemingly consumed in that flame, and the fire makes it go out of itself, wholly renews it, and changes its manner of being, as in the case of the phoenix that burns itself in the fire and rises anew from the ashes (SC.1.17.484).17

Wounds of love are intense and transforming encounters with God. They pierce the soul like fiery arrows and produce a burning and consuming love in the soul. They are “accompanied by a kind of immense torment and yearning to see God” (SC.1.18.485), and the bride desires that her Bridegroom “slay her for the sake of her seeing and being united with him in the life of perfect love” (SC.1.18.485). Inspired by the bride’s search in the Song of Songs (Sg 3:2; 5:6), and in the language of sixteenth-century Spanish love poetry which best expresses his meaning, John is describing Julian’s wound of willfull longing for God. Instead of dying with these wounds of love for her Beloved, the bride is left alone by him who quickly hides away from her, like the stag who appears briefly and flees. Some visits of the Bridegroom are refreshing and satisfying but these love-wounding visits “wound more than heal and afflict more than satisfy” (SC.1.19.485) because they are events of on-going and

17 John uses a similar Resurrection theology in his poem Rivers of Babylon.
ever-greater aggravation of the wound. They deepen the bride’s knowledge of her Spouse and increase her painful longing for him. Thus, says John, are these wounds of love, which, it must be emphasized, “are very delightful and desirable. The soul would desire to be ever dying a thousand deaths from these thrusts of the lance, for they make her go out of herself and enter into God” (SC.1.19.485). For John, meeting God in this life is a paradox of suffering and delight. In reading John’s account of these wounds of love, it is important to remember that he is, without being autobiographical, putting words on his own experience, and for his readers to enter into their own experience in trying to understand what he is saying.

The exquisiteness of her experiences of love explains why the bride rises and goes out after the Bridegroom who has wounded her. Strengthened by the fire of love caused by these wounds, she abandons all else and forgets herself (SC.1.20.485) as she devotes all her energies to searching for the only One who can heal her lovesickness. Because she has let go of all else, even herself, but cannot find the Bridegroom, the bride says that she is left “suspended in air and suffering without any support from you or from myself” (SC.1.21.486). She is wounded with love, and she is wounded because the Bridegroom has gone and she cannot find him. Having left all, she has gained nothing (SC.1.21.486). John writes that those suffering the intense pain of these wounds “would die if the Lord did not provide” (SC.1.22.486). Because they are “well prepared for God, and they have been given some of the sweetness of divine love, which they desire beyond all measure, they suffer beyond all measure” (SC.1.22.486). At this point in the poem, however, still the first stanza, this is not yet the bride’s state. She must be gently wooed by her Bridegroom.

In the second stanza, beginning her quest for the Lover who has wounded and stolen her heart, the bride appeals to the “shepherds”: her desires, affections and

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18 John would appear to be referring here to the intensity of the bride’s surrender, rather than to rapture. He teaches “true self-denial, exterior and interior, through surrender of self both to suffering for Christ and to annihilation in all things” (2DN.7.8.171). When the soul is empty, “it is truly poor in spirit and stripped of the old self, and thereby able to live that new and blessed life which is the state of union with God” (2DN.9.4.413-14). In the mystical marriage, the soul/bride passes “out of self to the Beloved” (SC.26.14.578). Her deepest centre is God (LF.1.12.645). Cf. Poverty of spirit is having “nothing to defend.” Martin Laird, Into the Silent Land: A Guide to the Christian Practice of Contemplation (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 137.

19 Sg 3:2; 5:6-7.
moanings (SC.2.2.487), to express her yearnings (longing) to the Bridegroom as she faithfully and lovingly awaits the time of union. She tells him of her needs, related to suffering in the three faculties of her soul: she is “sick” because she does not see God; she “suffers” because she does not possess God; and she is “dying” because she fears that, given her weakness and unreliability, she may lack God forever (SC.2.6.488). As a scholastic theologian, John comments that “these three needs and sufferings are based on the three theological virtues (faith, charity, and hope) that reside in the three faculties of the soul in the order given here, intellect, will, and memory” (SC.2.7.489).20

The bride knows that the search for her Beloved requires more than her yearning (Julian’s love-longing), and the third stanza depicts her deepening self-knowledge as she sets out to steadfastly and diligently practice virtue, and mortify her pride. She courageously rejects attachment to worldly goods, sensory pleasures and even spiritual consolations. She bravely refuses to be frightened by the thought of losing friends and reputation, enduring permanent discomfort, or being ridiculed. She puts on “the armour of God” (SC.3.8.493) to endure interior trials, to fight the wiles of the devil, and to throw down “with willful strength and determination all sensory appetites and natural affections” (SC.3.9-10.493).21 There is a very good reason for all this effort. In The Sayings of Light and Love, John has this to say for anyone who seeks a meeting with the Bridegroom:

The Father spoke one Word, which was his Son, and this Word he speaks always in eternal silence, and in silence it must be heard by the soul (S.100.92).

20 KR considers an understanding of Aristotelian-scholastic theory helpful in interpreting John’s teaching which does not depend on any one system (2A.8.4.175, N.3). For John, “everything the intellect can understand, the will enjoy, and the imagination picture is most unlike and disproportionate to God” (2A.8.5.175). It is faith that unites the intellect with God, hope that unites the memory with God and love that unites the will with God.

21 John declares war on “appetites” and “passions.” It is well to note John’s definitions of appetites: “Generally: inordinate affective desires in which the will participates … Especially when habitual, they both impede union with God and weary, torment, darken, defile, and weaken the soul (1A.6.1; 11.3; 12.2-6),” and passions, which: “also called emotions, belong, with the appetites, to the human affective (or appetitive) part (A.3.16.2) … When unbridled, [they] become the source of all vices and imperfections; when properly regulated, [they] give rise to all the virtues (A.3.16.2-5). In divine union, [they] are alive but so transformed that God alone is their rule (C.28.3-5).” (KR.Glossary.767, 773).
For anyone who seeks God, John writes, God is continually being revealed in Christ. Being spoken in the eternal silence of God, the Word of God must be heard in silence. In *Ascent*, John similarly writes, “In giving us his Son, his only Word (for he possesses no other), [God] spoke everything to us at once in this sole Word – and he has no more to say” (2A.22.3.230). We cannot receive God’s communication outside of and apart from God’s Son. Being wounded with love, we seek to be free of all that would prevent us from hearing God’s Word clearly.

Ever continuing her search, the bride of the *Spiritual Canticle* finds traces of her Bridegroom in irrational creatures: “his grandeur, might, wisdom, and other divine attributes” (SC.5.3.496). God has looked upon creatures, communicating “natural being and grace” (SC.5.4.497), and, through the Incarnation, clothed them in the image of the Son. She also learns of her Beloved from rational creatures (humans and angels). These glimpses of God increase the bride’s wound of love for her Bridegroom and her sorrow at his absence (SC.6.2.498). They enlarge the wound in her because they are merely messengers of the only One who can give her relief and healing. The bride is sick with love and pleads, “In true surrender yield to me, most dear” (SC.6). Only the sight and possession of her Beloved will cure her sickness; since he has given her this wound of love, only he can heal it. The bride wants no more messengers but her Bridegroom himself as both message and messenger (SC.6.7.499).

In the seventh stanza, John describes three types of wounds (sufferings with love) which correspond to three kinds of knowledge of God. The first is the wound (*herida*), which comes from her knowledge of creatures and what they tell her of God, which causes the bride’s love-sickness in the Song of Songs: “I charge you, daughters of Jerusalem, if you should find my love, what are you to tell him? – That I am sick with love!” (Sg 5:8). The second is the sore wound (*llaga*), deeper and longer-lasting, which comes from the knowledge the rational creatures give the bride of the Incarnation and the mysteries of faith flowing from this. John comments that this sore wound wounds the Bridegroom. He quotes the Bridegroom: “You have wounded my heart, my sister, with one of your eyes and with one hair of your neck (Sg 4:9). The ‘eye’ refers to faith in the Incarnation of the Bridegroom, and the ‘hair’ signifies love for this very Incarnation” (SC.7.3.500).
The third wound of love is like dying, for the bride is now like a “wound wholly festered” (llaga afistolada) (SC.7.4.500). She lives like this until love “in killing her, makes her live the life of love, transforming her in love” (SC.7.4.500). This will not come to its completion until the bride is granted the beatific vision in heaven, but even now, in her contemplation, “this dying of love is effected in the soul by means of a touch of highest knowledge of the Divinity” (Peers.SCA.7.4.53) which is referred to by the bride when she says, “y déjame muriendo/ un no sé qué que quedan balbuciando” (OC.SC.7) [and leave me dying/ of, ah, I-don’t-know-what behind their stammering” (KR.SC.7)]. The bride is given a touch of love which she experiences as beyond understanding or feeling, and imparts to her the knowledge that God is immense and beyond understanding, even beyond reason, because the rational creatures can only stammer about this. The bride says, “If what I understand wounds me with love, what I do not understand completely, yet have sublime experience of, is death to me” (SC.7.9.502). This “sublime experience” leads to the cutting loose of the bride from reliance on the rational creatures and her intellectual faith, which is a most painful dying of love. She must follow this “clearly imprinted trace of God” (Peers.SCA.7.9.55), and trust herself to the One who is beyond words. She must hope in God for all. The bride has new knowledge of the unfathomable mystery of her Bridegroom, given her in brief touches of love in her contemplation, but her Beloved, the stag, flees after each quick visit and she is left dying with love. The bride suffers more because she “does not die wholly of love. This love is called impatient love” (SC.7.4.501).

For the bride, her life is now caught in an agonizing tension between her natural life of being in her body and her spiritual life of loving God, which has become her truer place of living because of the many experiences and understandings of her Bridegroom, given to her in wounding touches of love (arrows). The arrows, wounding touches of love, are enough to kill her. They “so impregnate the soul and heart with the knowledge and love of God that she can truthfully say she conceives of

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22 John’s hospital work in Medina del Campo gave him close experience of such wounds.

23 God bestows touches of love “in contemplation, be it purgative, illuminative or unitive. Here the effects are characteristic of the state of spiritual betrothal: impatient love, wounds of love.” KR, 501, N.1.
The bride finds it extraordinarily painful to know that she has within her this life of love which is consuming her, and yet she is shackled to an existence which denies her what she wants.

The ninth stanza is one of beautifully plaintive repetition, directness, familiarity and simplicity. The bride, helpless, and hoping that now may be the time of her deliverance, appeals directly to the Bridegroom himself, laying before him her anguish at her seemingly-going-nowhere love for him: Beloved, why don’t you heal my heart? Why don’t you take possession of what you have stolen? Like the stag, wounded by a poisoned arrow, the bride has looked everywhere for relief, to no avail. She has been left “empty, hungry, alone, sorely wounded and sick with love, suspended in the air” (SC.9.6.506). She is not complaining about the Bridegroom’s wounding and stealing of her heart - for she desires this above all else, but that he does not heal her by “slaying her completely” (SC.9.3.505) and carrying off what he has stolen (SC.9.4.506). Since her heart is fixed upon him, and is no longer her own, she “yearns for the fulfillment and perfection of love in order to have complete refreshment therein” (SC.9.7.507). The bride longs for the “wages of her love” (SC.9.7.506). She begs for the only reward that will heal her love-wound: that she enjoy perfect love with her Beloved (SC.9.7.507) and be transformed into him “in the delight and glory of [his] sweet presence” (SC.9.3.505). So too, in his Toledo cell, did John beseech his absent Beloved to speak to him of love.

At this point, the bride is sick with the love of God: her heart is fixed on him, and she has no taste for anything apart from him. Being required to interact with the “affairs of the world” (SC.10.3.508) causes inner conflict and pain. These daily concerns annoy the bride intensely, as well as giving her profound sorrow and regret for the way they seem to block the path to her Beloved (SC.10.3.508). The bride must contend with devils and these worldly affairs that “take away the mantle of peace and quietude of loving contemplation” (SC.10.3.508). Amidst all this, the bride longs to keep her eyes entirely for her Beloved, the light of her eyes and her life, and to see him face to face with the eyes of her soul (SC.10.7.509). She entreats her Bridegroom to “extinguish these miseries” (KR.SC.10) with the cool water of his presence which


25 Julian writes that Christ wants us to come to him “nakedly, plainly and homely” (P.v.161).
will refresh her in her exhaustion. Only the presence of her desired Loved One can bring her relief and John with the assurance that comes from experience comments that

God is very ready to comfort and satisfy the soul in her needs and afflictions when she neither has nor desires consolation and satisfaction outside of him. The soul possessing nothing that might withhold her from God cannot remain long without a visit from her Beloved (SC.10.6.509).

In his commentary on the eleventh stanza, John describes how, since the “loving Bridegroom of souls cannot long watch them suffering alone” (SC.11.1.510), he favours his bride with “a certain spiritual feeling of his presence [in which she sees and experiences] through that obscure presence the supreme good and beauty hidden there” (SC.11.1.510). The bride’s experience of this favour greatly increases her fervour and desire to see him. The bride knows that God is present within her in her being and by grace, although hidden, but she particularly and fervently desires her Beloved to continue to reveal his

affective presence … [which is] so sublime that the soul feels an immense hidden being from which God communicates to her some semi-clear glimpses of his divine beauty. And these bear such an effect on the soul that she ardently longs and faints with desire for what she feels hidden there in that presence (SC.11.4.511).

The bride melts with “longing to be engulfed in that supreme good she feels present and hidden, for although it is hidden she has a notable experience of the good and delight present there” (SC.11.4.511). She seems to be forcibly drawn towards her hidden Bridegroom and she begs him to come out of hiding and allow her the sight of his beauty.

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26 The English “faints” suggests a loss of consciousness but the bride is very aware of her Bridegroom’s presence. The Spanish desfallecer can perhaps be better translated as “is faint”, “melts”, “becomes weak”, “is overwhelmed”, or “is taken out of herself.” CSUD, 334. Cf. Elizabeth of the Trinity writes that the soul falls down and faints in “an utterly profound silence,” and in another place: “I think that this should be the attitude of every soul that enters into its interior courts to contemplate God and to come into closest contact with Him: it ‘falls into a faint’ in a divine swoon before this all-powerful Love, this infinite Majesty who dwells within it! It is not life that abandons the soul, but rather the soul that scorns this natural life and withdraws from it … For it feels that this life is not worthy of His rich essence so it dies and flows into its God.” “Last Retreat,” Elizabeth of the Trinity: The Complete Works, vol. 1, trans. Aletheia Kane (Washington: ICS Publications, 1984), 150, 162.
John added the eleventh stanza to the *Spiritual Canticle* when he was compiling the second redaction of the commentary. As well as providing a useful bridge in the rearrangement of the stanzas, this stanza allows John to emphasize the bride’s desire for perfect love, and for her Bridegroom to “show her his beauty, his divine essence” (SC.11.2.510), which reflects John’s fascination with God’s beauty, as seen in his writing of stanzas 36-40, particularly the thirty-sixth. The love-wounds bestowed by her Beloved are the cause of the bride’s love-sickness (*dolencia de amor*), which, because of the favours of “affective presence” being given to her, has deepened. The only cure for her is the presence and sight of her Beloved, his beauty, his essence. Because she is taken out of herself by the experience of God’s hidden presence, the bride knows that the full vision of God’s beauty, which she desires, is more than her humanity can accommodate in this life. But, though sight of her Beloved will kill her, she says, “let it be so!” (SC.11). Death will give her “love’s completeness, which she desires” (SC.11.10.514). John comments that the bride has no fear of dying (1 Jn 4:18) but longs for the day when she beholds her Bridegroom’s beauty face to face. In this beauty she will be transformed, for “love never reaches perfection until the lovers are so alike that one is transfigured in the other” (SC.11.12.515). In this life the bride experiences, printed deep within herself, “a certain sketch of love, which is the sickness she mentions, and she desires the completion of the sketch of this image, the image of her Bridegroom, the Word, the Son of God” (SC.11.12.515) in an eternal embrace.

The bride has been given many favours by God, including an “enlightened faith” (SC.12.1.515) by which she knows her Bridegroom in an obscure and dark way, not with clarity, but with unexplainable conviction. She now implores faith to draw back its veil to allow her the clear vision she desires of her Bridegroom. It is through faith that the bride knows her Bridegroom, and not by clear sight. The bride’s

27 In SC.36.5.611-12, John uses the word “beauty” twenty-three times.

28 John observes that our present imperfect love is truly a sickness because “the soul that is feeble in love is too weak to practice heroic virtue … [however] those who feel in themselves the sickness of love, show they have some love” (SC.11.13-14.515). Longing is evidence of Love. John is suggesting that the struggle and pain that we have with our weakness and lack of love, is itself a sign of the love-wound (God’s presence) within us. It will be with us until we and the Bridegroom are truly one. Cf. Julian, P.lvi.380-81; P.lxxii.481.
faith is a Christ-spring within her, from which flows “the waters of all spiritual goods” (SC.12.3.516). The propositions of faith are like “silvered over faces” (SC.12.4.516) which hide the gold of Divine Reality. When God gives silver-plated earrings to the bride in Song 1:11, God “gives the bride himself but hidden in faith” (SC.12.4.517). Thus, the God she experiences in faith is the same God with whom she will be one in bliss. Faith is a “sleeping between” the propositions of faith and the God they veil; it involves closing off the intellect and living from the Christ-spring within. The bride uses the term “eyes” because “of the remarkable presence of the Beloved she experiences. It seems to her that he is now always looking at her” (SC.12.5.517). For the bride, “the truths infused in the soul through faith are as though sketched, and when clearly visible they will be like a perfect and finished painting in the soul” (SC.12.6.517).

Having treated the “sketch of faith” as truths infused into the bride/soul’s intellect, John places over this sketch a “sketch of love” which is drawn in her will. He outlines spiritual transformation:

When there is union of love, the image of the Beloved is so sketched in the will, and drawn so intimately and vividly, that it is true to say that the Beloved lives in the lover and the lover in the Beloved. Love produces such likeness in this transformation of lovers that one can say that each is the other and both are one. The reason is that in the union and transformation of love each gives possession of self to the other and each leaves and exchanges self for the other. Thus each one lives in the other, and both are one in the transformation of love (SC.12.7.517-18).

Transformation involves both Bridegroom and bride giving themselves to each other in a love which produces likeness. The sketch of love is not complete until the bride is transformed into her Beloved in glory. However, in this life she may attain to the “spiritual marriage, the highest state attainable in this life … [with which] the Bridegroom is very pleased” (SC.12.8.518). Again John quotes from the Song of

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29 Similar faith imagery may be seen in another poem written by John in his Toledo cell: *Song of the Soul that Rejoices to Know God by Faith*.

30 John refers to Jn 4:14 and 7:39.

31 The *Romances* that John also composed in his cell present the “propositions of faith” as a love-story between God and created beings, focusing on the wonder of the Incarnation of the Word as Bridegroom of his beloved bride (Jn 1).

32 Cf. “You looked with love on me” (SC.32); In gazing at us, God’s “eyes anticipate, radiate, penetrate and elicit beauty … traditionally called ‘grace’.” Matthew, *Impact*, 28-29.
Songs: “Put me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm” (Sg 8:6), referring to the Beloved being the sketch of faith in the bride’s heart, and the sketch of love in her will.

John describes the bride’s state at this time as “indescribable. It seems to the soul that its bodily and spiritual substance is drying up with thirst for this living spring of God” (SC.12.9.518). The bride’s whole being is involved. It is a physical as well as spiritual torment which so exhausts her that she would do anything to “break through” (SC.12.9.519) to Christ. The pain comes from her ardent yearning for what seems so close but is still denied her. Although God is very near to his love-wounded bride, “he is intolerable darkness” (SC.13.1.519). In Dark Night, John comments that the extreme suffering of the night of the spirit is part of our meeting with God in the “way of union,” and not just an irksome prelude to be endured. Much more than irksome, the bride/soul feels “taken apart” but that all is possible (2DN.13.7.426). In the darkness, she comes to a new way of knowing.

In the first twelve stanzas of the Spiritual Canticle, Christ the Word of God is the Bridegroom wounding his cherished bride with touches of love which draw her to him. The wounds are both delightful and painful, and ever increasing in intensity. The bride is now ready for the deepening of the wound of love in betrothal to Christ, her Beloved.

**Stanzas Thirteen to Twenty-one**

The thirteenth stanza in John’s Spiritual Canticle tells of radical desire. It is to this place that the bride’s wound of love has drawn her. John describes the deepening of the wound that has taken place and what happens when the bride comes to know that the Bridegroom, the wounded stag, is similarly wounded with love for her. In experiencing God as Love, she is betrothed to the Bridegroom. Contemplative readers of John’s Spiritual Canticle find that this is a place of movement, which is highlighted by the fractured nature of the stanza with both bride and Bridegroom speaking and

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34 The alignment of delightful love and suffering is a major theme in both John’s and Julian’s writings.
interacting. In the remaining stanzas in this section of his *Spiritual Canticle*, John has much to say about prayer and its effects at this new stage of the bride’s quest, including the suffering encountered, and he expresses it in the language of the Song of Songs.

In the twelfth stanza, having painfully endured her Bridegroom’s continuing absence, the bride implored faith to let her see suddenly and up close the “eyes” of her Beloved, whose image is printed deep within her. Now, in the thirteenth stanza, the veil is dropped in a special visit of her Bridegroom, and the bride is both overjoyed and terrified. Overwhelmed, she implores,

> Turn them away, my Love!  
> I’ll fly from here!

and her Bridegroom responds,

> Return, small dove, alight!  
> For on the hill above  
> the wounded stag in sight  
> finds freshness from the fanning of your flight (SC.13).

The Bridegroom usually visits his bride “chastely, delicately, and with strong love [amid her] intense loving desires and ardors” (SC.13.2.520), but at this point he reveals to her “some rays of his grandeur and divinity” (SC.13.2.520) which are communicated “sublimely and forcibly” (SC.13.2.520) so that the bride is carried “out of herself in rapture and ecstasy” (SC.13.2.520). The bride suddenly finds herself being forcibly taken over by her Bridegroom who gives her the sublime knowledge of some of his secrets. There is physical dislocation and pain as her body struggles with God’s entering into her experience, described as the concentration of God’s eyes on her. She copes with such an overwhelming experience with an emotional, “Turn them away, my Love!” It is too much for her humanity to bear. She is like the dove “in [her] sublime and swift contemplation, and in [her] burning love and in the simplicity

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35 John refers us to others for descriptions of different kinds of raptures, in particular, Teresa of Avila. See Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, *Collected Works I*, “Life,” Ch. 20; *Collected Works II*: “Interior Castle,” VI, Chs. 4-5. John comments that the spiritual betrothal is experienced in various ways and with varying intensity, but “the greatest possible communication is recorded here because it includes everything else” (SC.14&15.2.526).
of [her] advance” (SC.13.8.523), and she wants to leave her body so that she may ever experience such sublime communication from her Beloved: “I'll fly from here!”

The Bridegroom responds immediately to his bride’s distress, like the stag who “if he hears the cry of his mate and senses that she is wounded … immediately runs to her to comfort and caress her” (SC.13.9.523). The bride has the overwhelming experience of discovering that, as she goes about wounded with love for her Bridegroom, he also is wounded with love for her. John is describing the grace of knowing that he is first loved by God, as Julian learns when Christ impresses upon her, “Lo, how I love thee” (P.xxiv.236). Christ is smitten with a wounding, loving desire for his bride, for “among lovers, the wound of one is a wound for both, and the two have but one feeling” (SC.13.9.523). Just as the wounded stag runs to cool waters for refreshment, so too does the wounded Bridegroom run to his wounded bride for refreshment.36 He finds his refreshment in intercepting her flight, placing her “in the ark of his charity (Gn. 8-9)” (SC.14&15.1.525), which is the bosom of God (SC.14&15.3.526), his heart. He soothes her fright, and invites her to turn again to him (“Return, dove”), where for now she is instructed to settle with the wounded stag, Christ her Bridegroom, in sweet contemplation (SC.13.8.523).

In the Dark Night commentary, John explains that the bride/soul escapes her house via the ladder37 of contemplation which links her heart with God’s. She is disguised in the garb of faith, hope and charity, the virtues which purify her intellect, her memory, and her will. She is thus hidden in contemplative recollection from all attacks of the devil, the world and the flesh. For the bride/soul to escape from her

36 Cf. Jn 4:34.

37 John explains “ten successive steps on this ladder of love by which the soul ascends to God … The first step of love makes the soul sick in an advantageous way … The second step causes a person to search for God unceasingly … The third step of this loving ladder prompts the soul to the performance of works and gives it fervour that it might not fail … On the fourth step of this ladder of love a habitual yet unwearisome suffering is engendered on account of the Beloved … The fifth step of this ladder of love imparts an impatient desire and longing for God … The sixth step makes the soul run swiftly toward God and experience many touches in him … the seventh step of the ladder gives it an ardent boldness … The eighth step of love impels the soul to lay hold of the Beloved without letting him go … The ninth step of love causes the soul to burn gently … The tenth and last step of this secret ladder of love assimilates the soul to God completely because of the clear vision of God that a person possesses at once on reaching it. After arriving at the ninth step in this life, the soul departs from the body” (2DN.19-20.440-45). I am indebted to Dr Kerrie Hide for the additional insight that the secret ladder of the Dark Night poem takes one down into one’s heart where God is found. (Retreat presentation, St Mary’s Towers Retreat Centre, Douglas Park, December 2009).
house is “sheer grace” (DN.1, 2), because “the Beloved is not found except alone, outside, and in solitude” (2DN.14.1.428). In commenting on the thirteenth stanza of the Spiritual Canticle, John describes contemplation as “a high place where God begins to communicate and show himself to the soul in this life, but not completely” (SC.13.10.523). The “flight” John refers to in the thirteenth stanza is the contemplation experienced in the bride’s rapture, and the “breeze” is her love for the Bridegroom. It is this love which refreshes the wounded Bridegroom for it is the true communication between the lovers (rather than the sublime knowledge given to the bride). Love begets more love, and John notes that “God does not place his grace and love in the soul except according to its desire and love … and to acquire this charity, one ought to practice what St. Paul taught: ‘Charity is patient . . ..’” (SC.13.12.524). Our part is to love others.

Going beyond John’s commentary on the thirteenth stanza, as John himself has advised us to do (SC.Pro.2.470), one recalls that he had a precious crucifix with him in his Toledo prison: Crisógono records that he wore it against his heart and gave it to his guard before he escaped. 38 What John was contemplating in his prison cell was the goodness of God which overflowed into the Incarnation (Romances), and especially the love of God revealed in the crucified Christ. In his prayer, John was given to know/experience God in a profoundly life-changing way, as evidenced in his mystical poetry written at this time and afterwards. The thirteenth stanza of the Spiritual Canticle is about John coming to recognise God’s love in the crucified Christ, whom he describes as the stag on the hill, wounded with love for him. John's experience is exactly the same as Julian's: an overpowering experience, in extreme suffering, of God’s love. John’s poem, Rivers of Babylon, also picks up on this transforming moment:

Then came love to strike and wound me
and he tore my heart in two.

This reminds us of Julian’s description of Christ’s heart cloven in two (P.xxiv.236), but here John of the Cross is saying that as he contemplates his compassionate God in Christ, his own heart is torn in two: he loves Christ, and they

38 Crisógono, Life, 110. According to Edith Stein, the crucifix was especially precious to John because it was given to him by Teresa of Avila at Duruelo in 1568. Science, 276.
are one. He begs his Lover to kill him, flinging himself “into his flames, welcoming his burning touch” (*Rivers of Babylon*). One recalls that Julian chooses Christ in suffering for her heaven, and to remain there with him. As for Julian two centuries earlier, it is a bridal, transforming experience of God’s love which is given to John at this time when he looks with longing love to the crucified Christ. John and Julian tap into a strong Christian mystical tradition, well-known, for example, to Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) and other early Cistercians, as well as many other mystics, like John the evangelist, the apostle Paul, and Francis of Assisi. The tradition centres on the piercing of the side of the crucified Christ in John’s Gospel (Jn 19:34). We are invited to “look to the one whom they have pierced” (Jn 19:37), which is to go to Christ’s wounds, “particularly the one in his side … to look, to hide ourselves, to feed, to rest, to sleep the sleep of contemplation, to go beyond ourselves in meditation on the Passion, to go until we reach the divinity of Christ, as far as the eternal love of God.”

In John of the Cross’s thirteenth stanza, the dove (bride) is caught by her Bridegroom in the breeze (love) of her flight (contemplation), and she sees and tastes union with her Beloved: “This state is called spiritual betrothal with the Word, the Son of God” (SC.14&15.2.525). Now her complaints of his absence cease, for she usually knows he is near, and she is endowed and clothed with delightful graces and a new peace. Her knowledge and experience of God’s love is the sweetness of her contemplation described by John in the fourteenth and fifteenth stanzas. The bride’s Beloved is the beauty and grandeur of mountains, the remote depths of restful wooded valleys, wondrous endless variety and newness, and singing streams which inundate her soul, filling it with good things and the immensity of God’s voice. He is loving, gentle breezes which delight both feeling and hearing. He is the stillness of night, the promise of dawn, the heard presence in solitude, the music in her heart, and the intimate sharing of a mutual loving which refreshes and satisfies.

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41 Until she sees her Beloved face to face, she will always long for him.
The bride is given to discover, understand and experience in peaceful rest the abundant riches of her Bridegroom, his wisdom, power and love, and she can truly pray with St Francis: “My God and all things” (SC.14&15.5.526). John likens the bride to a solitary sparrow perched on the housetop: she dwells in highest, solitary contemplation, directing her love and praise to God; she is empty of self-love and the desire for sensible affection, being content to possess the darkness of “an abyss of the knowledge of God” (SC.14&15.24.535). The Bridegroom is the bride’s “supper that refreshes, and deepens love” (KR.SC.15). Here John explicitly refers to the risen Christ of the Apocalypse, coming to sup with the one who opens to him (Rev. 3:20).

In her betrothal, the bride is endowed with wisdom and tranquility, but until she is granted the high grace of the mystical marriage she must still contend with the withdrawing of her Bridegroom, with disturbances, and with the difficulties occasioned by her own on-going imperfections (SC.14&15.30.537).

The betrothed bride delights in God’s activity in her (the infused virtues). She enjoys habitual peace, and “sublime enjoyment” (SC.16.1.538) in her Bridegroom’s visits, during which she delights in giving herself to her Beloved, but she is not free from suffering. The devil attacks her with renewed energy, either in her sensory appetites which are not quite dead, or with disturbing images and spiritual trials. Like the bride in Song 2:15, the bride in John’s *Spiritual Canticle* calls on the angels to catch the “foxes” (SC.16) which wreak havoc in her garden (soul) and hinder the enjoyment she and her Bridegroom have in each other’s company. Her senses and faculties need to be “unoccupied, idle, and empty of their own operations and objects” (SC.16.11.542) if she is to attend fully to her Beloved as she desires.

In the seventeenth stanza, the bride tries with constant prayer to discourage the cold north wind (dryness), and she entreats the warm south wind (the Holy Spirit) to flow through her garden (soul) to prepare her for the visits of the Son of God, her Bridegroom. When the Holy Spirit flows through her garden, the bride is aware of her blessings and riches. God’s activity in her is also obvious to others. Her Bridegroom

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42 Cf. Julian’s description of the Trinity (P.liv.371).
43 “This preparation takes time, for some more than others, since God carries out this work according to the mode of the soul” (LF.3.25.683).
44 The suffering of the bride in the time of spiritual betrothal receives extensive treatment in 2DN.
finds his delight in her and “feeds on the soul, transforming her into himself” (SC.17.10.545). However, the bride finds that the Spirit’s work in her garden is constantly obstructed by her sensuality. She suffers greatly from feeling imprisoned and tyrannized by “imagination, phantasies, movements and affections” (SC.18.4.547) which continually try to draw her away from her Bridegroom, so she asks her Beloved to communicate with her in her inner soul, in a place where he can “inform and shine on her faculties45 with the glory and excellence of his divinity” (SC.19.2.549) out of the reach of her sensuality. She desires to see him “through a spiritual knowledge strange and foreign to the senses” (SC.19.7.551), beyond images, senses and feelings, face to face, in silence, in the hidden depths of her soul.

For the mystical marriage to take place, the bride must “hold the door of her will open to the Bridegroom so he may enter through the complete and true ‘yes’ of love” (SC.20&21.2.552), and to do this she needs to “attain an adequate degree of purity, fortitude, and love” (SC.20&21.2.551). Despite her efforts, the bride, well aware of her helplessness, can never attain to this without assistance from her Bridegroom, who now directly intervenes, freeing her from disturbances caused by her sensuality and the devil, and from the imperfection of acts in her memory, intellect and will, and taking her for his own. He wants his bride to enjoy “the sleep for which she longs” (SC.21). She is the Bridegroom’s enclosed garden, fenced in and protected, surrendered there in love for him alone to wander in. The bride at last enters into peaceful and loving communion with her Beloved, and, writes John, “no door is closed to the soul, but it is in her power to enjoy this gentle sleep of love at will” (SC.20&21.18.559). The gentle sleep of love is the bride’s meeting God in contemplation.

**Concluding Comments**

This chapter has argued that John uses the language of bridal mysticism because it mirrors his experience of God, his Beloved. In the first twenty-one stanzas of the *Spiritual Canticle*, John traces the path of the bride from the time of her heart being wounded with love for her Beloved, through the time of betrothal (when she

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45 Intellect, memory, and will.
comes to know that her Beloved is wounded with love for her) until the time of the mystical marriage in which her wound of love and that of her Beloved become one wound as she becomes one with him in transforming union. God touches or wounds the bride with love, drawing her into contemplation at the time of the betrothal, and then, through trials, tribulations and temptations, into the mystical marriage. The path is one of joy and pain and especially of deepening love, as the bride prepares for this union by becoming “lost to myself” (DN.8) and surrendering all that she is to her Beloved, who now takes her as his own.
CHAPTER 8

WOUNDED LOVERS

My dove, hiding in the clefts of the rock,
in the coverts of the cliff,
show me your face,
let me hear your voice (Sg 2:14).

Introduction

This chapter concludes the study of ‘wound’ in John of the Cross’s Spiritual Canticle by examining stanzas twenty-two to forty. These stanzas treat of the bride’s transformation in God in the state of mystical marriage.

Stanzas Twenty-two to Thirty-five

Like the thirteenth stanza of the Spiritual Canticle, the twenty-second is the place of a major shift. John marks it as such in his commentary by providing a review of the bride’s journey to this point. He lists the purgative way of mortification and meditation of the first four stanzas, the contemplative way of longing for her absent Beloved in stanzas five to twelve, the unitive (but deeply purgative) way of the spiritual betrothal wrought in stanza thirteen and leading to perfect love, and now, in stanza twenty-two, the spiritual marriage, which is

incomparably better than the spiritual betrothal, for it is a total transformation in the Beloved, in which each surrenders the entire possession of self to the other with a certain consummation of the union of love. The soul thereby becomes divine, God through participation, insofar as is possible in this life (SC.22.3.560-61).

Having intervened (in the two preceding stanzas) to deliver and establish his bride, by drying up her appetites and passions, and making her secure against attacks by the devil, the Bridegroom in stanzas twenty-two and twenty-three describes their nuptials. At this time, the Bridegroom “calls the soul his crown, his bride, and the joy of his heart, and he takes her now in his arms and goes forth with her as the bridegroom from his bridal chamber [Ps. 19:5]” (SC.22.1.559). With great desire for
his bride, the Bridegroom, like the Good Shepherd, has been searching for his bride along “many winding paths … And it is wonderful to see his pleasure in carrying the rescued, perfected soul on his shoulders, held there by his hands in this desired union” (SC.22.1.559). The garden that the bride has at last entered is God, and when she rests in her Bridegroom’s arms like the bride in Song 8:3, she “usually experiences an intimate spiritual embrace, which is a veritable embrace, by means of which she lives the life of God” (SC.22.5.562). Teresa of Avila experienced this embrace of the mystical marriage after receiving the Eucharist from John of the Cross’s hands in Avila on November 18, 1572. Such an embrace is a very special wound of love.

The bride rests in this transforming embrace “all centred on Love” (SC.22), laying her neck (strength/weakness) on her Beloved’s arms (strength), surrendering all in complete trust to him. Union is not complete until her death but he now strengthens and shelters her. The bride kisses her Bridegroom as an equal “without contempt or disturbance from anyone” (SC.22:7.563), which implies that her complete absorption in her Bridegroom does not permit any concerns about what others may think of her devotion. The eyes that the bride longed to see in stanza twelve, and which put her to flight in stanza thirteen because they were too much for her, she now, because of God’s strengthening gifts and her own faithful efforts, fully surrenders to.

In his commentary on the twenty-third stanza, John writes that, whilst holding the bride/soul within his arms, the Bridegroom reveals “wonderful secrets to the soul … [and the] stanza mentions only the Incarnation as the most important” (SC.23.1.563). The Bridegroom says that she came to wed him in his outstretched arms “beneath the favor of the cross (referred to by the apple tree), where the Son of God redeemed human nature and consequently espoused it to himself, and then espoused each soul by giving it through the cross grace and pledges for this espousal”

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1 Cf. “if anyone is seeking God, the Beloved is seeking that person much more” (L.F.3.28.684).
2 In Teresa of Avila’s words, “This favour produced such an effect in me I couldn’t contain myself, and I remained as though entranced … Throughout the whole day I remained thus very absorbed.” Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, Collected Works I, 402.
3 John writes of his understanding of the Incarnation in his aptly named Romances. I suggest that here in the twenty-third stanza John means that mystical union gives the bride a new understanding of Christ as her Beloved Spouse drawing her in to the Trinity.
This stanza contains a reference to the espousal which takes place for each one at Baptism, but John asserts that that espousal is “not the one we now speak of … The espousal of which we speak bears reference to perfection and is not achieved save gradually and by stages” (SC.23.6.564). According to John, the prophet Ezekiel describes the espousal that he means: God rescuing his prospective bride at birth, helping her to grow and develop to maturity, and making her his own in transforming union when she, in her nakedness, is ready for love (Ez 16:5-14).

The Bridegroom places his nuptials with his bride both in “the garden of her desire” (SC.22) and at the scene of the cross, the new apple tree (SC.23), the place of the wounded Christ. Scholars agree that the evidence points to John experiencing the mystical marriage amidst his suffering in his Toledo prison (1577-78). His Spiritual Canticle (including Stanza 23) bears witness to it. It is perhaps significant that we read in Teresa of Avila’s account of her experience of the spiritual marriage (in 1572, five years earlier), which John as her spiritual director at the time would have known about, that Christ appeared to me in an imaginative vision, as at other times, very interiorly, and He gave me His right hand and said: ’Behold this nail; it is a sign you will be my bride from today on. Until now you have not merited this; from now on not only will you look after My honour as being the honour of your Creator, King, and God, but you will look after it as My true bride. My honour is yours, and yours Mine.’

For Teresa too, then, the mystical marriage was integrally related to Christ and his cross, and, in particular, to the wounded hand that the Bridegroom gives her as a sign of their union. I suggest that it is a wounded hand that the Bridegroom gives to his bride beneath the apple tree/cross in the twenty-third stanza of John’s Spiritual Canticle: “I gave my hand.” John interprets his stanza to mean, “There I offered you my kind regard and help by raising you from your low state to be my companion and spouse” (SC.23.4.564). But the hand given by the Bridegroom beneath the cross is also a wounded hand. Although the mystical marriage is about the bride’s delight in

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4 Cf. “At the place where he had been crucified there was a garden” (Jn 19:41). The cross in the garden is the new tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden. “As an apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my love among young men. In his delightful shade I sit, and his fruit is sweet to my taste” (Sg 2:3). “I awakened you under the apple tree” (Sg 8:5).

5 Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, Collected Works I, 402.
her Bridegroom, it is a union which includes wounds, because for the bride to love her 
Bridegroom is to share his wounds. Her Beloved is the One of whom John writes 
allegorically in another poem\(^6\) which treats of a young shepherd who is wounded with 
love for his shepherdess. At the end of the poem, to show his love,

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\begin{align*}
\text{At last he did what he alone could do:} \\
\text{mounting a tree, he stretched his arms out wide} \\
\text{and there remained in love until he died,} \quad \\
\text{his heart by a deep wound of love pierced through. \(^7\)}
\end{align*}
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John’s Beloved is the suffering One. Because of the bride’s love for her Bridegroom, 
she shares his suffering, as well as joy.\(^8\)

In the next ten stanzas of the *Spiritual Canticle* (twenty-four to thirty-three), it 
is the bride’s turn to describe her nuptials and their effects. While the Bridegroom has 
described himself as the garden that the bride enters, the bride describes him as her 
flowery bed, because “now that she is united with and reclines on him and has 
become his bride, her Beloved’s breast and love is communicated to her … [which] 
means that he communicates to her his wisdom, secrets, virtues and gifts” 
(SC.24.3.566). Her bed is crowned and shielded by her virtues, built of peace, and 
hung in the kingly purple of love (*en púrpura tendido* [SC.24]). The hanging or 
covering of the bed (Christ) in the purple of love, means that “this soul is here clothed 
with God” (SC.26.1.574). An image is produced like that used by Julian of Norwich: 
“He is our clothing who for love wraps about us” (P.v.159). The bride in John’s 
*Spiritual Canticle* sees herself as “bathed in God’s love … [and ever being moved] 
with love to love God more” (SC.24.7.568).

In the twenty-fifth stanza, the bride praises her Bridegroom for three favours 
that she and others, all following their own spiritual paths, receive from him. She 
praises him for the sweet trace of himself that he has left within her. This causes her

\(^6\) “Un Pastorcico: Canciones a lo divino de Cristo y el alma” (A Shepherd Lad: Stanzas applied 

\(^7\) The reference to Jn 19:34-37 is unmistakable.

\(^8\) I suggest that John’s connection of garden and cross in Stanzas 22 and 23 parallels Julian’s choosing 
of the suffering Jesus for her heaven (P.xix.219). Cf. “on the hand with which he had just given me his 
to lightly “run along the way” (KR.SC.25). She also thanks him for two kinds of spiritual visits which John describes as “the well-spiced wine” (SC.25) which inebriates and fortifies her, and “the burning spark, whose quick touch is turning the soul to wax” (SC.25). These visits of her Bridegroom fill her “with things of God” (SC.25) and “cause her to direct to [him] the flowings of the movements and acts of love that [he causes] in her” (SC.25.11.572).

The bride’s profound experience of finding her Beloved in the silence of her heart in the twenty-sixth stanza of the Spiritual Canticle is echoed in the fourth stanza of Dark Night, where the light burning in her heart: “led me to that dear One, waiting for me … somewhere apart” (DN.4). She is invited into the secret inner room deep within her where her Beloved has always been (Sg 1:4; 2:4). She has known something of this place, but now she is invited to enter it and be alone with him. This is the place of inner recollection, about which John wrote in his commentary on the first stanza: “Be joyful and gladdened in your interior recollection with him, for you have him so close to you. Desire him there, adore him there. Do not go in pursuit of him outside yourself” (SC.1.8.480). In the mystical marriage, the bride is invited to taste, to drink, and to dwell in this place apart, the wine cellar, with her Beloved. It is not a place she can locate with her senses as it belongs to a different dimension of existence. She is led in an unexpected direction, is given a new way of seeing, and marvels at the delicacy of her surprising experience. Entering this place and meeting her Bridegroom there, confirms her sense of being invited into a place of solitude, or apartness.

In this hidden place the bride drinks of waters which, being “the intimate love of God, flow intimately into the soul and give her to drink of this torrent of love that … is the Spirit of her Bridegroom infused in this union” (SC.26.1.574). Thus the Beloved recollects his bride in loving intimacy with him, inebriating and delighting

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9 Sg 1:4.
11 Cf. “Highly ought we to enjoy that our God dwells in our soul” (W.99.7-9.90).
12 “The water that I shall give will become a spring of water within, welling up for eternal life” (Lk 4:14).
her, and from now on she is transformed in her substance\(^\text{13}\) by this drink which “deifies, elevates, and immerses her in God” (SC.26.10.577). Her faculties of intellect, will and memory, through which she is given wisdom and knowledge, experiences of “sweetest love” (SC.26.5.576) and delight in the remembrance of the glory given her, do not, like her substance, experience continuous union in this life. When God so ordains, the three faculties drink together of love, and when the favour passes, the bride remains still united in substance with her Bridegroom. The effect of the spiritual marriage can be seen in the bride’s withdrawal from all that is not God, and also in her losing sight of the herd or “flock” of her appetites, gratifications and passions (SC.26.18-19.580), which up until now to some degree still kept her bound.

In the twenty-seventh stanza, the Bridegroom gives his bride his heart. What the bride now enjoys with her Bridegroom in her inner room is “mystical theology, the secret knowledge of God that spiritual persons call contemplation. This knowledge is very delightful because it is a knowledge through love” (SC.27.5.583). It is a new way of knowing, beyond thought and feelings. In the wine cellar, the bride is given the love of her Bridegroom and attains to “perfect filial fear” (SC.26.3.575).\(^\text{14}\) In response, she gives herself into the loving arms of her Bridegroom, with all the faith, trust and love she can muster, till eternity dawns. It is a sacred moment, marked by loving vow.

The heart, or literally the breast (pecho), that the Bridegroom gives his bride is the symbol of “such genuine love that neither the affection of a mother, with which she so tenderly caresses her child, nor a brother’s love, nor any friendship is comparable to it” (SC.27.1.580). Any loving relationship within our comprehension, like those John mentions, is just a pale image of what God’s loving is like, for as much as we say it is like this or this, it is infinitely more so.\(^\text{15}\) The Bridegroom’s giving of his breast to his bride in Stanza 27 of John’s *Spiritual Canticle* is best

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\(^{13}\) “John is attempting to name the most interior, most intimate, part of the soul where the substance of God touches the substance of the soul. It is the dynamic point of union of spirit and Spirit. Here it is revealed that God is the center of the soul, and to be human is to have a capacity for divinization.” John Welch, *When Gods Die: An Introduction to John of the Cross* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1990), 57. Cf. Julian’s “substantial” self/soul is “beclosed in Jesus Christ, with the blessed soul of Christ sitting in rest in the Godhead” (W.101v.13-16.95).


\(^{15}\) Our relationships are “imperfect copies” of the divine archetypes. Stein, *Science*, 242.
symbolized by Christ’s giving of his breast on Calvary, when he opens his arms on the cross and offers his breast for all, allowing it to be pierced and for every drop of his blood to pour out (Jn 19:34).

In the twenty-seventh stanza, John repeats allí (there) three times: Allí me dio su pecho, allí me enseñó ciencia muy sabrosa ... allí le prometí de ser su esposa (“there he gave me his breast, there he taught me a sweet and living knowledge … there I promised him to be his bride” [KR.SC.27]). In the twenty-third stanza, John repeats allí twice: allí conmigo fuiste desposada, allí te di la mano (“there you were wed to me, there I gave you my hand”16). This place called “there” is the place of the mystical marriage. In the twenty-seventh stanza, “there” is with the Bridegroom inside the bride’s inner room, the wine cellar where the bride came to drink of him in the twenty-sixth stanza. And in the twenty-third stanza, “there” is within the wound of the crucified Christ.17 These two places are the same, for, when in the twenty-seventh stanza, Christ gives his breast to his bride in her inner room, we know that the heart he gives her is the one that was pierced on the cross. The bride’s experience of the Bridegroom giving her his breast is what John the evangelist is referring to in his first letter: “We have recognized for ourselves and put our faith in, the love God has for us” (1 Jn 4:16). It is an experience of being overwhelmed by the knowledge of God’s love, within a context of faith.

The bride enjoys the “love and secrets” (SC 27.4.582) that God communicates to her as to a dear friend. God reveals the “content of faith, that is the Bridegroom” (SC.1.11.482). In this life she enjoys her Bridegroom through faith. Mystical union is a paradox of delight and darkness. In the “Sketch of Mount Carmel,” John illustrates the way to mystical union: nada, nada, and even on the mount, nada (KR.111). God fills the space of the bride’s nothingness. She goes out of herself with the passion of “love’s urgent longings” (KR.DN.1), and, stripped of everything (images, feelings


and her self), she lives with her equally passionate Bridegroom in a cloud of unknowing. In faith, fired with love, the bride responds to the Bridegroom in her inner room, entrusting herself entirely to him. Henceforth, her “soul is set firmly in him” (SC.27.7.583) and she remains in God and God in her (1 Jn 4:16). Wanting only God’s will, all things, pleasant and unpleasant, are for her the same: “she loves God in them” (SC.27.8.583). In this context, suffering is seen as an opportunity for loving, and thereby resembling Christ in his loving. In a letter towards the end of his life, John wrote regarding persecution waged against him, “Do not let what is happening to me, daughter, cause you any grief, for it does not cause me any … God who knows what is suitable for us … arranges things for our good. Think nothing else but that God ordains all, and where there is no love, put love, and you will draw out love” (L.26.760). Flowing from John’s experience of God as Love, is that God’s will is his own, and this shapes every aspect of his life.

The twenty-eighth stanza continues to describe the “fullness of love.” God rejoices in the *engrandecer* (enlargement, exaltation) of the soul/bride in an intimate relationship of love in which the lovers are equal (SC.28.1.583-84). For the Bridegroom and his bride, their possessions are now held in common. For her part, the bride now occupies herself, body and soul, with her Beloved’s wishes, and not her own. She no longer tends to “unprofitable occupations” (SC.28.7.585) which are the habitual imperfections that take her energies away from God. Now she “walks in the union of love of God” (SC.28.10.586) and all her energies are devoted to practicing the love of God, which does not mean her life is without pain, for she says that “everything I do I do with love, and everything I suffer I suffer with the delight of love” (SC.28.8.586).

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18 Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-97) learns from her spiritual father, John of the Cross, “how to draw profit from everything [even her failings, for] love quickly consumes everything that can be displeasing to Jesus; it leaves nothing but a humble and profound peace in the depths of the heart.” John Clarke, *Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of St. Thérèse of Lisieux*, 3rd ed. (Washington: ICS Publications, 1996), 179.

19 Cf. “the soul is free and lives without inner suffering, for she wants nothing but what her Lord wants, who arranges everything for the best.” Mechthild of Magdeburg, *Flowing Light*, 1.26.53.

20 This stanza describes John of the Cross “as he truly was, a human being in love, a mystic of love.” Ruiz, *Saint and Teaching*, 47.
The twenty-ninth stanza expands on the bride’s surrender. According to Cutri, the bride in her surrender “loses all she sought to be. The experience is a grieving as in death, as in the seeming annihilation of self. In reality, what is transpiring in this experience of supposed annihilation is a radical transformation.”  

21 John comments on the bride’s losing of herself and being found:

Anyone truly in love will let all other things go in order to come closer to the loved one. On this account, the soul affirms here that she lost herself. She achieved this in two ways: she became lost to herself by paying no attention to herself in anything, by concentrating on her Beloved and surrendering herself to him freely and disinterestedly, with no desire to gain anything for herself; second, she became lost to all creatures, paying no heed to all her own affairs but only to those of her Beloved. And this is to lose22 herself purposely, which is to desire to be found (SC.29.10.590).

The bride’s losing of herself is the consequence of being in love with the Bridegroom and concentrating all her energies on him. Although there is profound suffering involved in this surrender of self (in losing all that is defended), the stanza is focused on extolling love.

John explains that, amongst the works pursued for God, “there is no greater or more necessary work than love” (SC.29.1.587). The love-stricken bride now devotes herself entirely and openly to her Bridegroom, which means loving him with “perfection and nakedness of spirit” (SC.29.8.589), glorying in her work of love, and bearing with the criticism of those who consider her to be misguided and truly lost. John warns that the bride ought not to “become involved in other works that might be of the slightest hindrance to the attentiveness of love toward God [for] God has solemnly entreated that no one should waken a soul from this love [Sg. 3:5]” (SC.29.2-3.588). 23 John writes in support of a life given to contemplative solitude, but

22 Hacerse perdidiza. KR translates as “love,” which appears to be error.
23 In the face of controversy about active and contemplative lifestyles in his own day and Order, John of the Cross includes the detail: “Because of her determined desire to please her Bridegroom and benefit the Church, Mary Magdalene, even though she was accomplishing great good by her preaching and would have continued doing so, hid in the desert for 30 years in order to surrender herself truly to this love. It seemed to her, after all, that by such retirement she would obtain much more because of the notable benefit and gain that a little of this love brings to the Church” (SC.29.2.587). For a discussion of the active/contemplative controversy in Discalced Carmelite history, see Gregory Burke, “The Rehabilitation of Jerome Gracián” (MA [Theology] thesis, Washington Theological Union, 2001).
given the extent of his own ministry, for him the contemplative life of necessity includes tending to others. The thirteen years remaining to John after his imprisonment in Toledo involved much pastoral ministry, but he included large segments of withdrawal time in it, as much as his duties permitted. At this point in his commentary, John takes the opportunity to comment that those others who have not come to the bride’s state and are engaged in active ministry such as preaching ought to spend “at least half of this time with God in prayer … [for] without prayer they would do a great deal of hammering but accomplish little, and sometimes nothing” (SC.29.3.588). John’s views have implications for prayer/ministry in the contemporary context. In the Living Flame commentary, John goes on to describe a further state of the bride’s union with God. Her solitude is now such that whatever she does is done in God so that discussion about any duality of contemplation and activity becomes meaningless. This explains John’s own life. With the Beloved in his heart, “all things seem to move in unison” (LF.4.4.709).

In the commentary on the twenty-ninth stanza, John once more repeats his teaching that the bride’s meeting with her Bridegroom takes place in faith and love, for when

she has lost all roads and natural methods in her communion with God, and no longer seeks him by reflections or forms or feelings or by any other way of creatures and the senses, but has advanced beyond them all and beyond all modes and manners, and enjoys communion with God in faith and love, then it is said that God is her gain, because she has certainly lost all that is not God (SC.29.11.590).

We meet the Bridegroom in faith and love “beyond” reflections, forms, feelings, creatures, senses and all modes and manners. This is apophatic prayer.

In the next two stanzas, John describes the exchanges of love between the bride and Bridegroom as the two of them weave together emeralds (her virtues) and flowers (his gifts) into garlands which fill and hang on the bride, and form a crown for the divine Bridegroom. In these garlands, the bride’s virtues and her Beloved’s gifts are interwoven with a single thread of her loving will (a hair on her neck), observable

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24 For example, as prior in Segovia, John developed a garden on land rising to a rocky crag and whenever able withdrew to a natural cave there. Crisógono, Life, 254; Ruiz, God Speaks, 327.
particularly in the virtues she acquired at the more difficult time of her youth, in periods of aridity, and through temptations and trials. It is a single hair because the bride now reserves her love for God alone. The Bridegroom gazes lovingly at this fluttering hair, for “with God, to gaze at is to love” (SC.31.5.597). He is enraptured and taken prisoner by the steadfastness of his bride’s love for him alone, and wounded by “the purity and integrity of her faith” (SC.31.3.596). Because for the bride there is nothing in life apart from her Bridegroom, his heart is irrevocably wounded with love for her. We recall that in the twenty-second stanza John describes the bride resting her neck on the arms of her Beloved, entrusting her strength (and weakness) into his keeping. If now the Bridegroom is gazing lovingly at the single waving hair on his bride’s neck, he is doing this as she is resting her neck on his arms, “all centred on Love” (SC.22). Therefore, when John describes the Bridegroom being captivated by the hair on his bride’s neck (her love), and wounded in love “beyond recall” by her single eye (her faith), he means that the mystical marriage also encompasses the bride’s trust in her Beloved. John is imaginatively using the theological language of the virtues of faith, hope and love in order to describe the simple, holistic experience of the mystical union of the bride and her Bridegroom.

In the thirty-second and thirty-third stanzas, John goes more deeply into this meeting of eyes. The bride, like Paul the Apostle, wishes to give her Beloved the credit for his power working in her. It is the Bridegroom’s “look of love [which makes] her gracious and pleasing to himself” (SC.32.2.599). John as theologian explains that “God’s gaze produces four goods in the soul: It cleanses, endows with grace, enriches, and illumines, like the sun that dries and provides warmth and beauty and splendor when it pours down its rays” (SC.33.1.601). God mercifully gives the bride/soul love and faith, for which God loves her “ardently” (SC.32.5.600), and, “by infusing his grace in the soul … makes it worthy and capable of his love” (SC.32.5.600). John explains that God puts the bride/soul “somehow in himself and makes her his equal. Thus he loves the soul within himself, with himself, that is with the very love by which he loves himself” (SC.32.6.600). When the bride sees herself held within God’s goodness, she is taken beyond the confines of her ego. In true

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25 In SC.32.7.597, John refers to his recent work Living Flame in which he has made mention of these temptations and trials. See KR, 597, N.3, which refers to LF.1.18-25; 2.23-30. In LF.1.25.651, John directs his reader on to Dark Night.
humility, she rejoices in the virtues God has placed within her, and she happily and gratefully acknowledges God’s gifts, being free from all soul-destroying negative self-appraisal which kept her from God in the past. She adores within herself the Beloved who now so frequently fixes his eyes on her (SC.33.7.604), and she lifts her eyes to him. This is a meeting of lovers’ eyes: the deep surrender and intimate contact in which the secrets of each are offered to the other. With delight, the bride thanks and loves her Bridegroom for his unfathomable goodness to her in freeing her from her miseries, and she confidently asks him to behold her often, to become more enamoured of her, to fill her with more of his grace and beauty, and, because he knows her by name, to show her his face (Ex 33:12-13).

As Eulogio Pacho observes, \(^{26}\) stanzas twenty-eight to thirty-five of the second redaction of the *Spiritual Canticle* have a retrospective quality in their treatment of aspects of the mystical marriage (already described in stanzas twenty-two to twenty-seven). Stanzas thirty-four and thirty-five, upon which we now reflect, are important examples of John’s pondering on mystical union. These two stanzas are amongst the three added after John’s escape from prison, \(^{27}\) and, until he added five more stanzas in about 1580, \(^{28}\) these two stanzas were the final two of the first redaction of his *Spiritual Canticle*. The emphasis is on the bride’s entry into the very heart of God. It is the Bridegroom speaking:

> The little snow-white dove
> back to the ark with olive branch has flown.
> The mate she sought, her Love,
> on verdant banks alone,
> this turtle-dove found, and is now his own (SC.34).

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When commenting on the thirteenth stanza of his *Spiritual Canticle*, John describes this little dove\(^{29}\) at the time of the spiritual betrothal as “flying in the breeze of love above the flood waters of her loving fatigues and yearnings” (SC.14&15.1.524). It finds nowhere to alight, but is caught by the compassionate father Noah “and placed in the ark of his charity [Gn 8:9]” (SC.14&15.1.524-25), which is “the divine ark, the bosom of God” (SC.14&15.3.526). This is now described as the bride being placed in “happy and perfect recollection at the breast of her Beloved” (SC.34.4.606). John’s description of the dove’s flight in the thirteenth stanza parallels the biblical story of the first flight of the dove sent out by Noah. In Genesis, Noah waits seven days and sends her forth again. This time the dove returns with a freshly plucked olive leaf (Gen 8:11). John’s thirty-fourth stanza is scripturally based on this second return of the dove, and on the Song of Songs, in which John must have pondered long and deeply the significance of the dove symbol.\(^{30}\) In the *Spiritual Canticle*, John uses three words for dove: *paloma* (dove), *palomica* (little dove), and *tortolica* (little turtledove, lovebird). In this thirty-fourth stanza, the bride is described as *la blanca palomica* (the small white dove) who has been granted a victory (*ramo*\(^{31}\): olive branch) over herself. She is also described as *la tortolica* (the small turtle-dove or lovebird) who has found her longed-for mate *en las riberas verdes*: “on verdant banks alone,” which John explains as drinking “the clear water of sublime contemplation” (SC.34.6.607). The bride has found her Beloved in her life of prayer.

John carries the dove symbolism into the thirty-fifth stanza. The bride/dove, who in the thirteenth stanza took flight from her Bridegroom’s eyes, can now raise her eyes to his (SC.32), and she builds her nest in him:

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\(^{29}\) We recall that John gave this little dove the qualities of “sublime and swift contemplation … burning love and … simplicity” (SC.13.8.523). The dove is traditionally a symbol of the soul, faithful marriage, and the Holy Spirit (Love of God).

\(^{30}\) John’s poetry and prose show deep familiarity with all of the dove references in the Song of Songs: 1:15; 2:10-14; 4:1; 5:2; 5:12; 7:1.

\(^{31}\) John’s use of *ramo* is delightful. There is the scriptural allusion to the olive leaf brought back to the ark by the dove, with the use of *ramo* (branch) as in *el ramo de árbor* (the tree branch), suggesting a little dove labouring with a huge load. The word *ramo* may also be translated as “bouquet” as in *el ramo de novia* (the bride’s bouquet). CUSD, 827.
In solitude she lives,
and there in solitude has built her nest;
in solitude he gives
her guidance, love and rest,
wounded, like her, in solitary quest (SC.35).

This stanza is about soledad (solitude), nida (nest) and the bride’s querido de amor herido (Loved One wounded with love). Solitude is emphasized throughout John’s poetry and prose writings, indicating its importance for him. For John, solitude is integrally related to interior recollection (loving attentiveness to God within the heart). Solitude is a dwelling place for God. It is aloneness with God. It is a spiritual state in which God is all, and it is usually served by a measure of physical solitude or withdrawal to a quiet place, be it desert, mountain or chapel. Solitude is found in the inner room Jesus is talking about when he says, “When you pray, go to your private room, shut yourself in, and so pray to your Father who is in that secret place” (Mt 6.6). In this stanza, John repeats the word soledad four times.32 In his commentary, John describes how the bride has chosen to be alone, to be estranged from all else for love of her Beloved who alone can satisfy her. In solitude, God speaks to her heart (Hos 2:16) and she is transformed, having found “her place in God” (SC. 35.4.608), which gives her “a stable peace and unchanging good” (SC.35.1.607). Now, all things speak to her of God. As the dove finds its rest in its nest, so too does the bride find her repose in her Bridegroom, who

is wounded with love for the bride. The Bridegroom bears a great love for the solitude of the soul; but he is wounded much more by her love since, being wounded with love for him, she desired to live alone in respect to all things. And he does not wish to leave her alone, but wounded by the solitude she embraces for his sake, and observing that she is dissatisfied with any other thing, he alone guides her, drawing her to and absorbing her in himself. Had he not found her in spiritual solitude, he would not have wrought this in her (SC.35.7.609).

In faith, trust and love, being detached from everything that is not God, the bride finds the Bridegroom hidden in her contemplation. She has now made her permanent home alone with him, in the recollection of his presence, “in solitude.” This bride/dove, who has been toiling in the abyss of God, has now made her nest in

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32 Flower’s translation replaces the fourth use of “solitude” with an insight on the wounded Lover sharing the bride’s solitary quest.
the heart of her bridegroom, Christ.\textsuperscript{33} The solitude she lives in is Christ, the One who gave his breast on Calvary. In solitude, the Bridegroom “guides her, drawing her to and absorbing her in himself.” This is transforming substantial union. The bride continues to suffer from her Bridegroom’s absence, but now, as with all Lovers, the wound of one is the wound of the other. The wounding that John is referring to in this stanza is the bride and Bridegroom’s sharing of the wound of love: now an intimate meeting in contemplation in which the Bridegroom gives his bride “guidance, love, and rest” (SC.35).

**Stanzas Thirty-six to Forty**

One day in Beas, Fray Juan de la Cruz asked Madre Francisca de la Madre de Dios, “In what does prayer consist?” Her response, “In looking at the beauty of God and rejoicing that he has it” so delighted John that he composed another five stanzas of the *Spiritual Canticle*.\textsuperscript{34} In these stanzas, John puts into words his own experience of the joy of the bride in the state of mystical marriage in seeing God in this life. She recognizes her Beloved in everything and rejoices in what she sees of his beauty or essence. This is to love the Beloved for the Beloved’s sake, not her own, and is the gift of perfect love as it may be received in this life. This prayer is free of self-interest. The new stanzas look to the beatific vision in which the bride will see her Bridegroom face to face. This is indescribable but John wants to say something about what he knows (SC.39.1.622).

The thirty-sixth stanza outlines three love-tasks of the bride who enjoys perfect union with her Beloved. John uses the plural: “Let us rejoice, Beloved … Let us go forth” (KR.SC.36) because now the Bridegroom and his bride act in unison. Firstly, the bride rejoices with her Beloved in their loving contemplative union (which overflows into her exterior works for him). Secondly, she delights *in tu hermosura* (in your beauty),\textsuperscript{35} in which she is transformed in the beauty of her Bridegroom. Thirdly, since she “cannot see herself in God’s beauty unless she is transformed into the

\textsuperscript{33} We recall Gertrude of Helfta’s request: “Pray for me, that with chaste love, I may deserve to build a nest like a turtledove in the wound of love of Jesus, my spouse.” *Spiritual Exercises*, 46.

\textsuperscript{34} Crisógono, *Life*, 134.

\textsuperscript{35} John here addresses his Beloved in prayer (SC.36.5.611-12).
wisdom of God” (SC.36.8.612), she desires to know her Beloved’s secrets by ascending to the pure water of a “pure and clear understanding of the divine truths” (SC.36.9.613) and by entering the espesura (thicket) (SC.36) of his wisdom and knowledge. The bride’s attitude to suffering is transformed, so that she welcomes all exterior and interior suffering, even death, “in order to see herself further in God” (SC.36.11.613). John explains,

Oh! If we could but now fully understand how a soul cannot reach the thicket and wisdom of the riches of God, which are of many kinds, without entering the thicket of many kinds of suffering, finding in this her delight and consolation; and how a soul with an authentic desire for divine wisdom wants suffering first in order to enter this wisdom by the thicket of the cross! … The gate entering into these riches of his wisdom is the cross, which is narrow, and few desire to enter by it, but many desire the delights obtained from entering there (SC.36.13.614).

The bride has come to know that she enters more deeply into the wisdom (loving knowledge) of God through embracing the cross as Christ did, with love. As the grain of wheat dies and is transformed, so she dies and is transformed, trustfully forsaking her own will in obedience to God who is All-Goodness, giving to her Beloved whatever he asks of her.36 She has learned in prayer (like John did in his prison cell) that when she accepts the unasked-for suffering in her life with love, she meets and is one with Christ who took up the cross with love.37 In suffering with love, there is joy. Like Julian, John insists that suffering with love produces spiritual joy. Transforming union is living in, and being lived in by God, who is self-giving love. It is keeping nothing for self, even to the last drop of blood (Jn 19:34). It is a union in which loving the Beloved is all the bride does.

Having come through many trials and tribulations to the mystical marriage, the bride’s strongest desire is to know Christ her Bridegroom better, and so in the thirty-

36 Julian, too, believed that we do not need to go looking for penance, but to accept the suffering which comes.

37 Recognizing that God’s love is revealed in the passion and death of Christ has always led Christians to make the connection between love and suffering in their own lives, and the Christian mystic tradition has always attested to it. In medieval devotion to Christ’s Passion, the connection was clearly seen. Cf. “There is no other path but through the burning love of the Crucified, a love which so transformed Paul into Christ … that he could say: ‘With Christ I am nailed to the cross. I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me’ (Gal. 2.20).” Bonaventure, prologue to “The Soul’s Journey into God,” in Cousins, Bonaventure, 54-55.
seventh stanza, she describes how she goes deeper into the mysteries of Christ. The “rock” is Christ (I Cor 10:4), and the “high caverns … so well concealed” are the sublime, exalted, and deep mysteries of God’s wisdom in Christ, in the hypostatic union of the human nature with the divine Word, and in the corresponding union of human beings with God, and the mystery of the harmony between God’s justice and mercy with respect to the manifestations of his judgments in the salvation of the human race (SC.37.4.616).  

By entering these mysteries, the bride will, like Moses who is hidden by God in the cleft39 of the rock and shown the “back” of God (Ex 33:22-23), see “all the good that can be revealed in this life” (SC.37.4.616). 40 The bride “earnestly longs to enter these caverns of Christ in order to be absorbed, transformed, and wholly inebriated in the love of the wisdom of these mysteries, and hide herself in the bosom of the Beloved” (SC.37.5.616), which is “the cleft of the rock” mentioned in Ex 33:22-23 and Sg 2:13-14. John again reminds us that entering the wisdom of God requires passing “through the straits of exterior and interior suffering. For one cannot reach in this life what is attainable of these mysteries of Christ without having suffered much” (SC.37.4.616). Suffering lived in love prepares for mystical wisdom.

The first and second redactions of John’s Spiritual Canticle commentary diverge considerably when describing the entering of these caverns, with the second redaction being more doctrinally worded, perhaps influenced by Inquisitorial surveillance. The first redaction provides a delightfully spontaneous account, which warrants lengthy quotation:

There shall we be transformed in the transformation of new knowledge and new acts and communications of love … Indeed [the bride] has very frequent illuminations of new mysteries, communicated to her by God in the communication which is ever made between Him and the soul. And this

38 The bride’s search in the Spiritual Canticle is for Christ the Bridegroom. We recall that at the time of the mystical marriage, “the Bridegroom reveals his wonderful secrets to the soul … He mainly communicates to her sweet mysteries of his Incarnation and the ways of the redemption of humankind” (SC.23.1.563). In Ascent, John’s readers are told to “fix your eyes only on him and you will discern hidden in him the most secret mysteries, and wisdom, and wonders of God” (2A 22.6.231). Cf. “for Juan … the theological life is a progressive discovery of Christ.” Matthew, “Knowledge and Consciousness,” 217.

39 Related to the image of wound.

40 John refers to the bride in the Song of Songs: “Arise, make haste, my love, my beautiful one, and come into the clefts of the rock and into the cavern of the wall [Sg. 2:13-14]” (SC.37.5.616).
communication He makes to her in Himself, and she enters into Him as it were afresh, according to the knowledge of those mysteries which she knows in Him; and in that knowledge she loves Him afresh most intimately and sublimely, being transformed into Him according to those new kinds of knowledge (Peers.SCA.36.5.162).

In this account, transformation is shown to be an ongoing process for the bride, taking place within her contemplation of Christ’s mysteries. It is “there,” in these caverns of Christ’s mysteries, that the bride and her Beloved taste together the juice of “the pomegranates [which] stand for the mysteries of Christ, the judgments of the wisdom of God, and the virtues and attributes [of God] uncovered in the knowledge of these innumerable mysteries and judgments … [and] God himself” (SC.37.7.617). The pomegranate juice is “the fruition and delight of the love of God overflowing from the knowledge of his attributes … [and] is the drink of the Holy Spirit (SC.37.8.617). The bride and her Beloved offer this love-drink to each other in contemplation.

Once more we find John using the word *allí* (there) to describe the place of mystical meeting, in this instance, the caverns of Christ’s mysteries: *allí nos entraremos, y el mosto de granadas gustaremos* (there we shall enter in, and we shall taste the juice of the pomegranates) (SC.37). And we find in the next stanza, the thirty-eighth, that John uses *allí* twice, beginning with *Allí me mostráis*:

There you’ll reveal to me  
All that my soul has longed for on the way –  
You, Love, my life will be! –  
There give without delay  
The gift you gave to me that other day (SC.38).  

At this point of the *Spiritual Canticle*, *allí* (there) refers to the bride’s coming to the face to face meeting with her Spouse in the next life. It is for this that she was created “that other day” (SC.38.6.620), and it is for this that God’s Son entered human history. It is for this that she has lived, and is still living, her mortal life wounded by love. On the day her name is called, bride and Beloved will at last be fully one in transforming union, each totally giving of self to the other. The bride, who has come

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41 Flower’s translation of Stanza 38 replaces the colon at the end of it (which is in the Spanish original and most English translations), which is a pity as the colon provides a stronger link to Stanza 39.

42 In the *Romances*, John describes creation taking place to provide a bride for God’s Son, the Word of John’s Gospel.
to know well the love her Bridegroom has for her, will not be content until she is able to “love the Bridegroom as perfectly as he loves her” (SC.38.2.618). There, in “the clear transformation of glory” (SC.38.3-4.618), God will show her how to do this by his own loving of her, through the Holy Spirit who is poured into her heart (Rom 5.5), and by his sharing of his strength with her. The bride longs for the glory for which God created her, which she has enjoyed in the spiritual marriage in this life, but which she knows comes to its fulfillment in Christ her Bridegroom, “when loosed from the flesh and within the high caverns of your chamber, gloriously transformed in you, I shall drink with you the juice of the sweet pomegranates” (SC.37.9.622).

Although seeing God face to face, or the “vision of God” (SC.38.6.620), cannot be described in this life, it is nevertheless true that the soul in the state of mystical marriage “knows something of this … and desires to say something about it, for by her transformation in God something of this … occurs in her … [and] she now feels within herself the signs and traces” (SC.39.1.622). Having walked with John in the bride’s spiritual quest of the *Spiritual Canticle*, the reader is amazed and awe-struck at how much in the last five stanzas of the *Spiritual Canticle*, and especially now in SC.39 (in both poem and commentary), he reveals of the secrets of his own love-story with God. The reader is drawn to look beyond the text.

In language which returns to his contemplative rapture at the time of the spiritual betrothal (SC.14&15), John, now profoundly rejoicing in God’s beauty, shares five of his insights on meeting God (described as gifts) based on his experience of the mystical marriage. In the first, the “soft breathing of the air,” John describes how the Holy Spirit makes the soul “capable of breathing in God the same spiration of love that the Father breathes in the Son and the Son in the Father” (SC.39.3.622-23). John explains that “this is transformation in the three Persons in power, wisdom and

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43 What the bride knows something about is described by John as the *aquello que* (that which, what) in Stanza 38. Used twice in the Spanish version of the stanza, Flower renders the phrase as “all” and “the gift.”


love, and thus the soul is like God through this transformation. He created her in his image and likeness that she might attain such resemblance” (SC.39.4.623). John tells us that we are given a “foretaste and noticeable trace” (SC.39.6.624) of this in this life, with “notable frequency and blissful love” (SC.39.4.623), but words are inadequate to describe it. It is Christ who has merited this for us. John of the Cross’s favourite scripture passage was probably the seventeenth chapter of John’s Gospel, from which, at this point, he quotes Christ’s words at length:

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\text{Father, I desire that where I am those you have given me may also be with me, that they may see the glory you have given me [Jn. 17.24], that is that they may perform in us by participation the same work that I do by nature; that is breathe the Holy Spirit … The glory which you have given me I have given them that they may be one as we are one, I in them and you in me; that they may be perfect in one; that the world may know that you have sent me and loved them as you loved me [Jn.17:20-23]} \] (SC.39.5.623-24).

John of the Cross’s understanding of this text reflects his understanding of the union of love within the Trinity in which, because of Christ, even as John writes his commentary, he participates. With passion, he pleads with his readers, who are created for this, to open their spiritual eyes and ears and stop wasting their time! (SC.39.7.624).

As the second gift he rejoices in, John describes how the bride/soul, in breathing of the air amidst the union of love in the Trinity, hears her Beloved calling her, and she responds in joyful, jubilant song. Both of their voices together are what John calls the “sweet song of the nightingale.” The words the bride hears voiced by the Bridegroom are those of the Song of Songs: “Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come” (Sg 2.10-14), which give her assurance that “winter” is now over and the time of good things has come, and invite her onwards towards transformation in glory. The Bridegroom (Christ) asks the bride to let her

46 Cf. the Julian reference cited in the previous note, where the Trinity is described as “Almighty Truth”, “deep Wisdom”, and “high Goodness.”

47 Jerónimo de la Cruz testified that John of the Cross would devoutly recite this chapter on his long journeys (KR, 624, N.1).

48 We recall that John wrote this commentary on his knees.

49 There is manuscript testimony by Sr. Agnes of St Augustine that John of the Cross was himself called the “Nightingale of God” amongst the sisters because “he never said anything that was not related to God.” Quoted in Otilio Rodriguez, Saint John of the Cross – The Nightingale of God (Macau: Carmel, 1990), 3.
voice “resound in the caverns of the rock” (SC.39.9.625), that is, in Christ the Rock, because he wants to hear her sweet voice of praise arising from her jubilation, which he shares, in her transformation wrought by his mysteries and her contemplation of them. The bride looks beyond the song she sings in this life to “the new song of glory” (SC.39.10.626) she will sing one day. The Bridegroom wants his bride to enter his song of joy.

Thirdly, John is given to rejoice in what he sees of God in creation. This gift from the Bridegroom to the bride is el soto y su donaire, literally the thicket or grove and its grace or elegance. John interprets el soto as God, the Creator, and su donaire as creation. All creation is grounded in God, and, because of God’s wisdom, beauty, grace and harmony within it, creation “fascinates and delights the soul” (SC.39.11.626). Many stories are told of the fascination and delight John found in creatures, for example,

Fray John, sitting on the river bank, gazed with delight at the little fishes darting to and fro beneath the surface of the water. ‘Come here, brethren,’ he said to his friars, ‘and you will see how these little animals and creatures of God are praising him …’ In the midst of the conversation he remained, as it were, in ecstasy. The friars noticed it and silently withdrew to continue their recreation, while the prior continued in the joy of his ecstatic contemplation of the tiny fishes.

John’s fascination and delight with creatures extended to all of them. It was a gift bestowed on him by the Bridegroom, who is similarly fascinated and delighted with all of his creatures.

As the fourth gift, John rejoices in what he knows of God’s beauty through contemplation. This gift is intrinsic to all of the other gifts. According to John,

In contemplation, God teaches the soul very quietly and secretly, without its knowing how, without the sound of words, and without the help of any bodily or spiritual faculty, in silence and quietude, in darkness to all sensory and natural things. Some spiritual persons call this contemplation knowing by unknowing (SC.39.12.626).


51 Teresa of Avila writes of “understanding by not understanding.” *Collected Works I*, 163. Cf. “But the higher part of contemplation, insofar as it is possible to possess it here below, consists entirely in this
In this life, all mystical knowing of God, or contemplation, however sublime, is “dark night” (SC.39.13.627) compared with seeing God face to face in heaven. Although grateful for the gift of dark contemplation whereby he sees God by faith, John longs to enjoy now the vision of God “in the serene night … [by which he means] in the clear and serene contemplation of the vision of God” (SC.39.13.627).

With the fifth gift, John rejoices in what he knows of God’s beauty through his experience of perfect love. In the serene night of heaven, he will see God clearly as he joyfully receives this gift: *llama que consume y no da pena* (literally, flame that consumes and gives no pain), which is the gift of perfect love so long desired. John explains that for love to be perfect “it must consummate and transform the soul in God; and the inflammation and transformation engendered by this flame must give no pain to the soul” (SC.39.14.627). There is no pain in the perfect love of bride and Bridegroom now totally surrendered to each other. In the serene night, the flame will be the gentle love of the Holy Spirit transforming the bride (John) in a consummating action which gives bride and Bridegroom blissful satisfaction at last. Until the bride attains to this, she suffers from transformation’s consuming pain, and from divine love being too much for her human frailty. In heaven there will be no pain, for “God will equip her … and strengthen her … consummating her intellect with his wisdom and her will with his love” (SC.39.14.628). The gift of perfect love will allow the bride to embrace the fullness of all the other gifts.

In the final stanza of the *Spiritual Canticle*, John can say to the Bridegroom, “My soul is now divested, alone, and withdrawn from all created things … and it has entered so deeply into interior recollection with you that none can discern the intimate delight I now possess in you” (SC.40.2.629). John began his *Spiritual Canticle* commentary with an exposition of interior recollection (SC.1.6-12.480-83), he has

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52 In section 14, John wordplays with *consumer* (to consume) and *consumar* (to consummate).

53 John summarises five blessings which have enabled this to happen: “her soul is detached and withdrawn from all created things … the devil is conquered and put to flight … the passions are subjected and the natural appetites mortified … the sensory and lower part is reformed, purified, and brought into conformity with the spiritual part” (SC.40.1.629).
mentioned it at key points of the spiritual journey, and now he finishes with it. Edith Stein comments, “No creature has any idea of what [the bride] enjoys in her hiddenness in God … [The senses] dismount, as riders do from their horses, because they ‘discontinue their natural operations … and give themselves over to spiritual recollection.’”54 In the state of mystical marriage, because of “the spiritual goods and delights that the soul enjoys inwardly with God in this state” (SC.40.5.630), the bride’s recollection is such that her whole being, corporeal and spiritual, is now enfolded in God. All that remains is that she be transferred “from the spiritual marriage, to which [the Bridegroom] desired to bring her in this Church Militant, to the glorious marriage of the Triumphant” (SC.40.6.630). The “soul awaits the glorious fulfillment in the deep peace of the certainty that she is fully prepared for it, and there is no danger for her to fear from any side.”55

**Concluding Comments**

The *Spiritual Canticle* poem and commentary tell the story of John’s love affair with Christ, the Bridegroom. This chapter draws on Stanzas 22 to 40, demonstrating that mystical union takes place *allí* (there) in the garden (SC.22) beneath the cross (SC.23). The bride who was first gifted with contemplation at the time of the betrothal, is drawn through suffering into the silence and solitude of substantial mystical union, in which the love-wounded Bridegroom gives his bride “guidance, love, and rest” (SC.35). There is a mutual surrender of Beloved and bride to each other (SC.27.3.581). The effect of mystical union is that the bride has no other task but love (SC.28.8.586). She withdraws from all that is not God (SC.29.1.587). She is graced with a way of knowing, beyond thought and feeling, which comes from “the secret knowledge of God” (SC.27.5.583). Entering deeper into the caverns of the rock, which are “the sublime, exalted, and deep mysteries of God’s wisdom in Christ” (SC.37.3.615), involves entering deeper into “the thicket of many kinds of suffering” (SC.36.13.614), but the bride’s attitude to suffering is transformed. Christ is model, as well as Lover. Suffering is welcomed because in embracing her own suffering with love, she is one with her Beloved.

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In his commentary on the final stanza of the *Spiritual Canticle*, John returns to his teaching on interior recollection, in which the bride is now hidden with her Beloved. The next chapter examines *Living Flame*, in which John writes of a state beyond mystical marriage. Given John’s understanding of wounds of love, it is not surprising that *Living Flame* contains more references to wounds than any other of his texts.
CHAPTER 9

WOUND ENFLAMED

The flash of it is a flash of fire,
a flame of Yahweh himself.
Love no flood can quench,
no torrents drown
(Sg 8:6-7).

Introduction

In beautiful Granada, sometime between 1582 and 1584, John wrote his poem *Living Flame of Love* and gave it to Doña Ana del Mercado y Peñalosa. His commentary on the poem, written in 1586 or early 1587, was also dedicated to this devout laywoman, with John working on a second redaction at La Peñuela just prior to his death in Ubeda in 1591. While both *Dark Night* and the *Spiritual Canticle* describe the journey to mystical union, *Living Flame* describes John’s deepening experience of mystical union in this life, which is his experience of the indwelling Beloved. The primary symbol of the poem is fire and it is addressed in the first line. Hence the title that we recognize: *Llama de Amor Viva* (Living Flame of Love). John entitled his poem: *Canciones que hace el alma en la íntima union con Dios* (Songs of the Soul in Intimate Union with God). In the poem’s four songs or stanzas, John praises and thanks his Beloved for the gift of mystical union, through the symbolism of fire as *llama* (flame), as *cauterio* (cautery), as *lampára de luz y calor* (lamp of light and warmth), and as *ardor amoroso* (loving heat/ardour) respectively.

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1 Ruiz places the first redaction *Living Flame* commentary at the start of 1587. *God Speaks*, 281. In this chapter, some translations will be drawn (with acknowledgement) from Jane Ackerman, *John of the Cross: The Living Flame of Love: Versions A and B* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1995).
3 John’s inspiration rests on Song 8:6, “Set me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thy arm, for love is strong as death, jealousy as hard as hell, the lamps thereof are fire and flames” (Douay-Rheims Bible, *St John of the Cross, A Digital Library*, Washington: CC Communications, n.d.). Cf. LF.3.5.675; 3.8.676. Verses of Song 8 are to be found at many significant places in John’s writings. See KR.810.
The four stanzas of *Living Flame* continue on from John’s description of the bride’s spiritual transformation in the *Spiritual Canticle* by treating of “a love deeper in quality and more perfect within this very state of transformation” (LF.Pro.3.639). The bride/soul is “so inwardly transformed in the fire of love and elevated by it that it is not merely united to this fire but produces within it a living flame” (LF.Pro.4.639). The dynamically active “living flame of love” within the soul is the Love of the Bridegroom, the Holy Spirit. This is what John’s recollection and union of love in God have now come to. In his poem and commentary, he is trying to articulate what it is like to have the Father, Son and Holy Spirit abide in him. He insists that the sublime experiences he describes in the stanzas of the *Living Flame* are not beyond reason because Christ promised,

> that on him who loved Him would come the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and They would take up their abode in him [Jn. 14:23], which had to be by making the person live and dwell in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the life of God (Ackerman.LF.Pro.2.71).

John of the Cross sees John 14:23 as encompassing: our loving of God (this is keeping God’s commandment); the indwelling presence of the Trinity within us; and our sharing in the divine life of the Trinitarian God.

In the prologue of this commentary on “the stanzas that treat of a very intimate and elevated union and transformation of the soul in God” (LF.Title.638), John refers to his reluctance to write on such exalted matters, and explains that

> one speaks badly of the intimate depths of the spirit if one does not do so with a deeply recollected soul. Because of my want of such recollection, I have deferred this commentary until now, a period in which the Lord seems to have uncovered some knowledge and bestowed some fervour (LF.Pro.1.639).

To explain mystical union in any way, John knows that he needs to be in a recollected state, aware of union with his Beloved as he writes. When he writes that “the soul feels this and speaks of it thus in these stanzas with intimate and delicate sweetness of love, burning in love’s flame” (LF.Pro.4.639), John is referring to his own mystical

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5 Here and elsewhere in the *Living Flame* commentary, John of the Cross specifically declares that mystical union is possible *en esta vida* (in this life). Cf. Ackerman.LF.1.15.87.

experience of the living flame of love. He also writes that “even though everything I say is as far from the reality as is a painting from the living object represented, I will venture\(^7\) to declare what I know (my italics)” (LF.Pro.1.638). John is sharing his experience of transforming union with his readers. We are told that he wrote the Living Flame commentary in fifteen days that contained many other occupations.\(^8\) For a long time John had prayerfully pondered his stanzas. Eventually he came to the point of readiness: “a period in which the Lord seems to have uncovered some knowledge and bestowed some fervour” (LF.Pro.1.639). Within a state of deep interior recollection, because of the knowledge and fervour given to him, John is able, as he writes, to give calor y luz (warmth and light) to his Beloved. John is describing contemplation.\(^9\) This is John writing theology.

In this chapter, I consider each stanza of Living Flame in turn. In the poem, John addresses his Beloved directly, and all of the initiative lies with God.\(^10\) We may also observe that Flower’s translation of the first stanza contains the words: “wound me and make me whole!” It is in our wounds that we are transformed.

### Stanza One

John’s commentary on this stanza is in three main sections. Firstly, he describes the activity of the Holy Spirit, the living flame of love, gently wounding the soul with love. The same flame of love which drew the bride into mystical union through the purgative way of tribulations, trials and temptations (LF.1.15.646) now assails the bride/soul “as though glorifying it with gentle and powerful glory” (LF.1.1.641), piercing the very substance\(^11\) of her soul. Secondly, John contrasts with this the love-wounding in the nights of suffering through which the bride/soul has come. Thirdly, we see the bride, who now enjoys “sweet encounters” with the

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\(^7\) Ackerman translates “me atreveré” as “I will dare” (LF.Pro.1.71). John is referring to what is beyond the text.

\(^8\) Ruiz, “The Canticle and the Flame,” in God Speaks, 281.

\(^9\) In the third stanza of Living Flame, the lamps of fire give warmth and light to the bride’s caverns (faculties), which, now empty of all else, give back warmth and light to her Beloved. See also SC.27.5.582.


\(^11\) We recall John’s understanding of substance: “that which is most inward, deep, and authentic … the essence of an existing being” (KR.Glossary.776).
Trinitarian God, desiring that the thin veil of her human life be torn in a “death of love” which will carry her off prematurely to the embrace of God in eternity.

John writes that there are “two kinds of union [union of love alone, and union with an inflaming of love]” (LF.1.16.647). In order to describe this further state of union, which he himself now experiences, he compares a log entered and transformed by fire, with a log so inflamed that it now itself sends out flames. The living flame of love active in his soul is the Holy Spirit, constantly and tenderly wounding him with delightful and refreshing love, and prime-mover of all his actions. This flame “wounds the soul with the tenderness of the life of God, and it wounds and stirs it so deeply as to make it dissolve in love” (LF.1.7.64). Because

> Love is never idle, but in continual motion, it is always emitting flames everywhere like a blazing fire, and since its duty is to wound in order to cause love and delight, and it is present in this soul as a living flame, it dispatches its wounds like most tender flares of delicate love. Joyfully and festively it practices the arts and games of love (LF.1.8.643).

The living flame of love “joyfully and festively” wounds the soul in its deepest centre, its substance. According to John, “the soul’s centre is God [and] when it has reached God with all the capacity of its being and the strength of its operation and inclination, it will have attained its final and deepest centre in God” (LF.1.12.645). This is not the wounding of love of the beatific state, but, writes John, it resembles it. In this state of “union with an inflaming of love” (LF.1.16.647), the soul’s transformation is ongoing, until it “appears to be God” (LF.1.13.645).

John rejoices in this living flame of love active within him. The flame communicates Father, Son and Spirit to him. He experiences God as Spirit of Love, and describes his experience in theological terms as one in which “the Blessed Trinity inhabits the soul by divinely illumining its intellect with the wisdom of the Son,

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12 In other works also, John uses the image of the log of wood in the fire to explain the process of spiritual transformation. Cf. 1A.11.6.144; 2A.8.2.174; 2DN.10.1-9.416-19; 2DN.11.1.419.

13 In *Living Flame*, John constantly mentions “delight”: God’s delight in humankind; the soul’s delight in God; and the sharing of delights in mystical union. He quotes from Proverbs: “I was delighted every day, playing before him all the time, playing in the world. And my delights were to be with the children of the earth [Prv. 8:30-31]”, that is, by bestowing delights on them” (LF.1.8.643-44). John’s fascination with God’s delight is solidly based in the Christian tradition (Mk 1:11). In *Living Flame*, he is describing a mystical state in which the soul’s “delight is God’s delight” (LF.2.34.671). It is a delight beyond sense and words.
delighting its will in the Holy Spirit, and absorbing it powerfully and mightily in the 
unfathomed embrace of the Father’s sweetness” (LF.1:15.646). John insists that God 
“acts thus in some souls” (LF.1.16.646), explaining that God, who 
is not close-fisted but diffuses himself abundantly as the sun does its rays, 
without being a respecter of persons [Acts 10:34], wherever there is room – 
always showing himself gladly along the highways and byways –does not 
hesitate or consider it of little import to find his delights with the children of 
the earth at a common table in the world [Prv. 8:31]. (LF.1.15.646).

Once again John writes of the delight God finds in his adopted children. The mystic is 
one who knows that God delights in her, and she delights in providing God with the 
space (inner room) in which to delight.

At this point of his commentary on the first stanza (LF.1.19-25.648-51), John 
inserts the first of several digressions to be found in Living Flame.14 He reminds us of 
the role of the living flame of love in the purgative and illuminative states, as 
explained in detail in Ascent and Dark Night. It is the same fire of love, now gently 
touching and flaring in the soul, that then was the cause of much pain and suffering as 
the soul was drawn through tribulation, trial and temptation to self-knowledge. In the 
dark nights of sense and spirit, the Holy Spirit purifies the soul, emptying it of all that 
will hinder the Beloved’s full possession. John writes that, although “not many people 
undergo so strong a purgation” (LF.1.24.651), their “sufferings at this time cannot be 
exaggerated” (LF.1.21.649). As a spiritual director, John has observed that the 
sufferings vary in intensity according to the state God calls the soul to, and according 
to the need for purification (LF.1.24.651). The flame of love actively purifying the 
soul is itself tender and loving; it is the contraries that exist in the soul at the start of 
contemplation, and the soul’s evasion, resistance, and self-protective strategies which 
cause the pain. An inner war rages as God love-wounds the soul, purifying its 
faculties, and enabling it “to be transformed in him through love in this life” 
(LF.1.24.651). When the soul is finally emptied of all that is not God, the flame of 
love is no longer experienced as harsh but, having entered within the soul, is

14 These digressions enable John to say more about a topic, or to introduce related topics. They are 
found in LF.1.19-25; 1.30; 2.9-14; 2.25-30, 3.18-26; 3.27-67. See LF.Intro.634.
experienced as gentle (LF.1.25.651). The contrast between the two states is profound. John writes that now the “words of the divine Song of Songs can be spoken of me: Who is this that comes up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her Beloved, diffusing love everywhere? [Sg. 8.5]” (LF.1.26.651-52). Suffering has been transformed.

Now in the state of mystical marriage, the bride/soul feels the emptiness of her lack of the full possession of God (LF.1.27.652), but hers is a “gentle and delightful desire” (LF.1.28.652) for she is “not capable of experiencing hardship” (Ackerman.LF.1.28.97). She desires the immediate and swift consummation of the mystical marriage in the beatific vision if it is God’s will. The bride/soul feels that now only the thinnest of veils separates her from full union with her Beloved. The veils of the world and her self have been broken through, and there is only the veil of mortal life which still holds her prisoner. She asks her Beloved to rompe (tear) through this veil and carry her off to himself before her natural time, in the love-wounding of este dulce encuentro (this sweet encounter [KR.LF.1]). John describes the “death of love,” in which the death of such persons is very gentle and very sweet, sweeter and more gentle than was their whole spiritual life on earth. For they die with the most sublime impulses and delightful encounters of love … Accordingly, David affirmed that the death of the saints is precious in the sight of the Lord [Ps. 116:15] (LF.1.30.654).

Thérèse of Lisieux prayed John’s passages on the death of love. However, she cautioned those around her that Christ died in agony and this might be her lot too. Thérèse experienced both aspects of dying, illumining John’s teaching that the death of love is similar to death in natural circumstances, although its cause and mode are

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15 In the thirty-ninth stanza of the Spiritual Canticle, John discusses the bride’s pain in being transformed by the “flame” (the love of the Holy Spirit) in this life, and explains that there will be no pain in the beatific state (SC.39.14.627). In Living Flame, John appears to lose sight of pain in his discussion of transforming love, which suggests that to some degree the beatific state starts now, and/or that pain becomes irrelevant. In his commentary on the fourth stanza, John attributes the minimizing of pain to God’s loving gentleness (LF.4.12.712).

16 John explains that this is the mystical dimension of “Thy kingdom come; thy will be done” (Mt 6:10) of the prayer Christ taught his disciples (LF.1.28.653).

17 John of the Cross quotes Philippians 1:23: “I want to be gone and to be with Christ.”
different (LF.1.30.653). It is perhaps significant that Pilate was surprised that Jesus had died so soon (Mk 15:44).

The third veil is so “very spiritual, thin, and luminous, that it does not prevent the divinity from vaguely appearing through it” (LF.1.32.654). In the Spiritual Canticle, the bride implores her Beloved to draw back the veil of faith to enable her to see his eyes (SC.12.2.516). It is this veil of faith which is so very thin in the state of mystical marriage. The Reality of God has become more real for the soul/bride than is reality: “All things are nothing to it, and it is nothing in its own eyes; God alone is its all” (LF.1.32.655). In contrast to the now-past, painful assaults on the other veils (temporal and natural), this veil is constantly gently assailed by the Holy Spirit (LF.1.29.653). The bride/soul is aware of God producing “these divine and glorious assaults in the manner of encounters … by which he ever penetrates and deifies the substance of the soul, absorbing it above all being into his own being” (LF.35.1.656). This bride/soul John is talking about is himself, and it is he who is sweetly encountering his Beloved through this now very spiritual, thin and luminous veil, and is being absorbed into God’s being. It is he who desires that his Beloved should “break the last thread, wound me and make me whole!” (LF.1). According to John, the Beloved’s tearing of the veil need not “wait for maturity, it seems, nor anything like it” (Ackerman.LF.1.33.105) because God can prepare souls in a short time and carry them off. Intense acts of love pierce the heavens (LF.1.33.655), so it is good for the soul (he is talking about himself) “to be occupied in many acts of love, because, being consummated in a short time, it may not linger very long in this world or in the next without seeing God” (Ackerman.LF.1.34.107).

John concludes his commentary on the first stanza of Living Flame in the form of a heartfelt prayer to the Holy Spirit of Love, Spirit of his Beloved. It is as if John cannot contain his joy at now knowing that “You are so friendly that You show You

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18 Clarke, Story of a Soul, 261-71.
19 I resist the use of “perfect” because of connotations which make it unsatisfactory and alien in a discussion of God’s love carrying off, “ready or not,” his beloved bride.
20 Cf. Walsh, Cloud of Unknowing, 131.
want to give Yourself to me in eternal life” (Ackerman.LF.1.36.107). John experiences God as his most dear and familiar (Julian’s “homely”) Beloved, who is wanting to fully consummate the mystical marriage with him in the bliss of heaven. Being emptied of self, John knows that all of his strength is of God. He wants all that God wants, for, as John says, all his prayers and petitions “come from you, and you move me to make them, and I make them in the delight and joy of the Holy Spirit, my judgment now issuing from your countenance [Ps.17.2]” (LF.1.36.657). With all of his being, now undivided, John rejoices in his Beloved. His final petition, which he knows is God’s petition too, is for perfect love, “so that I may love You from now on with the plenitude and abundance that my soul desires, without limit or end”
(Ackerman.LF.1.36.109).

**Stanza Two**

In this stanza, according to John’s commentary, the bride/soul “magnifies the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (LF.2.1.658). She rejoices in the love-wounding of the Holy Spirit, the taste of eternal life given to her by the soft touch of Christ, and the transformation accomplished by the gentle hand of the Father. In all of this, the Trinity of divine Persons has worked as One, giving life for death in the bride/soul’s sharing in Christ’s resurrection.

The cauterio (cautery), or burn, is the Holy Spirit: “a fire of love that, being of infinite power, can inestimably consume and transform into itself the soul it touches” (LF.2.2.658). This fire of love (more intense than all other fires) wounds and transforms the soul in accordance with the soul’s preparedness. Being transformed by the divine flames, the soul “not only feels a cautery, but has become a cautery of blazing fire” (LF.2.2.658). The fire of love does not destructively consume this strengthened soul but sweetly and gently enriches, expands, divinises, and delights it.

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21 My use of italics. Julian of Norwich is most astonished by, and finds most joy and comfort in, God’s homely and courteous love (P.vii.172).

22 Cf. “I am ground of your prayer [besekyn]” (W.89v.3-4.71).


24 A common medical practice in John’s day. To cauterise is to “burn the skin or flesh of (a wound) to stop bleeding or prevent infection.” COED, 226.
The bride/soul is happily immersed in “all the good things of the Beloved” (LF.2.4.569), which she now enjoys without limit or opposition. The fire of love consumes this soul in glory, and John exults in “the great glory of you who have merited this supreme fire!” (LF.2.5.659).

Because the cautery is *suave* (sweet, gentle), the resulting wound is “a wound of sweet love” (LF.2.6.659), which, now that evasion is over, is experienced as delightful. John writes that, like a material cautery causing a wound wherever it touches, wherever this sweet cautery (the Holy Spirit) touches becomes a wound of love so that “whether a soul is wounded by other wounds of miseries and sins or whether it is healthy, this cautery of love immediately effects a wound of love in the one it touches, and those wounds deriving from other causes become wounds of love” (LF.2.7.660). Thus, the Holy Spirit, fire of love, converts our other wounds, whatever their causes, into wounds of love. All of our wounds become wounds of love when they are touched by God’s love. God enters our poverty with delightful sweetness. The person in the state of mystical marriage is aware that suffering attracts the love of God and welcomes it. Because such a person desires an ever deeper loving encounter with God (ie. love-wounding), they may even, like John, ask for more suffering.26

Contrasting the sweet cautery’s wound with the wound produced by material fire, John highlights a stunning difference, which warrants a lengthy quotation. Unlike the material cautery-inflicted wound, which requires other medicine to cure it,

> the wound of the cautery of love cannot be cured with any other medicine than that self-same cautery, and the same cautery that cures the wound, by curing it makes it; for each time that the cautery of love touches the wound of love, it makes a greater wound of love, and so it cures and heals more the more it wounds. The lover who is most wounded is the most healed, and the remedy that love supplies is to wound and strike on the wound until it is so large that the whole soul dissolves into a wound of love. In this way, now completely cauterized and made into a wound of love, the soul is completely healed in love because it is transformed in love. And this is what is meant by the wound of which the completely afflicted and completely healed soul speaks here (Ackerman.LF.2.7.115-17).

25 In the *Spiritual Canticle*, John describes the wounds of love of the seeking bride as lovesickness, a sore wound, and a festered wound, by which she “lives by dying until love, in killing her, makes her live the life of love, transforming her in love” (SC.7.4.500). In *Living Flame*, John describes the continuing wounds of love received by the bride/soul in the state of mystical marriage.

In this excerpt, John explains “what is meant” by wounds of love in the state of mystical marriage. They are made by the “Burn that is for my healing” (LF 2). By the never-stopping, ever-deepening, loving action of the Holy Spirit causing and curing the wound of love, the bride/soul is transformed in love as she “dissolves into a wound of love.” The more wounded, the more healed and transformed is the bride/soul. She rejoices in this wounding, which is made by the Holy Spirit “as a gift” (Ackerman.LF.2.8.117) in order to delight her. The wounding is so subidamente regalada (sublimely delightful) because the cautery is “a touch exclusively of Divinity in the soul, without any intellectual or imaginative shape or figure” (Ackerman.LF.2.8.117). It is also, as Flower’s translation of the stanza makes clear, “Wound of delight past feeling!” (LF.2). John is referring to being touched (wounded) by God’s love in a manner that is beyond the human senses.

In a digression (LF.2.9-14.660-63), John explains other ways in which the love of God cauterizes and wounds souls. He describes transpiercingwhich contains an intellectual, or perceptual, element. In this, the soul feels “that a seraph is assailing it by means of an arrow or dart that is all afire with love” (LF.2.9.661). This causes the person to feel great “ardor and arousal of love” (Ackerman.LF.2.9.119), amidst which she is aware of the wound inflicted by the tip of the arrow or dart in the “middle of the heart of the spirit” (LF.2.10.661). The wound is like that inflicted by the herb found on an arrow-tip: its effect also resembles the scriptural mustard seed as it grows and spreads throughout the “spiritual and substantial veins of the soul” (LF.2.10.661). The soul feels that it is lost in seas of “loving fire” (LF.2.10.661) for, “conscious of the living point or centre of love within itself, it is unable to catch sight of the boundaries of this love” (LF.2.10.661).

John goes on to discuss spiritual wounding which extends to the body and is shown outwardly, as in the stigmata given to Francis of Assisi (another founder of a

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28 John comments that those few persons who experience this wounding are often founders of religious orders. While John is reluctant to declare overtly his own mystical experience, Teresa of Avila is more forthcoming. Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, *Collected Works I*, 252. We may note Teresa’s reference to spiritual pain which coincides with great love.
religious family) at La Verna in 1224. When the inner soul of Francis was wounded with love for the crucified Christ, his body shared in this wounding by receiving the imprinting of the five wounds of Christ. John explains that for persons like Francis, “what is a cause of pain and torment to their corruptible flesh is sweet and delectable to their strong and healthy spirit. It is, then, a wonderful thing, experiencing the pain augmented with the delectable” (LF.2.13.662). John comments that this is “an unspeakable marvel and worthy of the abundance and sweetness God has hidden for them that fear him [Ps. 31:19]: to give one enjoyment of as much savor and sweetness as there is experience of pain and torment” (LF.2.13.662). John is saying that spiritual delight and natural suffering can co-exist. He makes the further comment that, since the body can restrain the soul, a wound that is made only in the soul can in fact be “more intense and sublime” (LF.2.13.662). John warns us (once more) not to think of going to God relying on the senses, because even though spiritual wounding sometimes overflows into the senses (as happened for Francis), one must leave the activity of the senses behind in pursuit of the supernatural (LF.2.14.663).

In his commentary, John returns to the text of his poem: “Ah, gentle hand whose touch is a caress, foretaste of heaven conveying and every debt repaying” (LF.2). The mano blanda (gentle hand) which makes the cautery is el piadoso y omnipotente Padre (the kind/merciful and all-powerful Father) who holds all in his hand (LF.2.16.663). John addresses the gentle hand: “You have been gentle and friendly with me … you have wounded me in order to cure me … you have put to death in me … what deprived me of God’s life in which I now see myself live” (LF.2.16.663). The Father’s toque delicado (delicate touch) which caresses the soul with wounds of love is Christ, the Father’s only Son. John likens the gentle but full-of-power touch of the Word to the gentle breeze in which Elijah encounters Yahweh after the display of Yahweh’s power in hurricane, earthquake and fire [1 K 19:11-12] (LF.2.17.664). Christ “subtly penetrate[s] the substance of the soul, lightly touching it all, absorb[ing] it entirely in [himself] in divine modes of delights and sweetmesses” (LF.2.17.664). Christ dwells hidden within the soul, and the soul dwells in his presence (LF.2.17.664). This delicate touching of the soul is so delightful that it renders painful all other touches (LF.2.18.264). The more that Christ enters the soul

29 Cf. Gospel accounts of Jesus’ healing touch are particularly observable in Mark’s Gospel.
with his substance, the more the soul is purified and made like unto him (LF.2.19.665).

The infinitely delicate caress or touch is love-wounding. It is “a touch of substances, that is, of the substance of God in the substance of the soul” (LF.2.21.665), and *a vida eterna sabe* (it tastes of eternal life). This part of the commentary is a striking example of John trying to describe the indescribable, of not being able to say much, but trying to say something:

> It is impossible to express the delicacy of the delight which is felt in this touch; nor would I want to speak about it, to avoid conveying that it is no more than what I describe; for there are no words to explain such sublime things concerning God as occur in these souls. The appropriate language for the one who experiences this is to understand it for himself, and to feel it, enjoy it, and be silent about it (Ackerman LF.2.21.127).

In this very telling excerpt, we catch a glimpse of John’s own experience of wounds of love, within the intensity of his words and in the implications of his simple listing of understanding, feeling, enjoying, and being drawn into the silence that is God. The soul tastes “all the things of God” (LF.2.21.665), although not perfectly as in the next life. In his efforts to say something about his experience of this, John draws on the Book of Revelation in which it is written that a pebble “would be given to the one who overcame, and a name would be written on the pebble that none would know but he who received it [Rev. 2:17]” (Ackerman.LF.2.21.127). This secret name is the name of the Word, the Son of God (see Rev 3.12 and 19:12-16), and it is mighty in power. The touch of the hand of God in *Living Flame* is Christ, and John is trying to describe a meeting with the risen Lord in which the soul’s experience is without limiting boundaries of “form, figure and accident” (LF.2.20.665). It is an experience which is so interior, hidden and secret that it tastes of eternal life. It draws John into silence. Sometimes “the unction of the Holy Spirit overflows into the body … with the feeling of great delight and glory … [so that] … in its own way it magnifies God” (LF.2.22.665-66). In receiving a taste of eternal life, the bride/soul feels rewarded a hundredfold for her faithful endurance (LF.2.23.666). In fact, John insists, she “has endured no tribulation or penance or trial to which there does not correspond a

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hundredfold of consolation and delight in this life” (LF.2.23.666). The gentle hand (the Father) toda deuda paga (pays all debts).

John digresses here (LF.2.24-30.666-69) to insist that it is necessary to tread the path of trials, temptations and tribulations in order to reach the state of mystical marriage. 32 In his commentary on the first stanza of Living Flame, John referred to the suffering caused in the purgative state by evasion and resistance to the loving, living flame of love. Now he focuses on the necessity of sufferings, for “this highest union cannot be wrought in a soul that is not fortified by trials and temptations, and purified by tribulations, darknesses and distress, just as a superior quality liqueur is poured only into a sturdy flask that is prepared and purified” (LF.2.25.666). It is in faithfully and lovingly enduring these God-given trials of sense and spirit that the soul grows in “virtues, strength, and perfection” (LF.2.26.667). 33 Many desire mystical union, writes John of the Cross, but few are willing to “endure so lofty and sublime a work … thus they do not allow God to begin to grant their petition” (LF.2.27.667). In order to reach mystical union, we must allow God to conduct us “through the initial trials and mortifications … [of] ordinary suffering” (LF.2.27.667). It is only then, little by little, that we become ready for God to lead us into “the impetuous waters of spiritual tribulations and trials that are deeper” (LF.2.27.668).

At this point, John makes an impassioned plea to his readers, and, because of its relevance to his theology of suffering, I quote it in full:

O souls who in spiritual matters desire to walk in security and consolation! If you but knew how much it behooves you to suffer in order to reach this security and consolation, and how without suffering you cannot attain to your desire but rather turn back, in no way would you look for comfort either from God or from creatures. You would instead carry the cross and, placed on it, desire to drink the pure gall and vinegar. You would consider it good fortune that, dying to this world and to yourselves, you would live to God in the delights of the spirit, and patiently and faithfully suffering exterior trials, which are small, you would merit that God fix his eyes on you and purge you most profoundly through deeper spiritual trials in order to give you more interior blessings (LF.2.28.668).

31 My italics.

32 John discusses these sufferings of the soul in 2DN.

33 Cf. “the strengthening comes not through the trials in themselves but through the growth of the theological virtues” (KR, 667, N.10).
These are powerful words, and need to be understood correctly. Kavanaugh and Rodriguez comment that John is simply advocating what is traditionally known as “following Christ and sharing in the mystery of his cross” (KR.668).\textsuperscript{34} Suffering is necessary for those who seek God because Christ himself demonstrated that death leads to resurrection. In the long quotation above, John explains that lovingly enduring our sufferings allows us to die to the world and to self, and “to live to God in the delights of the spirit.” God gives us suffering in order to reward us (LF.2.28.668), and to exalt us as high as possible (LF.2.29.668). We can be glad of our trials, understanding that suffering is a sign of God’s special favour towards us (LF.2.30.669), and that our faithful enduring of it enables us to be drawn into mystical union. Therefore, writes John,

> People should live with great patience and constancy in all the tribulations and trials God places on them, whether they be exterior or interior, spiritual or bodily, great or small, and they should accept them all as from God’s hand as a good remedy and not flee from them for they bring health (LF.2.30.669).

The opportunity to suffer, in whatever shape it comes, draws us to practice virtue, and is to be understood as God’s gift which helps to spiritually transform us. John wants us to embrace the sufferings God gives us with faith, trust and love, allowing God to do what God wants to do in us. We cannot be spiritually transformed without suffering.

John now returns to explaining the second stanza of Living Flame. He addresses the final verse: “killing, you give me life for death’s distress” (LF.2). He begins by reminding his readers how well God has rewarded the soul’s enduring of interior and exterior trials with “divine goods for the soul and body” (LF.2.31.669). Referring to the book of Esther,\textsuperscript{35} John comments that the soul “might do anything it likes and omit anything it does not like in the kingdom of its Bridegroom” (LF.2.31.670). This is the nature of the relationship enjoyed by the Bridegroom and bride in the state of mystical union. Of course, the bride will like to do what the

\textsuperscript{34} John expands on this theme in 2A.7.168-73.

\textsuperscript{35} “Write what you please … in the king’s name, and seal it with the king’s signet” (Est 8:8).
Bridegroom likes, and will not like to do what the Bridegroom does not like, and vice versa.

Because the “old self” has at last died completely, the bride/soul is able “to live perfectly in this new life” (LF.2.33.670). While the intellect, before union, understood naturally and through the natural senses, it is now divinely moved in union with God’s intellect. While the will, before union, loved with natural affection, it is now divinely moved to live the life of God’s love. While the memory, before union, was focused on creatures, it is now focused on eternity. While the natural appetite before union was charmed by creatures, it is now charmed and “moved and satisfied by another principle, the delight of God” (LF.2.34.671). Similarly are all natural movements, operations and inclinations “now, in union, dead to what they formerly were, changed into divine movements, and alive to God” (LF.2.34.671). Thus, the intellect of this soul is God’s intellect; its will is God’s will; its memory is the eternal memory of God, and its delight is God’s delight; and although the substance of this soul is not the substance of God, since it cannot undergo a substantial conversion into him, it has become God through participation in God, being united to and absorbed in him, as it is in this state. Such a union is wrought in this perfect state of the spiritual life, yet not as perfectly as in the next life. Consequently the soul is dead to all it was in itself, which was death to it, and alive to what God is in himself (LF.2.34.671).

After thus attempting to summarize the immensity of the bride’s transformation in theological language, John enters his deepest heart, which is the wine-cellar where dwells his Beloved (LF.2.35.672). He refers explicitly to Song 1:4-5, and implicitly to stanzas 26 and 33 of the Spiritual Canticle.36 There, no longer dark with all that in him resisted mystical union, he shares in the beauty of the Bridegroom, and he rejoices in the love (pechos: breasts) of his Beloved.

In the commentary’s second redaction, John concludes with a tapestry of scriptural texts in which he praises God who has enfolded him “in gladness and love” (LF.2.36.672), and who will ever renew him in glory [Ws. 7:27] (LF.2.36.672). John sings jubilant praise for what God has done in him in the words of Psalm 30, from which he quotes the first line and emphasizes the last two:

36 I would argue that in paragraphs 35 and 36, one is strongly aware that John is experiencing mystical union as he writes.
I will extol you, O Lord, for you have upheld me …
You have turned my mourning into joy:
you have cut my sackcloth and surrounded me with gladness,
to the end that my glory may sing to you and I may not regret;
my Lord, God, I will praise you forever [Ps. 30:1,11-12] (LF.2.36.672).

In this stanza, John has expressed his experience of Father, Son and Holy Spirit
delightfully wounding him with love, “killing” the “old self” and transforming him.
He has also, in the words of the psalmist, described the path to mystical union as a
blessed path of “mourning” (suffering) that opens into the spiritual joy of praising
God, who is worthy of all praise, forever.37 He finishes by assuring us that “there is no
need to be amazed that the soul so frequently walks amid this joy, jubilance, fruition,
and praise of God” (LF.2.36.672). John feels so cherished by the tender words and
favours of his Beloved, that it is as though God “has no one else in the world to favor
nor anything else to do, that everything is for [John] alone” (LF.2.36.672). And so he
moves into the silence of his contemplation of Song 2:16: “My Beloved belongs to me
and I to him” (LF.672, N.21).

Stanza Three

In the third stanza, John addresses his Beloved through the symbol of “lamps
of fire.” These lamps of fire refer to God and to God’s attributes, the splendour of
which, long contemplated by the bride/soul, now illumine with a wonderful radiance
the once “dark and blind” sense of her caverns/faculties, enabling her to offer this
light and warmth to her Beloved. The two properties of lamps are to “transmit light
and give off warmth” (LF.3.2.673). The knowledge and fervor that John needed for
writing his Living Flame commentary (LF.Pro.1.638) are the subject matter of this
third stanza.

In Stanza 27 of the Spiritual Canticle, John writes: Allí me enseñó ciencia muy sabrosa (There he taught me sweet and living knowledge), referring to allí (there) as
the place of mystical meeting, where the Beloved teaches his bride “mystical
theology, the secret knowledge of God that spiritual persons call contemplation. This
knowledge is very delightful because it is a knowledge through love” (SC.27.5.582).

37 “Blessed are those who mourn: they shall be comforted” (Mt 5:5).
This loving knowledge transforms the bride. The third stanza of *Living Flame* is about transformation in contemplation, and the commentary includes a major digression on guiding souls in contemplation. John warns his readers of their need for experience in order to understand what he is writing about (LF.3.1.673). He is plumbing the depths of his own contemplative experience, and that of his directees, as he attempts to describe the transformation which takes place in mystical union.

In the state of mystical marriage, the bride/soul receives spiritual insights which are gifts of knowledge of her Spouse, relating to his attributes. In being given knowledge of an attribute of God, for example God’s omnipotence, wisdom or goodness, the bride also experiences the warmth of God’s love. Thus, writes John, “you feel that he omnipotently loves and does good to you … you feel that he loves and does good to you with wisdom … you feel that he loves you with goodness” (LF.3.6.675). This is the Bridegroom communicating with his bride, and John comments that “in this manifestation of himself to the soul, which in my opinion is the greatest possible in this life, he is to it innumerable lamps giving forth knowledge and love of himself” (LF.3.3.674). Since the bride/soul’s faculties (intellect, memory and will) are now empty of all that pertains to sensory satisfaction, she is able to receive the loving knowledge of her Beloved’s many attributes, and these make their home in her. The “rapture of love, communicated by the fire of the light of these lamps” (LF.3.4.675) is indeed a wounding with love (LF.3.5.675). These communications simultaneously inflame her with love and are “like soft refreshing water that satisfies the thirst of the spirit” (LF.3.8.676). John is lost for words38 as he tries to describe the indescribable transformation in which “the soul becomes God through participation in him and his attributes, which it terms ‘the lamps of fire’” (LF.3.8.677).

The “splendors” of the lamps of fire are “the loving knowledge that the lamps of God’s attributes give forth from themselves to the soul” (LF.3.9.677), causing her to shine like the lamps and to be transformed within their glow. The splendors may also be described as God’s “overshadowings” of the soul, which is “similar to

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38 Readers are to look beyond the text.
protecting, favoring, and granting graces” (LF.3.12.678). The splendors of the lamps of fire act upon the soul’s “caverns” (faculties), which, when purged of all creaturely attachment, are able to be filled with the Infinite, which alone can satisfy them (LF.3.18.680). Thus the intellect thirsts for “the waters of God’s wisdom” (LF.3.19.681); the will hungers for “the perfection of love after which the soul aims” (LF.3.20.681); and the memory has an emptiness which is a “yearning and melting away of the soul for the possession of God” (LF.3.21.681). Because the caverns contain an infinite depth of longing, “their languishing and suffering are infinite death” (LF.3.22.681). The more the bride/soul loves, the more she suffers. However, writes John, and he asks God to help him express this, “when the soul desires God fully, it then possesses him whom it loves … Thus it seems that the more the soul desires God the more it possesses him, and the possession of God delights and satisfies it” (LF.3.23.682). There is a connection between desiring God “fully” and the delightfully satisfying possession of God. John has experienced this.

John interrupts his commentary to write at length on contemplation, and the need for the bride to allow the Beloved, who is seeking her “much more” (LF.3.28.684) than she is seeking him, to lead her “by the hand to the place [she] knows not how to reach (to supernatural things of which neither [her] intellect nor [her] will nor [her] memory can know the nature)” (LF.3.29.684). The Beloved’s “divine inspirations and touches … [prepare the bride for] union with him and substantial transformation in all of [her] faculties” (LF.3.28.684). John is much concerned that the Beloved’s leading of the bride should not be obstructed by any one of three blind guides: a spiritual director, who may be learned and discreet, but does not have the necessary personal “experience of what pure and true spirit is” (LF.3.30.685); the devil; or the bride herself. John’s teaching on contemplation is to help all to better understand the transformation of the faculties, or caverns (LF.3.7.683). Because the main focus of my thesis is on meeting God, John’s comments on contemplation warrant my close attention.

39 Cf. “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow” (Lk 1:35).
40 Cf. “I it am, that makes you to long, the endless fullness of all true desires” (W.103.5-7.98). See Chapter 5, 106. God is present in our longing.
John starts with an outline of the beginner’s prayer: to meditate on spiritual material; to use discourse; to use the imagination; to make interior acts on one’s own; and to enjoy and profit from spiritual satisfactions, which wean the soul from attachment to the sensory and the worldly (LF.3.32.685). Then, writes John, “when the appetite has been fed somewhat and has become in a certain fashion accustomed to spiritual things and acquired some fortitude and constancy, God begins to wean the soul … and place it in the state of contemplation” (LF.3.32.685). The soul finds that her former efforts are now fruitless, leading only to dryness, distraction, and lack of satisfaction.41 She is now able only to receive, and “God is the giver and the one who works in it, by according spiritual gifts in contemplation (which is knowledge and love together, that is, loving knowledge), without the soul’s natural acts and discursive reflections” (LF.3.32.686). The soul “must travel to God accompanied only by loving awareness … with uncomplicated and simple loving awareness, as one who opens [her] eyes with loving attention” (Ackerman.LF.3.33.173). This loving awareness is a passive resting in, waiting on, and receiving of God. John gives an insightful description of contemplation, from which I quote at length:

Since God interacts with the soul by means of a simple and loving knowledge in giving, the soul also interacts with Him by means of a simple and loving awareness in receiving …

Therefore, the soul must not be attached to anything, not to exercise in meditation, not to discourse, not to any sensual or spiritual delight, nor to any other apprehensions; for the spirit must be … free and annihilated concerning everything that … would impede and disquiet it, and make noise in the profound silence of senses and spirit which are needed in the soul for such a profound and delicate listening; for God speaks to the heart in this solitude as He said through Hosea [2:14]42 in supreme peace and tranquility, the soul listening and hearing what the Lord God speaks in it … (Ackerman.LF.3.34.173-75).

When it happens, therefore, that souls are conscious in this manner of being placed in silence and in the state of listening, they should even forget the practice of loving attentiveness I mentioned so as to remain free for what the Lord then desires of them. They should make use of that loving awareness

41 Cf. 2A.13-14.189-97. John describes in some detail the three signs by which one is to recognize readiness for contemplative prayer: “the realization that one cannot make discursive meditation or receive satisfaction from it as before … an awareness of a disinclination to fix the imagination or sense faculties on other particular objects, exterior or interior … [and] a person likes to remain alone in loving awareness of God, without particular considerations, in interior peace and quiet and repose, and without the exercise … of the intellect, memory and will” (2A.13.2-4.189-90). All three signs are necessary.

42 “But look, I am going to seduce her and lead her into the desert and speak to her heart” (Hos 2:16).
only when they do not feel themselves placed in this solitude or inner idleness or oblivion or spiritual listening. So they may recognize it, it always comes to pass with a certain peace and calm and inward absorption (LF.3.35.687).

John’s words depict the bride/soul entering a new dimension, a dimension beyond the sensory, even beyond loving awareness, and into the silence or solitude of God, in which she feels placed, and in which her Beloved is the giver and she is the receiver.\(^\text{43}\) The silence or solitude of God is recognizable because in it she “always” enjoys “a certain peace and calm and inward absorption.” John appears to be here using the terms “silence” and “solitude” interchangeably, and meaning different things in different contexts. He describes solitude as the silence of “inner idleness or oblivion or spiritual listening” (LF.3.35.687). Solitude is also the poverty of spirit which Christ calls blessed in the Gospel [Mt 5:3] (LF.3.46.691). It is being alone with God, without attachment to or dependence on anyone or anything else, natural or supernatural, for in order to receive the contemplative knowledge being bestowed by her Beloved, the bride/soul must be detached from all sensory and spiritual satisfactions in prayer. The bride/soul is to strive to come to

as complete a withdrawal and solitude as possible, for the more solitude it obtains and the nearer it approaches this idle tranquility the more abundantly will the spirit of divine wisdom be infused into its soul. This wisdom is loving, tranquil, solitary, peaceful, mild, and an inebriator of the spirit, by which the soul feels tenderly and gently wounded and carried away, without knowing by whom or from where or how. The reason is that this wisdom is communicated without the soul’s own activity (LF.3.38.688-89).

This infused wisdom is contemplation and is what is meant when the soul is conscious of “being placed in silence” (LF.3.35.687). For this she has prepared by her practice of the silence and solitude of poverty of spirit and withdrawal from all that is not God. In solitude, God calls the bride/soul “to the desert where it journeys festively clothed and adorned with gold [love/will] and silver [knowledge/faith] jewels” (LF.3.38.688). John is talking about spiritual delight when he comments that “nothing satisfies [the bride/soul] as much as that solitary quietude” (LF.3.51.694). In solitude, the Bridegroom himself “gives her guidance, love, and rest, wounded, like her, in solitary

\(^{43}\) In *Dark Night*, John similarly writes that “contemplation is nothing else than a secret and peaceful and loving inflow of God, which, if not hampered, fires the soul in the spirit of love” (1DN.10.6.382).
quest” (SC.35). The bride’s experience of infused silence and solitude is that of union with her Beloved.

Once more, John defends what he is saying, strongly condemning spiritual directors who, through lack of knowledge and experience of mystical union, keep their directees practicing the prayer of beginners because “these other things are practices of illuminists and fools” (Ackerman.LF.3.43.181). John sees the spiritual director’s primary task being to help the directee acquire poverty of spirit (LF.3.46.691). John’s concern is the emptiness of the soul’s caverns (faculties), because if the soul does what it can, then “it is impossible that God fail to do his part by communicating himself to it, at least silently and secretly” (LF.3.46.691). To this empty and naked soul, darkly and obscurely, God communicates “contemplative knowledge which is a ray of darkness” (LF.3.49.693), and “the will often feels enkindled or tenderly moved or captivated without knowing or understanding anything more particularly than before, since God is ordaining love in it” (LF.3.50.694). Beyond imagination, the memory “walks safely … [and] draws closer to God” (LF.3.52.695), who has “neither form nor figure” (Ackerman.LF.3.52.191). By her poverty of spirit, the bride-soul “carries out well the commandment of love, which is to love God above all things; this cannot be done without nakedness and emptiness” (LF.3.51.694).

The second blind guide, the devil, tries to draw the soul out of solitude by sensory distractions, and may attempt, through “horrors, fears, bodily pains, or exterior sounds and noises to make it at least advert to sense and to draw it out thereby and divert it from the interior spirit” (LF.3.64.700). Our task, writes John, is to remain empty and detached, gently maintaining a loving attentiveness to our Beloved (LF.3.65.700), and allowing God to do the rest. The third blind guide, the self, will want the bride/soul to be actively doing something, but she must rest in God’s hands in silence, moving at God’s pace (LF.3.67.701).

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44 Preparing for the gift of solitude is illustrated in John’s sketch of Mount Carmel. He made many copies for his directees.

Returning (eventually) to his explanation of the soul’s caverns accommodating the loving knowledge of God being given (contemplation), John comments that the soul “feels that the deep knowledge and splendors of the lamps of fire fit into them, [and] it knows that its capacity and recesses correspond to the particular things it receives from the knowledge, savor, joy, delight, and so on, of God” (LF.3.69.702). The soul’s sense or feeling, which, before this gift of God’s loving knowledge was “dark and … blinded by its appetites and affections” (Ackerman.LF.3.76.211), can now, together with the caverns of the faculties, accommodate the loving knowledge it receives. In its surrender, the soul now, in its turn “shines and diffuses the warmth of love” (LF.3.78.705). The same light and warmth that the bride/soul receives, she now gives to her Beloved. It means, John explains, that

a reciprocal love is thus actually formed between God and the soul, like the marriage union and surrender, in which the goods of both (the divine essence that each possesses freely by reason of the voluntary surrender between them) are possessed by both together. They say to each other what the Son of God spoke to the Father through St. John … (All my goods are yours and yours are mine and I am glorified in them) [Jn. 17:10] (LF.3.79.706).

This is meeting God in mystical union in this life. It is a relationship in which, having come to poverty of spirit, the bride/soul is given in this life the kingdom of Heaven (Mt 5:3). She has “deep satisfaction and happiness” (LF.3.80.707) in giving back to her Beloved what she receives (the warmth and light of the Trinity itself), knowing that what she gives is greater than anything of her own. She recognizes with “a highly illumined faith” (LF.3.80.707), which is now a very thin veil (LF.1.32.654), that she exists in God who makes a home in her (Jn 14:23). In contemplation, the bride/soul enters the silence of God, the abyss in which she can listen to and hear God. She remains in solitude, alone with God, and is dispossessed and free of all else. She believes, as does John of the Cross, that God ordains all, and she embraces God’s will as her own.⁴⁶ She remains in God’s love (Jn 15:9).

In the eternal dwelling place of God, the fullness of transforming union will be accomplished (LF.3.79.706). Meanwhile, the bride/soul loves her Beloved within the love of the Trinity (Jn 17:26) in perfect love (LF.3.82.707). She delights in his attributes, enjoying him alone and for his own sake (LF.3.83.707-8). She praises God

⁴⁶ Cf. Julian’s beseeching.
as her creaturely duty, for the joy of praising and “for what he is in himself” (LF.3.84.708). With great gratitude and delight, she praises her Beloved who is worthy of all praise (LF.3.85.708).

**Stanza Four**

In this stanza, and in his commentary on it, John continues trying to put words on his experience of deepening transforming mystical union. The stanza addresses the Beloved as “O Bridegroom Word” (LF.4.3.708-9), whom John contemplates as the Son of God awakening in the depths of his heart (LF.4.4.709). What John describes as the awakening there of his Beloved, is, in fact, the powerful, but gentle and loving awakening of John’s own soul by the Spirit of his Bridegroom, from “the sleep of natural vision to supernatural vision” (LF.4.6.710) of God, and of all things in God. It is an awakening in which some of the veils are removed and John sees “a glimmer of [God] as He is … [for] that countenance of his, full of graces, becomes partially and vaguely discernible” (LF.4.7.711). In the Old Testament, Moses, the bearer of the Law, saw the back of God, but John, because of Christ, the divine Bridegroom, sees God face to face (albeit still dimly in this life) as his “brother and equal” (LF.4.13.713). With this new sight, John, with “remarkable delight” (LF.4.5.710), knows and understands that all created beings move in unison with God. God seems “to move in them, and they in him with continual movement” (LF.4.7.710). In unison with all of creation, John experiences himself as moving in God, and God in him.

There are many anointings and awakenings bestowed by God on the soul in the course of the soul’s journey to mystical union, but in this stanza John is referring

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47 As already seen (Chapter 7, 154), John’s theology of the Incarnation of the Word of God is expressed in his Romances (inspired by the prologue to John’s Gospel): “My Son, I wish to give you a bride who will love you. Because of you she will deserve to share our company and eat at our table the same bread I eat” (Romances 3, 62). John does not ascribe to an atonement theology of the Incarnation.

48 Cf. “The third property she experiences in these resounding rivers of her Beloved is a spiritual clamor and outcry louder than any other sound or call. This cry prevails against all other cries and its sound exceeds all the sounds of the world” (SC.14&15.9.528).


to an “awakening of the Son of God … [which] is a movement of the Word in the substance of the soul, containing such grandeur, dominion, glory, and intimate sweetness” (LF.4.4.709). John seems to be saying that this special awakening is the gift of supernatural vision to understand and “see” who God truly is. It is the discovery that God is not “careless and asleep” (LF.4.8.711) as we project on to God, but Love.\(^51\) John suggests this in a prayer:

Awaken us and enlighten us, my Lord, so we might know and love the blessings that You have always set before us, and we will know that You moved to grant us favors and that You remembered us (Ackerman.LF.4.9.226).

John’s delight is in being awakened to the profound knowledge that God remembers him and lovingly cares for him. He has no fear of God who is treating him with loving gentleness (LF.4.12.712), and is “acting in a friendly way toward [him], as [his] brother and equal” (LF.4.13.713). John prays to be ever mindful of, and responsive to, the love of “my Lord.” His faith (now such a thin veil) in God’s embracing love is such that it rules his whole life. It explains John’s attitude to human existence, and to suffering: John’s God is Love, and can be totally trusted in all the circumstances of his life. He rests content in knowing that “God ordains all” (L.26.760).

God dwells hidden in the substance of all souls, but, writes John of the Cross, the experience of God’s indwelling is not the same for all (LF.4.14.713). In unprepared, encumbered souls, God’s in-dwelling is unperceived, whereas in purified hearts, God is able to be truly alone (to reign uncontested), and to be truly secret (in a deep and secret embrace beyond the senses and the devil).\(^52\) Thus, writes John,

In this soul in which neither any appetite nor other images or forms nor any affections for created things dwell, the Beloved dwells secretly with an embrace so much closer, more intimate and interior, the purer and more alone the soul is to everything other than God. His dwelling is in secret, then, because the devil cannot reach the area of this embrace, nor can the human intellect understand how it occurs. Yet it is not secret to the soul itself \(^53\) (LF.4.14:713-14).

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\(^51\) Cf. “Thus was I taught that Love is our Lord’s meaning” (P.lxxxvi.490).

\(^52\) The prepared, purified individual lives in solitude.

\(^53\) The soul recognizes God’s embrace in contemplation. Cf. LF.3.35.687.
For John, with his faculties now empty of the sensory and the worldly, the Beloved is beyond “images or forms,” and speaks peace to his heart in solitude when God places him in silence “and in the state of listening” (LF.3.35.687). In the state of mystical union, the soul “always perceives God resting and reclining within its breast” (Ackerman LF.4.15.233). John lives in habitual recollection, with his Beloved sleeping on his breast, and sometimes, in a manner different to the anointings given to less prepared souls, he is given

an awakening of the Bridegroom … [in which] everything that occurs and is caused is perfect, for he is the cause of it all. And in that awakening, which is as though one were to waken and breathe, the soul feels a strange delight in the breathing of the Holy Spirit in God, in which it is sovereignly glorified and taken with love (LF.4.16.714).

If these awakenings were not given to the soul with loving gentleness, and “without using the natural, so that a person does not know whether this happens in the body or out of it [2 Cor. 12:2]” (LF.4.12.712), and if the Beloved was always awake instead of mostly sleeping, these “awakening” experiences of knowing and loving God (contemplation) would be too much for a person in this life.55

John refers (above) to the “strange delight” he feels. There are no human words to describe the experience of being drawn into the very breathing of the Trinity,56 in which the soul is filled with “good and glory and delicate love of God” (LF.4.17.715). This is what happens, writes John, in the gentle and loving awakening of the Bridegroom Word

in the center and depth of my soul, which is its pure and intimate substance, in which secretly and silently, as its only lord, you dwell alone, not only as in your house, nor only as in your bed, but also as in my own heart, intimately and closely united to it (LF.4.3.709).

We recall John’s words in the Prologue to *Living Flame* that we are not to marvel at God giving us such sublime gifts, because Christ told us that “the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit would take up their abode in those who love him by making

54 Cf. “There on my flowered breast … he stayed, sinking to rest” (DN.6).
56 Cf. SC.39.3-6.622-24; “One Love dwells in all three Persons who together form one Love, and the Loved One is the Lover in whom each one lives and moves” (*Romances* 1.43).
them live the life of God and dwell in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit [Jn. 14:23]” (LF.Pro.2.639). Being awakened by the Bridegroom who dwells within his heart, and himself dwelling within the breathing love of the Trinity, John’s heart swells with love for his Beloved.

John finishes abruptly, praising God for enkindling him in love “indescribably and incomprehensibly” (LF.4.17.715). This enkindling is the enflaming of the wound of love within him. John is now a flame of Love. The reader is well aware that there is much that has been left unsaid.

Concluding Comments

John’s Living Flame poem and commentary describes a further state of transforming mystical union, that is, a deeper meeting of God. In this state, the Holy Spirit gently wounds the soul to its deepest centre, gently assailing the thin veil which is now all that separates it from God. These wounds are delightful and a marked contrast to those which caused suffering in the stages of purgation and betrothal. However, the bride yearns for the tearing of the final veil of life which keeps her from her Beloved. John describes how the bride is wounded and healed by the cautery of the Holy Spirit applied by Christ (the delicate touch) of the Father (the gentle hand), until she dissolves into a wound of love, that is, in to God. Suffering attracts God’s loving touch and is to be understood as gift. The path of mourning opens into the spiritual joy of praising God in which we know that we are cherished. When the bride’s caverns of intellect, memory and will are emptied of the world and self, they contain an infinite depth of longing for God, which also means possession of what is desired. In Living Flame, John provides a major teaching on contemplation, and explains how the bride enters into silence and solitude. Mystical union is described as an awakening to knowing who God really is – Love. The bride now lives in habitual recollection with the Beloved, who sometimes awakens so that she experiences the delight of being taken with love “in the breathing of the Holy Spirit in God” (LF.4.16.714).

The next chapter draws together John’s teaching on meeting God by addressing three wounds of love.
CHAPTER 10

THREE WOUNDS OF LOVE

*Draw me in your footsteps, let us run ... How right it is to love you (Sg 1:4).*

Introduction

Like Julian of Norwich, John of the Cross understands meeting God as entering the mystery of Christ who leads us in contemplation into the mystery of the Trinity. The purpose of this chapter is to draw together some important aspects of John’s teaching on meeting God in this life. It does this by considering his teaching in terms of three wounds of love:

- the delightful wound of Trinitarian Love
- the wound of suffering: Christ is the doorway
- the wound of contemplation: transforming union

As the scope of the dissertation defines, the chapter draws on John’s *Spiritual Canticle, Living Flame* and other writings.

The Delightful Wound of Trinitarian Love

We recall that in the *Spiritual Canticle* commentary, John defines wounds of love as “sweet touches of love” (SC.1.17.484) given by God. They are “accompanied by a kind of immense torment and yearning to see God” (SC.1.18.485), and they are “delightful and desirable” (SC.1.19.485) for they make the soul “go out of herself and enter into God” (SC.1.19.485). Wounds of love are initiated by God, and God is also wounded by our love (SC.13, 31, 35).

We recall, too, John of the Cross’s theology of the Holy Trinity as three Persons interacting lovingly with each other and in each other (Romances 1.44). The Father wants to give his Son a bride, “who by your grace will earn the right to be with us, with us to dwell” (Romances 3.47). The Father loves all who love his Son with the
same love that he has for his Son (*Romances* 2:46). The Son is delighted with his Father’s will, and promises to give “this promised bride the splendour of my brightness when at last I have her at my side” (*Romances* 3.47). In the *Living Flame* commentary John insists that the sublime experiences he describes are not beyond credibility because Christ promised that “the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit would take up their abode in those who love him by making them live the life of God and dwell in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit [Jn. 14:23]” (LF.Pro.2.639).

It is helpful to briefly revisit two chapters of the *Spiritual Canticle* commentary. In the first chapter, John tells his readers that the bride is seeking Christ, but also the place where Christ is to be found, which is in the Father’s bosom. Furthermore, “the Word, the Son of God, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is hidden by his essence and his presence in the innermost being of the soul” (SC.1.6.480). Therefore, the bride, wounded with love by her Beloved, will find him in the depths of her being where the Triune God, who created her in the image of God, dwells and awaits her. In the thirty-ninth chapter, John comments on five aspects of mystical union, the first being *el aspirer del aire* (the breathing of the air). According to John, the Holy Spirit makes the soul “capable of breathing in God the same spiration of love that the Father breathes in the Son and the Son in the Father” (SC.39.3.622-23), and “this is transformation in the three persons in power, wisdom and love” (SC.39.4.623). This unity and transformation of love will be fully accomplished in the next life, but the bride is given a foretaste of it in the mystical marriage (SC.39.6.624).

In the *Living Flame* poem and commentary, John expresses mystical union as participation in the life and love of the Trinity. The first stanza/song calls on the Holy Spirit (Spirit of the Bridegroom) who now gently wounds with love the soul’s secret centre, to tear through the veil of life and, in a wound of love, carry off the bride into eternal bliss. In the poem’s second stanza, the burn or cautery is a delightful wound which is the Holy Spirit (Living Flame of Love), administered by the Father (gentle hand) via the Son (caressing touch). This wound ever deepens, being caused and healed continually in our contemplation, and taking us to the death of self, for which we are rewarded with mystical union. This is a foretaste of the glory that will be ours with Christ the Bridegroom in the embrace of the Trinity in the next life. In the third
stanza, the lamps of fire represent God and God’s attributes being encountered by the bride in her contemplation. She is “immensely absorbed in delicate flames, subtly wounded with love through each of them, and … perceives clearly that this love is proper to eternal life” (LF.3.5.675). In the fourth stanza, John describes the bride’s experience of the awakening of the Bridegroom within her heart. In this, she “is sovereignly glorified and taken with love” (LF.4.16.714), and “enkindled … indescribably and incomprehensibly, in the depths of God” (LF.4.17.715).

John underlines his Trinitarian theology with a preoccupation with the concept of “three” throughout his writings. Some of John’s use of three is enshrined in the spiritual tradition, for example, the three theological virtues (faith, hope, love), the three spiritual faculties of the soul (intellect, memory, will), the three stages of the spiritual journey (purgative, illuminative, unitive), and the three enemies of the soul (world, flesh, devil). However, John goes much further. A few of the many, many other examples are John’s three nights (1A.2.1.120), three parts of one night (1A.2.5.121), three reasons for calling the journey towards union with God a night (1A.2.1.120), three stages in the fire burning the log of wood (2N.10.1.416), three kinds of love-wounds (SC.7.2-4.500-501), three needs and sufferings (SC.2.6-8.488-89), the threefold trials of those who are to reach union with God (LF.2.25.686), three signs of readiness to pass on to contemplation (2A.13.2-4.189-90), and three blind guides (LF.3.29.684).

There are some very rich examples of threes in Living Flame. John begins his commentary on the delightful wounding of the second stanza by stating that “the soul here magnifies the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, stressing the three admirable favors and blessings they produce in it, having changed its death to life, transforming it in the Trinity” (LF.2.1.658). A second example is when John describes the three exquisite qualities of love pertaining to each aspect of the “loveliness” of the soul’s surrender to God (Ackerman.LF.3.81-85.217-19). He begins his description of the very first of these qualities of love by explaining that

the soul here loves God, not through itself but through him. This is a remarkable quality, for the soul loves through the Holy Spirit, as the Father and the Son love each other, according to what the Son himself declares through St. John: That the love with which you have loved me be in them and I in them [Jn. 17.26] (LF.3.82.707).
John of the Cross laces his text with threes in the same way and for the same purpose that a present-day knitter of prayer-shawls knits in patterns of three. Occasionally, as in the two examples above, he makes his Trinitarian preoccupation explicit.¹

For the person in the state of mystical marriage, the Holy Spirit, Living Flame of Love, wounds “in order to cause love and delight … [dispatching] its wounds like most tender flares of delicate love” (LF.1.8.643). These wounds of love are experienced as suffering by the person in the purgative and illuminative stages of spiritual development, but they are always wounds of love because God’s purpose remains the same. Wherever the soul is touched by God (i.e. everywhere) becomes a wound of love, including wounds from other causes. God’s love touches and heals in one inclusive and continuous activity until we eventually dissolve into a wound of love. The Father’s delight rests in the Son, and in being with the Son’s bride, “the children of the earth [Prv. 8:30-31] … by bestowing delights on them. Hence these wounds (his games) are flames of tender touches” (LF.1.8.643-44). It is the Holy Spirit’s task to

touch and wound with love. Being wholly delightful and completely sound, the wound brings delight, just as a good doctor usually does … The Holy Spirit produces it only for the sake of giving delight, and since his will to delight the soul is great, this wound will be great, for it will be extremely delightful (LF.2.7.660).

Wounds of love for the person in the state of mystical marriage are “of the highest degree possible in this state … for this cautery is a touch only of divinity in the soul, without any imaginative form or figure” (LF.2.8.660). As John of the Cross says, “You are great, O delightful wound, because he who caused you is great!” (LF.2.8.660). It is Trinitarian Love which delights in wounding the soul with love.

Within Trinitarian Love, there is a special place for Christ, the Son, the Word, the Bridegroom of the soul. It is Christ who espouses humankind in his Incarnation

¹ Cf. Julian: “For all our life is in three: In the first we have our being. And in the second we have our increasing. And in the third we have our fulfilling. The first is Nature, the second is Mercy, the third is Grace. For the first I saw and understood that the high Might of the Trinity is our Father. And the deep Wisdom of the Trinity is our Mother. And the great Love of the Trinity is our Lord. And all these we have in nature and in our substantial making” (P.Iviii.391-92).
(Romances) and his Passion (SC.23). Christ, Image of the Father, and now risen and with us, accompanies us in the suffering of this life. John teaches that when we look for comfort from God, we hear these words: “behold my Son subject to me and to others out of love for me, and afflicted, and you will see how much he answers you” (2A.22.5.231). We are to behold the suffering Christ who acts out of love for God and humankind. In Ascent John gives counsels, the first of which reads (in Peers’ translation): “let him have an habitual desire to imitate Christ in everything that he does, conforming himself to His life; upon which life he must meditate [considerar: consider] so that he may know how to imitate it, and to behave in all things as Christ would behave” (Peers.1A.13.3.57). Christ is our Way into Trinitarian Love. The next section explores John’s view of suffering as a wound of love which draws us in to mystical union.

The Wound of Suffering: Christ is the Doorway

Crisógono’s biography of John of the Cross includes descriptions of two extraordinary occasions in which John gives evidence of his attitude to suffering. The first occasion occurred just after he had escaped from his prison in the Toledo priory. Because of his still weakened state, a few of the Discalced Carmelite Madres of the Beas convent were asked by their prioress to sing for him in order to cheer him. They sang this song:

He who does not experience sufferings
In this vale of sorrows,
Knows nothing of good things,
Nor has he tasted love,
For suffering is the dress of lovers.²

John was deeply moved by the song and remained in tears, silent and still for an hour, before “he spoke of how much our Lord had made him understand the value of suffering, and wondered at how little one is willing to suffer for God.”³ The Beas nuns “marveled to see a man, so worn out from suffering, feeling so bad because he

² Crisógono, Life, 125. In a note, Crisógono comments that the verse occurs as the first strophe of a poem in MS 17511 of the Biblioteca Nacional. José Vicente Rodríguez attributes the lyric to Fray Pedro de San Angelo, a famous solitary of La Peñuela and El Calvario. “Renewed Dynanism: Founder in Baeza,” in God Speaks, 192.
³ Crisógono, Life, 126.
had not suffered even more for one who suffered so much for us.”  

John’s response indicates a profound knowledge of Christ as compassionate Beloved whom he had met in suffering. He saw suffering as “the dress of lovers.” It was a theme John often returned to in his sermons and conversations.

The second incident occurred in Segovia in the last year of his life when his much-loved brother, Francisco, was visiting. John told his brother that he had been praying before a picture of Christ carrying his cross when a voice asked him what favour he would like for a special service he had performed. John replied, “Lord, what I should like you to give me is trials to suffer for you, and to be despised and esteemed as of little worth.” John is referring once more to his understanding of the meaning and value of suffering. We know that trial and rejection marked the climax of Christ’s earthly life. Rejection is presented as the climax of the Beatitudes (Mt 5:10-12) and requires totally living in faith, hope and love, with the poverty of spirit John teaches. Towards the end of John’s life, there was a vicious campaign against him within the Order he had helped found. I suggest that John’s prayer is that of a deep lover of Christ. It reflects an embracing of rejection, persecution, abuse and calumny “on my [Christ’s] account” (Mt 5:11). Christ has already borne all rejection, including John’s experience of it, and is one with him in a loving sharing. This sheds further light on John’s experience of trial and rejection when imprisoned some years before.

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4 The evidence of one of the singers, Sister Francisca de la Madre de Dios, quoted in Vicente Rodríguez, “Renewed Dynamism,” 192-93.

5 See Figure 6 for a copy of this small painting which is preserved in the Discalced Carmelite monastery in Segovia. Ruiz, God Speaks, 338.

6 Crisógon, Life, 268.
Figure 6. Original Painting of the Christ that Spoke to John in Segovia.
Because of the evidence of his writings, it is accepted that John experiences mystical union with his Beloved when suffering physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually in his prison cell in Toledo. His experience is hinted at in the ballad Rivers of Babylon which he composed there. The poem begins,

I sat beside the flowing streams
that water alien Babylon,
there on the ground I sat and wept
as I remembered Zion.

On one level this poem is about an episode in Israelite history, on another level it is about John listening to the waters of the Río Tajo flowing past his place of imprisonment as he weeps for his present situation, and on yet another level it is a poem about John seeking his Beloved. As John sits with “sad heart” but in “silent hope” as an outcast in a land alien to him on every level,

then came love to strike and wound me
and he tore my heart in two.

Pleading then, I begged he’d kill me
having wounded me so much,
and flung myself into his flames,
welcoming his burning touch.

In this place of suffering, John is graced with passionate love for his Beloved. He responds by pleading for mortal wounding and flings himself “into his flames, welcoming his burning touch.” We note the use of the personal pronoun for love. John is mystically one with his Beloved when he gazes on the crucified Christ and sees there the Image of God his compassionate Beloved, who love-wounds John by breaking his heart in two in a sharing of compassionate love. John is one with the One who lovingly bore, and bears, all pain, including his. He enters the mysteries of Christ: the caverns of the Rock (SC.37). He shares in Christ’s final agonizing but faithful and loving entrusting of his spirit into the hands of the Father whom he knows is Love. To prepare people for this moment of mystical union is John’s mission.

7 Eulogio Pacho provides evidence for this time and place of composition. “Poet in Prison,” in God Speaks, 177.

8 Like Julian, John chooses to remain with his Beloved in suffering.
John of the Cross teaches that the way to the fullness of life is through Christ who is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life … [Jn.14:16]” (2A.7.8.172). This way involves carrying Christ’s cross which is astonishingly but very plainly said to be “sweet and … light [Mt. 11.30]” (2A.7.7.171). John explains, “If individuals resolutely submit to the carrying of the cross, if they decidedly want to find and endure trial in all things for God, they will discover in all of them great relief and sweetness” (2A.7.5.171). John, like Christ, is saying that the burdensome cross of suffering (and death) becomes sweet and light when we purposefully choose to remain there with our Beloved in a meeting of lovers. If we suffer with him, we will be transformed and share his resurrection to new life. We are to be like Christ, writes John, and “where there is no love, put love, and you will draw out love” (L.26.760).

John writes a good deal about suffering. In the *Spiritual Canticle* poem and commentary, the bride, wounded with love like the bride of the Song of Songs, leaves her house at night and goes out bravely to find “the Word, her Bridegroom” (SC.1.5.479), whom she does find, and for whose sake she is beaten on the way (Sg 3:1-4; 5:6-7). Similarly in the *Dark Night* poem, the bride, having “hushed” her house, goes out to find her Beloved. In the *Ascent* and the *Dark Night* commentaries, suffering is generally associated with the sensory and spiritual purification which, when embraced as response to, and in imitation of, Christ’s life and sufferings, prepares the person for union with God. In John’s *Romances*, the maiden-mother marvels at the crying infant, in whom she sees both the “tears of mankind … [and] joy of God” (*Romances* 9.58). The poem is describing the Word, the bride’s Beloved, in whom is both human suffering and divine joy. In the *Living Flame* poem and commentary, we are shown suffering integrated with love in the soul’s union with God. John teaches the Christian message, not always understood, that love contains both suffering and delight. It is suffering with love that leads to joy.

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9 My italics.

10 This is Julian’s choosing Jesus as her heaven.

11 “How gentle and loving is your awakening … O Bridegroom Word, in the center and depth of my soul” (L.F.4.3.708-9).

12 In the Song of Songs, the story is told twice, repeating the line: “I sought but could not find him” (Sg 3:1; 5:6). One wonders if John saw in the dual telling the nights of sense and spirit. See Colin Thompson, *St John of the Cross: Songs in the Night* (London: SPCK, 2002), 156.
The bride who in the *Spiritual Canticle* searches longingly for her Bridegroom, is not to “pause to love and delight in [her] understanding and experience of God” (SC.1.12.482) but to persistently seek her Bridegroom in darkness under the veil of faith. In the period before the betrothal, God provides his bride with wounds of love that provide on-going aggravation and torment. She is sick because she does not see God, she suffers because she does not possess God, and she is dying because she fears that she never will (SC.2.6.488). Such eventually is the intensity of her grief, she would indeed die “if the Lord did not provide” (SC.1.22.486), for although her Bridegroom is spiritually near her, he is “intolerable darkness” (SC.13.1.519). In the state of betrothal, the wound deepens, until the bride’s faculties of intellect, will and memory are emptied by her faith, love and hope. According to John, “a person’s sufferings at this time cannot be exaggerated” (LF.1.21.649). The conjunction of suffering with spiritual delight in John’s writings is not hidden and cannot be glossed over. Even in the state of union, there is suffering, for the bride begs that the veil of life be torn so that she can see her Bridegroom face to face in glory (LF.1).

In *Living Flame*, John reminds us that it is with love that the Living Flame of Love, the Spirit of the Bridegroom, always touches, or wounds us. In the early stage of the spiritual journey, the contraries warring within us involve resistance and evasion, and cause suffering (LF.1.23.650). Then the dying to self wrought in trials, temptations and tribulations is necessary (LF.2.28.668) if we are to be emptied of all that is not God, and come by way of nada to the Mount where only God dwells.  

When the emptying of the caverns of the spiritual faculties (intellect, will, memory) has been accomplished, these emptied caverns, now contain “voids” (LF.3.18.680-81), like a boundless abyss of thirst, hunger and yearning (LF.3.19-21.681), but, writes John, the more the bride/soul desires God, the more she possesses God, and the “satisfaction and delight” (LF.3.23.682) outweigh the suffering.

In mystical union, the bride experiences God’s love as being far beyond any natural love. Because she has found the “treasure of love … hidden in God” (SC.27.8.583), her delight is to love God in all things, be they pleasant or unpleasant. To suffer in what God ordains, gives the bride the opportunity to love the Beloved

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13 Sketch of Mount Carmel, KR, 110.
who favors her so much. In order to enter ever more deeply into the mysteries of her Bridegroom, she willingly suffers “all the afflictions and trials of the world and everything however difficult and painful, that might be a means to this knowledge, even the anguish and agony of death, all in order to see herself further within her God” (SC.36.11.613). Transforming union involves keeping nothing for self, even to the last drop of blood (Jn 19:34). John is given over to his Beloved. He learns from his contemplation of Christ that love for the other (Other) is not self-seeking, and that to follow Christ and deny self is to “lean more toward suffering than toward consolation” (2A.7.5.170), which is to guard against seeking self instead of God. Despite the cross being “sweet” and “light” (2A.7.7.171), the cost is still there for us. John refers to Christ’s prayer in the garden: “all three times he prayed with the same petition … Father, if it cannot be but that I must drink this chalice, may your will be done [Mt. 26:39; Mk. 14.36; Lk. 22:42]” (3A.44.4.347). Embracing with love the will of God is to participate in the love of the Trinity, and it leads to spiritual delight and resurrection glory. John is not suggesting that we go out looking for suffering (he himself was guided by reason to escape from prison), but, like Julian, he is talking about accepting the suffering that comes our way, and embracing it as the place of transforming union with the Beloved.

In the second stanza of Living Flame, the bride/soul rejoices because the gentle touch of God’s love toda deuda paga (pays all debt), that is, gives spiritual riches and new life in recompense for her pain and in place of her old life. This is surely an allusion to the Paschal mystery in which the Word pays the ultimate price for his bride, but John’s main intention is to point out the truth of the Bridegroom’s incredible promise to “repay a hundredfold [Mt. 19.29] … [for she] has endured no tribulation or penance or trial to which there does not correspond a hundredfold of consolation and delight in this life” (LF.2.23.666). God’s wounds of love paradoxically heal us and eventually consume us in love. We recall John’s impassioned, “O souls … if you but knew how much it behooves you to suffer … You would consider it good fortune that, dying to this world and to yourselves, you would live to God in the delights of the spirit” (LF.2.28.668). In eternal life there is no suffering because then the union of love is complete. In this life in the state of mystical marriage, the person is given a taste of this bliss, which is so powerful in its
effect that the bride “suffers no more” (LF.2.24.666). The bride’s attitude to suffering has been transformed by God’s wounding of her with love.

Christ, the Bridegroom of humankind, is the doorway into the life of the Trinity, and the way of union is the way of the cross.

The Wound of Contemplation: Transforming Union

In all of his writings, as exemplified in this extract from the very start of the *Spiritual Canticle* commentary (and which I here repeat), John of the Cross consistently teaches,

Individuals who want to find [the Beloved] should leave all things through affection and will, enter within themselves in deepest recollection, and let all things be as though not … God, then, is hidden in the soul, and there the good contemplative must seek him with love (SC.1.6.480).

When we begin to follow these instructions, we discover in dark contemplation that all our imperfections come to light and we are led gradually along a painful path towards the acquiring of self-knowledge and virtue. On the way, in our prayer, we are taken from praying to the Other out there and separate from us, to the Other dwelling within us: the Spring within that John writes about in his poem *Qué bien sé yo la fonte que mana y corre* (How well I know the spring that flows and runs).14 This spring may still to some degree be understood as separate and independent of us, albeit cherished deep within.

Then there is another movement, in which, according to John of the Cross, the Beloved wounds the soul in its deepest centre, its substance, which is God (LF.1.12.645). The bride/soul is given a sense of God’s Being in her being, and, moreover, that God is one with, and not separate from her. In a mysterious fashion, although God is known to be a separate Being, God is at the same time integral to her own being. Together with a sense of being “taken over” by God, there is also a sense of discovering something that has always been the case, but hidden. It is as though

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14 This poem on faith, composed in John’s time of imprisonment, comes to a climax in expressing John’s love for his Beloved in the Eucharist, now denied him: “This living spring, so very dear to me, is here, within the bread of life I see, though it is night.” Flower, *Centred on Love*, 25.
some of the veils that hang in front of the bride/soul are removed so that she “might get a glimmer of him as he is” (LF.4.7.711). She and God are one. She relaxes in the calming peace and strength of God, resting trustfully in God. At this point, the soul is no longer the doer but the receiver from God “who alone can move the soul and do his work in its depths” (LF.1.9.644). In transforming substantial union, nada and Todo are one. Freed from attachment to all that is not God, and totally given over in faith, hope and love into the Abyss that is God, the bride truly knows\textsuperscript{15} that God is the goodness and love within her. Thus, in the fourth stanza of Living Flame, John of the Cross addresses his Beloved awakening gently and lovingly within his heart, and swelling it with love.\textsuperscript{16} Because John loves with the love of his Beloved, he loves others as Christ loves him (Jn 15:12).

John illumines our understanding of the bride’s substantial union with the Beloved in the thirty-fifth stanza of the Spiritual Canticle:

\begin{quote} 
In solitude she lives 
and there in solitude has built her nest; 
in solitude he gives 
her guidance, love and rest, 
wounded, like her, in solitary quest (SC.35). 
\end{quote}

The solitude in which the bride lives and has built her nest is substantial union with her Beloved, who now guides her every action, giving her love and rest. She has found “a place in God” (SC.35.4.608) and is blessed with “a stable peace and unchanging good” (SC.35.1.607). Each wounds the other with love, and the sufferings of one are the sufferings of the other. Since the Bridegroom is the Word, the bride shares Christ’s compassionate and self-emptying love for humankind.

In the 1930s and 40s, Edith Stein identified herself with the sufferings of her Jewish people with empathy\textsuperscript{17}, and she took upon herself what she called the “expiation” of the crimes of the Nazi perpetrators, for she understood all of creation as a network in which good and evil had repercussions for the whole. For Edith, her

\textsuperscript{15} In the sense that “know” has been used throughout this dissertation.

\textsuperscript{16} Experiencing Love’s sweet breathing renders John speechless and he concludes the Living Flame commentary (LF.4.17.715).

\textsuperscript{17} Edith Stein’s doctoral thesis was entitled “On the Problem of Empathy” (1916).
Beloved, as Christ Crucified, was the great Expiator of evil, and so, by herself taking on the sufferings and guilt of others, she was also identifying with him. In this, Edith was loving her enemies and doing good to those who hated her (Lk 6:27) because this is how her Beloved behaves towards others. She chose to be in solidarity with the One she loved, and to learn from him to be gentle and humble of heart (Mt 11:29). These are the actions of one who loves the Beloved and desires to share his sufferings. There are many others in the Christian tradition who have “resolutely … [and] decidedly” (2A.7.5.171) chosen to embrace suffering in union with Christ for the sake of others. What Edith called “expiation,” we may call sharing the sufferings of Christ because of substantial union. Because we are united in our substance, we know that the Beloved holds our wounds and sufferings, and we hold his. Our wounds and sufferings are one. Just as a spouse, parent or friend will enter into the sufferings of a dear one, and will sacrifice himself/herself for the sake of this dear one, so too do we take on ourselves the pain of our Beloved, as did Christ for us on Calvary. Sharing Christ’s sufferings means that our contemplative gaze is open to the pain of the whole of humankind.

A lectio divina approach to John of the Cross’s mystical writings leads eventually and inevitably to his Prayer of a Soul Taken with Love. This is John’s prayer of longing love to his Beloved, who is also his transcendent God. Lord, Beloved, writes John, because of my weakness, I cannot come to you unless you lift me to yourself in your mercy and goodness, forgiving my sins and graciously accepting my good works and sufferings, which I need you to work for me and grant to me. I know of your desire for transforming union with me, because you have given Christ to humankind, in whom you give All. Because of Christ, I already hold you, Beloved, in my heart, and can love you there without holding back or delaying. Mine is all that is, all of creation, even the Mother of God. God is mine and all for me because Christ is mine and all for me. I can go forth and exult in my Glory, hiding in it and resting in it, and all the longings of my heart will be fulfilled (S.26-27.87-88). John’s main point is that because we have Christ we already have what we long for. In prayer we become aware that this is so.

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19 I am paraphrasing Sayings 26-27.
Like John the evangelist, John of the Cross often mentions “glory.” Both writers interpret “glory” as in the Hebrew Scriptures, where the glory of Yahweh refers to the loving, saving and guiding presence of God. In the Gospel of John, Christ glorifies his Father by revealing to humankind what he “knows” of his Father’s loving and saving presence, in his words and deeds which are always in accord with his Father’s will. The loving and saving presence of God is made known in Christ, that is, he himself is glorified, because he is one with the loving and saving presence of God. Thus, immediately before his Passion, Jesus prays,

Father, the hour has come: glorify your Son so that your Son may glorify you … I have glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. Now, Father, glorify me with that glory I had with you before ever the world existed (Jn 17:1, 4-5).

Jesus goes on to include his disciples in his prayer to his Father:

I have given them the glory you gave to me, that they may be one as we are one. With me in them and you in me, may they be so perfected in unity that the world will recognize that it was you who sent me and that you have loved them as you have loved me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, so that they may always see my glory which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world (Jn 17:22-24).

It is the loving and saving presence of God that is being shared by humankind. One can read these Johannine verses and substitute the word “love” for the word “glory,” because, continuing his prayer to his Father, Jesus explicitly explains his mission, that “the love you have for me may be in them, and so that I also may be in them” (Jn 17:26). Transforming union is sharing in the glory of God in substantial union. It is oneness with the loving and saving presence of God. The “Glory” which in Sayings John writes we are to exult in, and hide in and rest in, is Trinitarian Love. We have Glory within us in the indwelling Beloved, whom we can right now love in our hearts.

20 Cf. “For I – Yahweh declare – shall be a wall of fire all round her and I shall be the Glory within her” (Zec 2:9). For the meaning of “glory” in the Hebrew scriptures, see Francis J. Moloney, “Johannine Theology,” in NJBC, 1421. According to Moloney, the later interpretation of glory as esteem, honour or earthly success came about because of its “odd translation” from Hebrew into Greek as doxa, with its connotations.

21 See especially John’s commentary on SC.38 and all four stanzas of LF.
John’s theology of meeting God involves our simple recollection, in faith, hope and love, of the Beloved’s presence within us.

Concluding Comments

Although John often explains that the Bridegroom is the Word, he is never constrained by this. His theology is both Christ-centred and Trinitarian. It is also apophatic, for God

dwells more in secret, the more he dwells alone. Thus, in any soul in which neither any appetite nor other images or forms nor any affections for created things dwell, the Beloved dwells secretly with an embrace so much closer, more intimate and interior, the purer and more alone the soul is to everything other than God (LF.4.14.713).

The way of union is a way of dark faith; it is nada, nada, nada, and even on the Mount, nada. It is in its nakedness, writes John, that the soul “finds its quietude and rest … because it is in the very center of its humility” (1A.13.13.151). When the caverns of the faculties of intellect, memory and will are emptied and purified, the bride/soul enters an abyss of silence and solitude, which is a profound place of meeting and oneness. It is there that she experiences the glory of transforming union in this life: she becomes one with the loving, saving and guiding presence of God. Christ is the doorway, model and Spouse. John purposefully wrote his commentaries for Carmelite friars and nuns, and some of his lay directees, to help them to enter into silence and solitude to meet with the God of love. All of John’s writing is geared towards helping his readers come to the substantial union of love. Along the way we learn that, just as Christ’s hour of glory was on the cross, so too transforming union with God in this life contains both suffering and delight. Christ Crucified reveals the loving and saving presence of God, and we meet God where God is revealed. The wound of contemplation ever deepens until we leave this life and enter into the serene night of the beatific vision.
PART IV

CONCLUSION
CHAPTER 11

MEETING GOD

Leave the towns,
make the rocks your home ...
Learn from the dove that makes its nest
in the walls of the gaping gorge  (Jer 48:28).

Introduction

The final chapter of the dissertation comments on the contribution that a *lectio divina* interpretation of ‘wound’ in the mystical writings of Julian of Norwich and John of the Cross makes to an understanding of meeting God in contemplation in this life. The chapter begins with a foreword which addresses the dissertation’s reliance on a definition of theology which includes its spiritual dimension. Julian’s and John’s experience of meeting God in a life-time of *lectio divina* is an important component of their theology. This dissertation uses the same approach in its interpretation of their mystical texts. The validation of the methodology lies in the fruitfulness of the research, which is discussed in the remaining sections of the chapter. The first of these sections presents what an examination of wounds in Julian’s and John’s writings reveals about meeting God in this life. For both mystics, the crucified Christ is the Image of the Triune God who delights in and suffers with humankind. They know God as vulnerable Lover: their compassionate Beloved. Their teaching on meeting God in this life is presented. The second section engages more specifically with what Julian’s and John’s writings contribute to an understanding of meeting God in suffering. Some concluding comments bring the dissertation to a close.

Theology and a Life Lived Informed by Prayer

Julian and John wrote mystical theology from within lives informed by prayer. Each of them was committed to a life of prayer: Julian as an anchoress and John as a priest in Teresa of Avila’s Carmelite Reform. Their lives were steeped in the monastic practice of *lectio divina*. While highly esteeming reason, and even though John was also a scholastic theologian, they wrote mystical texts which accorded with the
monastic understanding of theology as being more than intellectual knowledge: knowing as spiritual experience.¹ The writings of Julian and John contain clear evidence of the connection of their theology of contemplation with their own lived experience of it.

Julian’s “Revelation of Love that Jesus Christ, our endless bliss, made in Sixteen Showings” (P.i.143) is her text for many years of lectio divina. She understands some things immediately, she comes to more understanding later, and the whole revelation becomes clear only after considerable prayer.² In her showings, Julian beholds (holds-in-being) God by bodily sights, through words formed in her understanding, by spiritual sights, and by more spiritual sights.³ Meeting the crucified Christ in a compassionate sharing of suffering is a profound experience of conversion (explained in the language of bridal mysticism) which shapes her theology.⁴ Thus, in the tenth showing, when Christ impresses upon her how much he loves her, and leads her into his side, she has bodily sight of his Passion, hears words spoken, and is given spiritual sight of the Godhead, which leads her to write: All is God’s goodness. In Julian’s twenty-year lectio of the parable of the lord and the servant, she is “taught inwardly” (P.li.336), until she comes to understand that the mystery of suffering and sin is contained in Trinitarian love: she then writes her theology of Christ as Mother of mercy and grace.⁵ Julian considers that her book, begun by God’s gift and grace, “is not yet performed” (P.lxxxvi.489): it is for all to ponder within their own life of lectio divina.⁶ The opening segment of the Westminster version of Showings presents Mary’s reverent beholding as a lectio model for how we are to read Julian’s text.⁷

John’s theology is also profoundly influenced by his encounter with God’s love in his own great suffering.⁸ In Chapter 9 we saw considerable evidence of the

¹ Chapter 2, 53.
² Chapter 2, 48.
³ Chapter 2, 48.
⁴ Chapter 4, 87.
⁵ Chapter 6, 132-39.
⁶ Chapter 6, 152.
⁷ Chapter 3, 73-76.
⁸ Chapter 10, 235.
connection between his theology and his lived experience of it. He states in the Prologue of *Living Flame* that “even though everything I say is as far from the reality as is a painting from the living object represented, I will venture to declare what I know” (LF.Pro.1.638), and that he has deferred writing this commentary until now when “the Lord seems to have uncovered some knowledge and bestowed some fervour” (LF.Pro.1.639), because “one speaks badly of the intimate depths of the spirit if one does not do so with a deeply recollected spirit” (LF.Pro.1.639). Indeed, in this commentary, John frequently breaks into prayer to his Beloved. John repeatedly assures his readers (because he knows) that mystical union is possible in this life: “It should not be held as incredible” (LF.1.15.646); “There is no need to be amazed” (LF.2.36.672). We are to look beyond John’s text for his meaning because “it is impossible to express … there are no words to explain such sublime things concerning God as occur in these souls” (LF.2.21.127). There is also John’s disclaimer in another place that expressions of love are not fully explainable for “who can express with words the experience [the Spirit] imparts … [or] the desires he gives” (SC.Pro.1.469). John’s own mystical experience is thinly veiled in his commentary on the thirty-ninth stanza of the *Spiritual Canticle*: “Since the soul in the state of spiritual marriage knows something of this ‘what’ [the glory for which she is predestined], she desires to say something about it, for by her transformation in God something of this ‘what’ occurs within her” (SC.39.1.622).

Thomas Merton has lauded Julian of Norwich as one of England’s greatest theologians. John of the Cross is a Doctor of the Church. Their writings are regarded as mystical classics in the Christian tradition. However, they are also somewhat of an anomaly because the present definition of theology in the Western Church holds that theology is an intellectual exercise. There is scholarly support for reuniting spirituality with theology as was once the case, and still is in the Eastern Church.

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9 Cf. Ruiz comments, OC, 776.
10 Chapter 7, 157.
11 Chapter 8, 196.
13 See contemporary definition of theology, Chapter 2, 53, N.83.
14 Chapter 2, 52-59.
solidarity with this movement, the dissertation adopts the theological methodology used by Julian and John. The chosen approach is an attempt to enter Julian’s and John’s way of doing theology, in order to come to a deeper understanding of their teaching on meeting God in contemplation in this life. Chapter 2 establishes a literary/theological hermeneutic which focuses on Julian’s and John’s texts as literary and mystical, and on the reader. It is argued that Julian’s and John’s *lectio divina* approach best answers the requirements of the hermeneutic. Without such an approach, the mystical doctrine sought by this dissertation remains inaccessible. Readers of mystical texts must engage with the faith dimension of them for spiritual meaning.

The ultimate validation of a methodology lies in the fruitfulness of the research,¹⁵ which is the focus of the remaining sections of this chapter. The first section addresses what interpreting ‘wound’ in Julian’s and John’s mystical writings reveals about meeting God in contemplation. We recall the long history of the wound in the Christian tradition¹⁶ which began with John’s gospel and the piercing of Christ’s side. It was seen in Thomas being invited to enter Christ’s wounds; it was taken up by medieval mystics as a symbol for the compassionate heart of God; and it was traced back into the Old Testament, as in the Jeremiah quote at the start of this chapter. In Julian’s and John’s writings, the wound is understood to be a touch of God’s love and highly desirable. It is a source of both joy and suffering.

**Contemplation: A Meeting of Wounded Lovers**

In their writings for others, Julian and John articulate their experience of a love relationship with God. Within their own time, place and language, they put into writing for others what they know about contemplation as a spiritual journey of *oneing* or transforming union. It is a journey fuelled by desire and wrapped in the goodness of God. Julian and John are lovers, lost in the Mystery of God. The journey they make in order to discover God in themselves includes a dying to all in themselves that is not God. It is a journey through death to resurrection. When one

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¹⁵ Chapter 2, 43. See N.48.

¹⁶ Chapter 2, 32-34.
enters Julian’s and John’s mystical texts via the theme of wound, one very quickly becomes aware that wounds are God’s touches of love which draw them into their home in God (oneing/mystical union), and that meeting God in these wounds contains love’s paradox of delight and suffering. As one progresses, one realizes that Julian and John are saying that this will ever be the case this side of the grave. It becomes obvious that they are operating from a different way of knowing. It is also clear that the key to the mystery is Christ.

**Julian and Contemplation**

I see *Showings* as structured around Julian’s vision of Christ’s Passion and the three wounds of compassion, *willfull* longing to God, and contrition. For her, these wounds are three medicines: gifts of God’s mercy and grace by which we are drawn into oneing with God. Chapter 4 shows that when Julian is wounded with compassion for Christ (lovingly suffers with him), she comes to know that Christ lovingly suffers with her, and she becomes a lover given over to her Beloved (P.xviv.219). Chapter 5 discusses the wound of *willfull* longing to God as God working in her desires and longing to bring her to true rest in the God who joys in her. Chapter 6 describes the wound of contrition as Mother Christ and his Spirit working with mercy and grace to one Julian’s sensuality into her substance in God. All is God’s goodness. Julian presents a deeply contemplative text which explains not only that God is All-goodness, but how we come to know this God of All-goodness in a life of prayer. In Chapter 3, I argue that the Westminster compilation helps to make this intent clear.

Julian describes contemplation as what happens when God gives us what we desire. She teaches that the fullness of contemplation is apophatic prayer in which, by God’s gracious gift, our longing selves are completely fastened and oned into the beholding (holding-in-being) of God (W.94v.3.81 – 95.2.82). We are like Mary as we behold God with reverent dread, and we marvelously enjoy in great sweetness and

17 Chapter 6, 149.  
18 Chapter 3, 67-76.  
19 P.xliii.301-2. Chapter 5, 125.
delight the stirring of God within us.\textsuperscript{20} Contemplation is a meeting of lovers in which we know God’s active presence within us.\textsuperscript{21}

In all of the versions of \textit{Showings}, the showings of Christ’s Passion play an important role.\textsuperscript{22} They are more than a backdrop for Julian’s doctrine of a God who is All-goodness.\textsuperscript{23} In Chapter 4, we saw Julian beholding her Beloved in the much-wounded, crucified Christ. Suffering her own death agony, Julian consciously shifts her bodily and spiritual gaze to the suffering Christ who is also suffering his death agony. In beholding (holding in her being) her beloved Christ, Julian is granted the grace of compassion to lovingly suffer with him, which is the gift of love. She would rather die herself than see his broken body fall (die), because to see “the lover … him who is all my life, all my bliss and all my joy, suffer” (P.xvii.214) is the greatest of all pains. Paradoxically, the Trinity fills Julian’s heart with joy in this and all of her showings. The mystical experience of meeting Christ in the very depths of suffering is an experience of \textit{oneness} in loving compassion. It also holds the resurrection experience of meeting the risen Christ. Julian’s heart is filled with joy because she knows God as her compassionate Beloved who shares Trinitarian joy with her. It is God’s gentle intimacy that most delights her (P.vii.172).

We see evidence of the medieval veneration of John’s Gospel in Julian’s reference to the wound in Christ’s side (Jn 19:34-37). In the tenth showing, the crucified but now glorified Christ invites Julian into his side where she beholds his “blessed heart evenly broken in two … [and] in part the blessed Godhead” (W.87.14.66 – 87v.1.67).\textsuperscript{24} To behold Christ’s broken heart is to behold God’s compassionate love, and draws Julian into apophatic contemplation of the Godhead: Lo, how God loves us (P.xxiv.236-37). We are Christ’s joy and his bliss. In his heart there is room for us all. Mother Christ leads us into his heart for nourishment and

\textsuperscript{20} Julian defines love as “a marvelous holy delight in God” (W.97.9-10.86).
\textsuperscript{21} John of the Cross calls this the awakening of the Bridegroom within (LF.4).
\textsuperscript{22} The Westminster version includes the crucial tenth spiritual showing.
\textsuperscript{23} Chapter 4, 77, N.2.
\textsuperscript{24} Chapter 4, 90-91.
tenderness. The compassionate Christ with his wounded heart is the Image of the Most High God.

Chapter 5 discusses contemplation in terms of the wound of *willfull* longing to God. Julian sees our longing, which has its origin in God’s thirst for us, as the dynamic of the contemplative life. It is of our nature to love-long for God (P.xlii.299). Christ is both the cause and the effect of our longing/desires/prayer: he is Ground of our longing, he works in our will, and he is the fruit and end of our prayer (W.92.7.76 – 92v.11.77). It is God (in us by nature and grace) who shows us something of God’s self and stirs our desire to see more (W.80.12.52 – 80v.4.53). We have God and we want God and this is “the common working” of the spiritual life. The longing we experience is itself the presence of God in us. Being mindful that our longing is God’s presence in us enables us to trust that our deepest desires are being fulfilled. In this life, sometimes “suddenly” we are given the grace of seeing, but mostly the journey to God is made in trustful, God-given love-longing. The wound of *willfull* longing is a source of suffering as well as the delightful presence of Julian’s Beloved because longing for oneing becomes more painful as one’s relationship with the Beloved deepens.

In Chapter 6 we saw that knowing God involves knowing the self. Julian suffers much before accepting that her sins have their place in her acquiring of humility. Far from being angry and blaming her, the compassionate Beloved suffers with her. The wound of contrition (the second aspect of *compunctio*) which presses heavily on Julian has been taken on by Christ, her Brother, Saviour, Mother and Spouse (P.li-lii.355-56). Mother Christ lavishes mercy and grace on us, drawing our sensuality into oneness with our substance in God and turning our sins into honours.

I argue in Chapter 3 that the Westminster version of Julian’s *Showings* is a contemplative compilation which allows Julian’s teaching on beholding, beseeching

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25 Chapter 6, 135.
27 We are mindful because *God wants us to know*. Chapter 5, 108-10.
28 Chapter 6, 149.
29 Chapter 1, 8.
and beclosing to be seen more clearly. We recall that this version begins with a meditation on Mary, who truly and wisely, with reverent dread, beholds God’s goodness. Apart from indicating the lection way to approach a contemplative manuscript, the passage establishes that knowing God’s goodness is the foundation for meeting God in contemplation. Mary’s true and wise beholding of God’s goodness includes a true and wise knowledge/acceptance of her self, her littleness. This leads her to meekness, and into beseeching (contemplation) in which her will/love is fastened and oned into God’s: “Lo, me here, God’s handmaid.”

Chapter 5 is an important chapter which examines Julian’s understanding of a life of prayer as one movement into God. It includes both sekyng (seeking) and besekyng (beseeching), which are not the same. We seek into the beholding of God by meditative and discursive prayer which is the active praying of oratio. When God draws us in to beseeching, we have been graced with contemplatio. Julian describes beseeching as “right full prayer” (W.89.4-5.70). When we beseech we are drawn by grace into the quietness of contemplation in which our prayer is the stirring of God in our soul. Beseeching is the graced fastening and oneing of our will into God’s. It is surrendering to God’s mercy and grace. It includes joy (thanking). We meet God in contemplation when we are graced with silent, imageless, given-over, receptive, joyful oneness with God. This is the “high and unperceivable prayer” (W.94v.9-10.81) in which “we have that we desire” (W.94v.3.81). We are taken over by God. According to Julian, the two “conditions” (W.89.3.70) of beseeching and sure trust attach to all of our prayer, so there is a potential contemplative dimension to all prayer. Indeed, in a life lived in lectio divina, this is what the normal progression is.

In contemplation, when we “plainly behold [God] by special grace, seeing no other needs, then we follow him and he draws us [in to] him by love” (W.95v.5-8.83). When we are tempested or troubled, “our Lord God follows us helping our desire” (W.95v.2-3.83), and we are drawn to seke (seek) busily, as does Julian when she is

30 The dissertation challenges the commonly held view that beseeching is intercessory prayer, and argues that Julian’s beseeching is contemplation.


32 Julian’s beseeching is John’s “being placed in silence” (LF.3.35.687).
tempted to despair by the fiend.\textsuperscript{33} Her peace returns “by the virtue of Christ’s Passion” (P.lxx.438). Christ tells her to take her showings, study them, find comfort in them, keep herself in them, and trust in them, and “you shall not be overcome” (P.lxx.440). For Julian, prayer is one movement into God which includes both the kataphatic \textit{oratio} of seeking and the apophatic \textit{contemplatio} of beseeching.

Julian understands oneing\textsuperscript{34} (mystical union) in accordance with the medieval understanding of the doctrine of indwelling in John 17:21-23, which she explains using a language of Trinitarian beclosing.\textsuperscript{35} Humankind in its making is knit with Christ in to God. With Christ we are beclosed in God, and God is beclosed in us.\textsuperscript{36} Mother Christ and the Spirit work in us through mercy and grace to one our sensuality into our substance which always remains beclosed in God. Prayer is the way in which we come \textit{to see and to know} that our Maker “dwell in our soul” (W.99v.1.91) and, later, that “our soul that is made dwells in God in substance, of which substance by God we be that we be” (W.99.15.90 – 99v.7.91). This is substantial union, in which one knows oneself as being in God. Julian’s teaching on substantial union directly correlates with that of John of the Cross.

When graced with contemplation, we listen to our Beloved and delight in his goodness (W.96.1-6.84). There is desire, loving communing and joy. We are given these “privy touchings of sweet spiritual sights and feeling” (W.96.10-12.84) until we “shall die in longing for love” (W.96.17.84).\textsuperscript{37} Then shall we be fully \textit{oned} into “our Lord [God our self] clearly knowing, and God fulsomely having, and we endlessly be had all in God” (W.96v.2-5.85). In the beatific vision we will behold (hold in our being) God fully, but even in this life we share in resurrection joy when we meet God in our prayer-life of love-longing and beseeching.

Julian presents a treatise on meeting God in a lifetime of prayer. Her theology is profoundly Trinitarian. It centres on the crucified Christ as revelation of her

\textsuperscript{33} Chapter 6, 143.

\textsuperscript{34} Chapter 1, 12, N.27. For Julian, oneing is both a noun and a verb.

\textsuperscript{35} Chapter 5, 103, N.1; 110-14; 112, N.32.

\textsuperscript{36} “[God] made man’s soul to be his city and his dwelling place” (P.li.340).

\textsuperscript{37} Cf. John and the death of love: LF.1.30-34.653-56.
Compassionate Beloved, whose delight we are. It teaches that we are made for bliss and that “peace and love are ever in us” (P.xxxix.284).

John and Contemplation

Scholars agree that John of the Cross’ nine months incarceration was the time and place for a spiritual experience which he himself calls the mystical marriage.\(^{38}\) We can be confident of this because John expressed it in mystical poetry. The *Romances* point to John’s pondering of the Prologue of John’s Gospel whilst in prison. Instead of indulging his memory in resentment or a host of other self-comforting thoughts,\(^{39}\) John, like Julian, resists the temptation to despair by meditating on God’s goodness. This prepares John for the gift of contemplation: the experience of God’s goodness. In his poetry he describes God’s love for humankind in the language of the bridal mysticism of the Song of Songs. Imprisoned, he engages as bride with his crucified Beloved, Image of the Triune God, who lovingly bears all of humankind’s suffering, including his. If Christ is like this, God is like this. Far from theologies of atonement and appeasement, John, like Julian, experiences God as compassionate Beloved. Love strikes and wounds him and tears his “heart in two” ([Rivers of Babylon](#)) with compassionate love for his Beloved. Since it is in a sharing of suffering that he experiences the union of love with his Beloved, John can later say that suffering is the “dress of lovers.”\(^{40}\) Transforming union changes everything. John is given over, surrendered, living in God, “with all [his] cares among the lilies cast” (DN.8).

Chapters 7 and 8 explore John’s *Spiritual Canticle* as the mystical and poetic expression of his own spiritual journey to transforming union. Being wounded with love (Julian’s love-longing) causes the bride to be sick, to suffer and to die in ever-deepening desires and longings for her Bridegroom who appears to be absent. She is eventually led to union with her Beloved in a sharing of the wound of love, which is

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\(^{38}\) By contrast, isolation, silence and darkness may have an extremely negative effect on the human psyche. Cf. Sara Maitland, *A Book of Silence* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2010), Chapter Three: “The Dark Side.”


\(^{40}\) Chapter 10, 232-33.
John’s own experience in his Toledo cell. The bride enters “the garden of her heart’s desire” (SC.22) under the tree of the cross (SC.23), and *alli* (there) the Beloved gives her his heart (SC.27). Now united to the Bridegroom, “in glory and appearance the soul seems to be God and God seems to be the soul” (SC.31.1.595). This is because for God “to love the soul is to put her somehow in himself and make her his equal. Thus he loves the soul within himself, with himself, that is, with the very love by which he loves himself” (SC.33.6.600). In the nest of solitude (which is substantial union) the Beloved “gives [the bride] guidance, love and rest, wounded like her in solitary quest” (SC.35). The compassionate Beloved’s gift of “guidance, love and rest” is contemplation in which “he alone guides her, drawing her to and absorbing her in himself” (SC.35.7.609). The wound they share is the wound of love.

In his *Living Flame* commentary, as Chapter 9 examines, John describes transformation in terms of “a reciprocal love … between God and the soul, like the marriage union and surrender” (LF.3.79.706). The soul is “somehow God through participation. Although it is not God as perfectly as it will be in the next life, it is like the shadow of God” (LF.3.78.706). In transforming union, “the soul always walks in festivity, inwardly and outwardly” (LF.2.36.672). Contemplation is a sharing in resurrection joy. Wounds of love are described in Trinitarian terms. John’s experience is beyond what can be humanly conceived. The Father wounds the soul with “the Word, the Son of God” (LF.2.17.664). John constantly reminds his readers not to be incredulous or to disbelieve: this is what Christ promised (Jn 14:23).

In many places in his writings, John defines contemplation as God’s active presence in the soul. Thus contemplation is “an inflow of God into the soul” (2DN.5.401); it is “an awakening of God in the soul” (LF.4.2.708); it is “most sweet and secret knowledge” (SC.27); it is God “favoring and caressing the soul like a mother who ministers to her child and nurses it at her own breasts” (SC.27.1.581); it is mystical union in which God “transforms [his bride] in himself … makes her entirely his own and empties her of all she possesses other than him” (SC.27.6.582). John describes contemplation in hauntingly beautiful and mysterious creation terms (SC 14&15). It is “solitude or inner idleness or oblivion or spiritual listening”

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41 Chapter 7, 174.
It is God speaking “to the heart in this solitude, which he mentioned in Hosea [Hos. 2:14], in supreme peace and tranquility while the soul listens” (LF.3.34.687). In contemplation, the soul experiences God as lamps of fire (light and warmth) with knowledge of God’s attributes always coupled with the experience of Love.

In his definition of contemplation, John includes God’s transforming activity in preparing the soul for mystical union. Contemplation is “night, which … causes two kinds of darkness or purgation in spiritual persons according to the two parts of the soul, the sensory and the spiritual” (1DN.8.1.375). The old self dies as the spiritual faculties are emptied and the appetites and passions are stilled, made ready for new life. God always touches us with love but wounds of love in the purgative stage cause pain by stirring the contraries within us. In the unitive stage of the mystical marriage, wounds of love wrap the bride in peace and love, although in her longing for her Beloved she increasingly suffers until the final veil is torn in death. However, and here John refers to his mentor, St Gregory, “when the soul desires God fully, it then possesses him whom it loves” (LF.3.23.682).

John is the experienced spiritual director who explains how the soul’s contemplative journey unfolds. Beginners in prayer who “meditate and make acts and discursive reflection with the imagination” (LF.3.32.685) are led to a state in which they “proceed only with a loving attention to God, without making specific acts” (LF.3.35.686). They should remain in a profound silence of senses and spirit, and listen, for God speaks “peace in this solitude” (LF.3.34.687). When souls are “conscious of being placed in silence and in the state of listening, they should even forget the practice of loving attentiveness … so as to remain free for what the Lord then desires of them” (LF.3.35.687). In all of this, from beginning to transforming union, we simply follow God’s lead. Our part is fidelity to prayer.

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42 Chapter 9, 221.
43 Cf. Julian, “I had him and wanted him” (W.80v.1.53).
44 Chapter 9, 220-22.
45 The soul clearly recognises the gift given to it.
Like Julian (P.liv.372), John emphasizes his Johannine understanding of the Indwelling God (Jn 14:23; 17). Christ’s role is to lead us into Trinitarian love. John of the Cross teaches that “you yourself are his dwelling and his secret inner room and hiding place. There is reason for you to be elated and joyful in seeing that all your good and hope is so close as to be within you, or better, that you cannot be without him” (SC.1.7.480). Many of John’s short sayings relate to recollection of God dwelling within our hearts. He does not explain recollection in terms of the intellect or images, but in terms of the will: recollection is an apophatic loving attentiveness to the Beloved (S.88.92).

Closely related to John’s teaching on recollection is that on solitude and silence. In Dark Night the searching bride is led to “that dear One, waiting for me, well-known, somewhere apart where no-one came in sight” (DN.4). Being wounded with love, the bride divests herself of all (world and self) that is not God, so that she meets God alone and “apart” from all else, that is, in solitude. The bride of the Spiritual Canticle finds the Beloved “in secret cellar deep” (SC.26), that is, she meets God in the silence of her heart. John lived with his Beloved in the silence and solitude of his habitual recollection.

In addition, in John’s busy life of service he sought to be physically apart in solitude and silence for long periods of time. In John’s day there was much dissension over the relationship of contemplative to active life for Carmelite friars. We see John’s response to the dilemma in the evidence of his contemplative life, and in his instructions to: “have habitual desire to imitate Christ in all your deeds” (1A.13.3.148). John knew that Christ factored time apart with his Beloved Father into a busy life of compassionate ministry. The Gospels record Christ going out very early in the morning, or up a mountain, or staying behind by himself. John simply imitated Christ: a life of compassion for others, with much time apart and wrapped in the silence of his Beloved.

46 LF.Pro.2.239 (Chapter 9, 203); SC.39.5.623-24 (Chapter 8, 197).
47 Cf. Julian: “God is nearer to us than our own soul” (W.101.5-6.94).
48 See Chapter 8, 186, N.23.
Meeting God in this life involves a new way of seeing and knowing because contemplation is beyond human images and feelings. The bride’s new life is a sharing in Trinitarian love – into which Christ leads her. She sees as God sees. When the bride of the *Spiritual Canticle* comes to the state of mystical marriage, she “occupies her soul and body, her faculties and all her ability, in nothing other than the service of her Bridegroom” (SC.28.2.584). God is the prime-mover in all of her actions. In the *Living Flame* commentary, the bride habitually experiences her Beloved “resting and reposing” (LF.4.15.714) within her. Sometimes the Beloved gently awakens and “the soul feels a strange delight in the breathing of the Holy Spirit in God, in which it is sovereignly glorified and taken with love” (LF.4.16.714). This is indescribable.

In the state of mystical marriage there is only a very thin veil (LF.1.29.653) which now hides the bride’s Beloved as she journeys on in faith, hope and love. The compassionate Beloved continues to embrace her with wounds of love as she comes “up from the desert leaning on her lover” (Sg 8:5). Thus it is that John of the Cross explains meeting his Beloved in this life. And thus it is that when he lies awaiting the tearing of the last veil in death, he asks for verses of the Song of Songs to be read, and during the reading comments “with longing, ‘What precious pearls’.”

### A Paradox of Joy and Suffering

Julian and John teach that God draws us into mystical union by means of loving touches which are wounds of love. The mystical journey is an on-going romance between God and each individual soul. Wounds of love delight us for we recognize our Beloved in them. They also cause us pain because our Beloved is not fully ours in this life. In addition, the spiritual journey includes the physical and spiritual pain of purgation. There is both delight and suffering involved in meeting God because it is a journey of transformation. The state of mystical marriage involves a new way of seeing, in which to suffer with the Beloved is highly desirable and delightful. Because of Christ, Julian and John, and medieval mystics as a group, knew God as compassionate Beloved. The medieval image of God as compassionate Beloved has been lost or obscured for some centuries in the western world. However,

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since the middle of the twentieth century there has been renewed theological interest in where God is in suffering. Julian and John can contribute to this discussion.

Meeting God in Suffering

Julian and John live out of the knowledge and experience of God as All-Goodness, who is in all and does all, and in whom there is no evil. In keeping with the Prologue to John’s Gospel, they understand that humankind was created to share in the love of the Trinity, with the Incarnation and Redemption being part of the original plan, not a rescue mission for a plan gone wrong. God who is All-Might, All-Wisdom, and All-Goodness wants our happiness and peace. Julian comments that she needs to “grant that all things that are done are well done” (P.xi.190), and John writes in a letter that God “arranges things for our good” (L.26.760). Even so, both mystics acknowledge the presence of evil and misery in our world. Like Meister Eckhart (ca. 1260-ca. 1328), they understand the ordinary suffering in our lives as “facts of common experience to be accepted and overcome, not by grim endurance, but by transformation.” Life’s un-sought-after suffering is “ordained” (held within Love) by God. God is present in every aspect of life, which includes suffering. They see sin as all that is opposed to God and as the cause of suffering. According to Julian, suffering is caused by our blindness to God’s love, while John points to the contraries


51 Cf. Julian: “our Lord God said to her thus, ‘Are you well paid that I suffered for you?’ And she said, ‘Yes, good Lord, blessed must you be.’ Then said Jesus, our good Lord God, ‘If you are paid, I am paid’” (W.83v.6-10.59). Kerrie Hide comments: “This is not God being paid or satisfied through the cross. The payment is directed at humanity. Salvation revealed on the cross is a mutual exchange between Christ and humanity. The oneing between Christ and humanity is so great that if we are satisfied Christ is apayde.” Gifted Origins, 111. John understands Christ’s coming as his claiming of his bride (Romances). Neither mystic ascribes to the atonement theology of Anselm (ca.1033-1109) that God’s Son took on sinners’ debts because only God could satisfy God’s honour. See Anselm of Canterbury, “Meditation on Human Redemption,” in The Prayers and Meditations of St. Anselm, ed. and trans. Benedicta Ward (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1973), 103-11, 233.

52 Richard Woods, Meister Eckhart: Master of Mystics (London: Continuum, 2011), 161. Cf. “I consider it better than anything else that a man should fully abandon himself to God when He would cast anything upon him, be it disgrace, trouble, or whatever kind of suffering it might be, accepting it with joy and gratitude, allowing oneself rather to be led by God than plunging into it oneself. So just learn all things gladly from God and follow Him, and all will go well with you.” Walshe, Meister Eckhart, 506.
that rage within us. They regard trials, tribulations and temptations as necessary because they prepare us for the delight of transforming union.

The mystical writings of both Julian and John have their origin in an experience of their own suffering in which God’s love overwhelms them. When Julian on her death-bed and John in his prison behold the naked, poor, crucified Christ, they are given to know that when the crucified Christ bears all of humankind’s suffering, it is not as a sacrifice of atonement or appeasement, but as vulnerable Lover. Since Christ is the Image of the Triune God, God is the compassionate Beloved: the Lover who suffers with his bride. It is because Julian and John meet Christ as Beloved in the context of suffering (his and theirs) that their image of God is as it is and they regard suffering as they do. Their God is the Lover who suffers with the bride-beloved. Their Lover bears with love all of humankind’s suffering, including theirs. To love their Beloved is to want to share the Beloved’s suffering, as the Beloved shares theirs. The one desire and delight of spiritual persons is to be like their Beloved in all things: to be compassionate Love. Christ is not only Image of the Triune God; he is also the Way we are to follow, the gateway to God. Christ’s Passion exemplifies the Christian path of mystical transformation which is wrought in the annihilation of self. The way to God leads all the way to Calvary where Christ cries out from the core of his being and breathes all of his being in to God. (Mk 15:37). It is a path the mystic, like Christ and with Christ, follows in the darkness of faith, hope and love, and sometimes “suddenly” Christ is encountered along the way in Resurrection joy.

Julian is well aware of “the woe that is here in this life” (W.111v.10-11.115). In her writings, she focuses on the sufferings which relate to the desire and penitence of compunctio. Julian attributes her own suffering to her longing for her absent Beloved, as well as to her “wretchedness, sloth and irksomeness … so that I wanted not to live and to travail as it fell out to me to do” (W.112.2-6.116). She describes the sufferings of the servant (Everyman) in the parable of the lord and the servant.

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53 Chapter 1, 8.
54 Cf. Chapter 5, 104.
55 Chapter 6, 131-32.
The servant “groans and moans and wallows and twists, but he may not rise nor help himself in any way” (P.li.330). Julian teaches her readers to have a true knowing of God’s goodness, and to make light of their suffering like Christ did (A.xxv.779). They are to behold Christ’s Passion in three ways: “the hard pain” (P.xx.224); “the love that made him suffer it [which] surpasses all his pains” (P.xxii.230); and “the joy and bliss that made him like it” (P.xxiii.232). She explains that reverent dread (loving reverence) is the mark of a true and wise relationship with God. We are to flee from our self-loathing and despair by running to Mother Christ as fast as we can and fall in “to his blessed breast by his sweet open side” (W.106.8-10.104), and if we cannot run, then we are to call to him with all our might (W.109v.12.111). Julian sees her beloved Christ as poor and like a rag drying out in the cold wind on Calvary, and also as enthroned as Lord in the middle of the centre of her heart (P.lxviii.430). This is where he must be sought.

John similarly directs us to flee into recollection of our Beloved within our heart. His writings are very explicit about the place of suffering in humankind’s journey to God. He presents Christ as the door and the gate of the way of union which does not entail a multiplicity of considerations, methods, manners, and experiences – though in their own way these may be a requirement for beginners – but demands only the one thing necessary: true self-denial, exterior and interior, through surrender of self both to suffering for Christ and to annihilation in all things (2A.7.8.171).

John teaches that we are to embrace the cross with love, because it “greatly lightens and eases the journey” (2A.7.7.171). We are to choose the distasteful in God more than the delectable, [lean] more toward suffering than toward consolation, more toward going without everything for God than toward possession, and toward dryness and affliction than toward sweet consolation. [The soul] knows that this is the significance of following Christ and denying self (2A.7.5.170).

Losing our old self for the sake of Christ is “seeking God in oneself” (2A.7.5.170). It is through the thicket of suffering that we enter the riches of God (SC.36.13.614).

56 Chapter 6, 142-43.

57 John sadly comments that “from [his] observations Christ is little known by those who consider themselves his friends. For we see them going about seeking in him their own consolations and
John’s only desire is for mystical union with his Beloved, which means loving Christ, and not himself. Hence we may understand John’s words in the last year of his life in Segovia when he asks for the favour of suffering more for Christ. He wants to bear the sufferings of his Beloved. Like Evagrius, John knows that disordered passions and appetites are a block to love, and that the faculties (intellect, memory and will) need purifying before our true self is freed to shine forth with God’s love. John does not deny the suffering involved as the old-self dies and the ego is freed. The suffering comes from resistance to love, and abandonment of hope, in the trials, tribulations and temptations, which clear away anything that holds us captive, and which make room for Love in us. The Bridegroom is with us every step of the way: “Peace be with you” (Jn 20:19). If we do not run from suffering, but learn to love in it, mystical union begins in this life.

Julian and John are in love with a God who is vulnerable and suffers with humankind out of compassionate love. For God to suffer with us is for God to enter our vulnerability: to be with us in our woundedness. God is not aloof from human suffering, or from human company. On the contrary, God

diffuses himself abundantly as the sun does its rays, without being a respecter of persons [Acts 10:34], wherever there is room – always showing himself gladly along the highways and byways – [God] does not hesitate or consider it of little import to find his delights with the children of the earth at a common table [Prv. 8:31] (LF.1.15.646).

God delights in humankind and “diffuses himself abundantly … wherever there is room.” Julian comments that her greatest comfort comes from Christ’s loving familiarity in relating directly with her without intermediaries: a poor creature’s “heart might be ravished and almost forget himself for joy at this great homeliness” (P.vii.172). John has similar joy, commenting that the soul: “feels in this state that

satisfactions, loving themselves very much, but not loving him very much by seeking his bitter trials and deaths” (2A.7.12.173).


Chapter 7, 163. See N.21.
God is so solicitous in regaling it by various favors, that he has no one else in the world to favor nor anything else to do, that everything is for the soul alone” (LF.2.36.672).60

Although Julian and John use different language to describe it, their relationship with their Beloved is an all-consuming love-affair. Julian chooses the suffering Christ as her heaven now in this life (A.xi.739); there is no life for her apart from him. John loses himself for love (SC.29), with love his only task and only reward (SC.28). In a love relationship the sufferings of one are the sufferings of the other (SC.13). Julian and John experience God’s love in an experience of their own suffering. They therefore know that their compassionate Beloved suffers with them. In their turn, they desire to bear the sufferings of their Beloved, which, of course, are the sufferings of humankind. Such is their love for their Beloved that they welcome suffering as a gift because it enables them to demonstrate their love. They feel they have been given so much and have so little to give in return.61

In the Western Church, the understanding of God as a suffering God emerged strongly in the Franciscan tradition and profoundly influenced medieval piety and theology. In their contemplation of the crucified Christ, Francis and Bonaventure found a vulnerable God of outpouring love. Ilia Delio roots the theology of a suffering God in the Old Testament.62 She contrasts the Old Testament view of a vulnerable God who suffers with his children with the view held by the early Fathers (and persisting to the present) that, while God indeed loves us by acting with goodwill towards us, God is “impassible,” which means “exempt from suffering.”63 Augustine (354-430) wrote that God’s “pity is not the wretched heart of a fellow-sufferer … the pity of God is the goodness of his help … when God pities, he does not grieve and he liberates.”64 The God of Francis (1182-1226) and Bonaventure (ca. 1217-74) is the

60 Chapter 9, 217.
61 John wept at how little he suffered for his Beloved. Crisógono, Life, 126.
62 Delio, Humility of God, 92-93.
63 O’Collins and Farrugia, Concise Dictionary of Theology, 116.
64 Augustine, Contra Adversarium Legis et Prophetarum 1.40, in Delio, Humility of God, 92. The thirteenth-century emergence in the Western Church of the Franciscan view of a vulnerable God of love would have been assisted by Evagrius (345-99), whose Eastern training influenced Western monasticism through John Cassian. Evagrius defined impassibility, not as a lack of emotion, but as “a
Old Testament God “who is so bent low in love for every creature and all creation that God goes to the depths of human suffering – the cross – to show his love and to bring all those in darkness into the embrace of love.” Christ, Image of our compassionate Beloved, shares our suffering and dying. The contribution of medieval mysticism to the Christian tradition is the emphasis on the immanent (yet transcendent) God of compassion who invites each of us into the love relationship of the Song of Songs.

Western society’s contemporary approach to suffering carries a four hundred year history in which suffering is commonly viewed as a problem to be solved by human intelligence. There is no good in suffering. Julian and John would say not so. Although it is true that there is no virtue in suffering for the sake of suffering itself, the suffering that comes unbidden to us is valuable because suffering with Love (the Beloved) is transforming. Julian’s and John’s peace of heart is not readily explainable by human standards. Their peaceful, positive attitude to their own suffering is the mark of a given-over lover, lost in God. It had not been won without their own generous response to grace. It did not mean that they accepted suffering with mindless passivity. Nor were they devoid of human compassion for others. On the contrary, their lives were significantly marked by the compassion they bore for others. They were able to live peacefully with the suffering of their own lives because they were one with Christ in their suffering. Being lost in God, their lives reflected a new Reality in which God was their All.

The suffering of twentieth-century war-torn Europe triggered writing about God as a suffering God. Jürgen Moltmann taught that the cross is the core of theology: “When the crucified Christ is called the ‘image of the invisible God’ the meaning is that this is God and God is like this.” Moltmann’s theology of a suffering God has some affinity to the theology ascribed to by Julian and John and all

quiet state of the rational soul; it results from gentleness and self-control.” Evagrius, Skemmata 3, in Harmless, Desert Christians, 347.
65 Delio, Humility of God, 90.
66 Williams, Wound of Knowledge, 12.
of the medieval mystics. For them the revelation of God’s love in Christ’s crucified love leads “into the very heart of the mystery of God.” They draw on the bridal mysticism of the Song of Songs to express their understanding of the suffering God. Their relationship with God is as lovers. Each of the lovers joys in the other, and suffers with the other. We are to share our nest with the Beloved who is wounded with love for us as we are wounded with love for him (SC.35), and to go deeper into the thicket of suffering where God is to be found (SC.36.12.613-14).

Dorothee Sölle considers that John of the Cross’s dark night of the soul is today’s “dark night of the world,” as understood in the sufferings engulfing humankind and mother earth, which are experiences of the cross, or hopelessness, and absence of God. One can respond with “numbness” to this suffering and see it as entirely negative, to be resisted and avoided. Or one can respond to the “agony” of suffering by embracing it and “remaining in inconsolability,” waiting for the new birth that will come. Transformation occurs in suffering with love. Similarly, Delio comments that we are suffering the pain of entering a new period of axial consciousness, one which is evolutive, global, ecological, and communal. In the evolving cosmos, new life depends on death, and the suffering God is “woven into the creative process itself.” In another place she writes,

If we could only realize that suffering and death are part of the greater fullness of life, we would run to embrace them for that is what we seek, the fullness of life. If we could only realize that suffering and death are part of God’s creation, we could accept them, for we desire to become a new creation.

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68 There are also pronounced differences. Schillebeeckx accepts Moltmann’s “deep and correct insight … that God is the great fellow-sufferer, who is concerned for our history.” However, he does not accept Moltmann’s view that “God himself has cast [Jesus] out as a sacrifice for our sins,” because God does not cause suffering. Schillebeeckx, Christ, 728. Cf. Schillebeeckx understands that “God, by nature, is absolute goodness … in whom there is absolutely no negativity or evil.” Aloysius Rego, Suffering and Salvation: The salvific meaning of suffering in the later theology of Edward Schillebeeckx (Louvain: Peeters, 2006), 332. In this, Schillebeeckx is at one with medieval mystics.


71 Sölle, Silent Cry, 155. Sölle cites Edith Stein’s solidarity with the Jewish people. We have already noted Stein’s identifying with the crucified Christ. See Chapter 10, 240-41.

72 Delio, Emergent Christ, 80.

In this, Delio is moving into a cosmological view, but the theology is not alien to Julian’s and John’s. Both Julian and John see suffering to be transforming because of Christ. Julian teaches us to behold God’s goodness which is in all and does all. John teaches that those who resist suffering will never come to the state of mystical marriage. Our sufferings provide the preparation and the space for transforming union with the Beloved: “The soul is unable to live perfectly in this new life if the old self does not die completely” (LF.2.33.670).

Delio goes on to argue that Christ will emerge in our evolving universe “by way of the heart.” Transformation of the heart is exactly what Julian and John are writing about. In the Christian tradition, death leads to resurrection; Christ is glorified; the grain of wheat yields a harvest. According to Julian, we come to know God and our self in one, and John teaches that as the old self dies the new self is free to love as it is loved. This happens in a life of prayer and compassion. In Julian’s theology, suffering with the Beloved leads to joy. Similarly, John teaches that suffering with the Beloved transforms. Julian emphasises the remedy given to help us: Christ is with us, “keeping us and leading in to fullness of joy” (P.lxxvii.466). John rejoices that he has all that he needs “because Christ is mine and all for me” (S.27.87). Julian and John understand suffering from the viewpoint of oneness with the God who is their compassionate Beloved. They welcome it as grace.

Concluding Comments

A lectio divina interpretation of ‘wound’ in the writings of Julian of Norwich and John of the Cross leads to a profound understanding of contemplation. It is clear that Julian and John are totally in love with and given over to a God whom they know as their compassionate Beloved. The God who commands their deepest reverence is their gentle Lover who draws them into what Julian calls oneing and John calls the transforming union of the mystical marriage. They find their Beloved when they “look to the one whom they have pierced” (Jn 19:37), to the crucified Christ, and find there the Image of the all-holy and vulnerable God who suffers with humankind. They

74 Delio, Emergent Christ, 119.
teach us to imitate Christ in all things, even (particularly) death on the cross. They
behold the crucified Christ as the Way into Trinitarian Love.

Julian and John experience oneing and transforming union with Christ at a
time of their own acute suffering when, bereft of human help, they gaze with faith
upon the crucified Christ. They are graced with an understanding of his suffering, and
of the endless, unconditional love which makes him bear it. The suffering borne by
Christ includes theirs. They are one in a sharing of suffering. Their hearts are torn in
two. For Julian and John, suffering is an opportunity for oneness with their
compassionate Beloved: in the cross they find the garden of their heart’s desire. For
us, too, the experience of suffering is an opportunity for transforming union with
Christ if we are able to risk surrendering into the movement of the dying and the
rising of the crucified Christ. Julian and John teach that when we are at last totally
given to our Beloved we arrive at a stability which enables us to remain in peace and
love amidst the medley of good and ill in our lives. We live a new Reality.

Like the weeping Mary of Magdala who finds her beloved Master already
there with her on Easter morning (Jn 20:15), Julian discovers and teaches that our
compassionate Beloved is nearer to us than we are to ourselves (W.101.5-6.94), and
John tells us to seek our Beloved with love within our soul (SC.1.6.480) for “all [our]
good and hope is so close … that [we] cannot be without him” (SC.1.7.480). We meet
God when we enter our hearts and abide in solitude and silence. Both Julian and John
teach that prayer is a single movement in which God draws us from the kataphatic
prayer of discourse and imagination into silent, imageless, apophatic prayer. The love-
longing we experience is God working in us to bring us to the joy for which we were
created. Our life is endlessly graced with wounds (touches) of love which unite us
with our Beloved. We come to live our lives in the habitual awareness that our
Beloved is beclosed in us and we are beclosed in our Beloved. Just as God “does not
hesitate or consider it of little import to find his delights with the children of the earth
at a common table in the world [Prv. 8:31]” (LF.1.15.646), so too do Julian and John
find their joy in being with their Beloved. The fruits of a life of contemplation are joy
and peace.
The dissertation challenges views of God as remote from humanity and its concerns. Christ as the Way into Trinitarian Love is affirmed. The place of suffering in transforming union is surprising and crucial. The love affair that is Julian’s and John’s astounds. Meeting God in this life involves both delight and suffering because love itself contains this paradox. Delight overpasses suffering. The two mystics teach by word and example that it is in a life of prayer that we see, know, meet, and become one with our compassionate Beloved. In a love-affair like Julian’s and John’s, we share in Trinitarian delight and become compassionate lovers of others.
APPENDIX A

WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL MANUSCRIPT


Pages 37-117.

[Page 72v]

O ure gracious & goode lorde god shewed me in party pe wydome & pe trewthe of pe soule of oure blessed lady aynt mary where in I vnder stood pe reuerent beholdynge. pat she behelde her god pat is her maker maruelynge with grete reuerence pat he wolde be borne of her pat was a simple creature of his makyng. for this was her meruelynge. pat he p was her maker wolde be borne of her. p is made. And this wydome & trouth know ynge pe gretenes of her ma ker and the lytyllnes of her self.

O ur gracious and good lord God showed me in part the wisdom and the truth of the soul of our blessed Lady, Saint Mary, wherein I understood the reverent beholding, that she beheld her God who is her maker, marvelling with great reverence that he would be born of her that was a simple person of his making. For this was her marvelling, 'That he who was her maker would be born of her who is made.' And this wisdom and truth knowing the greatness of her Maker and the littleness of her self.
self who is made, caused her to say full meekly to Gabriel, 'Lo, me here, God's handmaid'.

This wisdom and truth made her see her God so great, so high, so mighty and so good that the greatness and the nobility and beholding of God fulfilled her with reverent dread. And with this she saw herself so little and so low, so simple and so poor in reward of her God, that this reverent dread fulfilled her with meekness. And thus, by this ground, she was fulfilled of grace and of all manner of virtue, and surpassed all people. In this sight, I understood truly that she is more than all that God made beneath her in worthiness and fullness. For above her there is no thing that is made: but the blessed manhood of Christ, as to my sight. And this our good Lord showed to my understanding, in teaching us.

Also I saw that our good Lord is to us all things that are good and strengthening to our help. He is our clothing, which for love wraps and surrounds us, helps us and enables us, and hangs about us for tender love, that he may never
leue vs/ And jo in this fyght
I sawe pat he is all pyng pl is
good as to my vnderstondayng:
And in pis he shewed me a lytil
thyng pl quantite of a hafyl
nott lyeng in pe pawme of
my hand as it had seemed: and
it was as rownde as eny ball.
I looked per vpon w pl pe eye of
of my vnderstondayng: and I
pought what may pis be: and
it was aunswered generally thus:
It is all pat is made: I meruelled
howe it myght laste: for me
pought it myght jodeynly haue
fall to nought for lyttlyld: &
I was aunswered in my vnder

leave us. And so in this showing I
saw that he is all things that are
good as to my understanding.
And in this he showed me a little
thing, the quantity of a hazel nut,
lying in the palm of my hand, as it
seemed.1 And it was as round as
any ball.2 I looked upon it with the
eye of my understanding, and
thought, ‘What may this be?’ And
it was answered generally thus, ‘It
is all that is made.’3 I marvelled
how it might last, for I thought it
might suddenly have fallen to
nought4 for littleness. And I was
answered in my under-

stondayng: It la styth & euer shall
for god louyth it: and jo hath
all thyng his begynnyng by
pe loue of god: In this lytyl
thyng I sawe thre propertee:
The fyrt is: pl god made it: pe
secunde is pet louyth it: & pl pod
is pat god kepith it: But what
is pis to me: jodely pe maker:
pe keper & pe louer: for tyll I am
substantially oned to hym: I
may neuer haue full reste ne ve
rey blyffe: that is to sey, pat I
be so fastened to hym pat per
be no thyng pl is made be
twene my god & me: This litil
thyng pl is made: me thought

standing: It lasts and ever shall,
for God loves it. And so have all
things their beginning by the love
of God.1

In this little thing I saw three
properties. The first is that God
made it. The second that he loves
it. And the third, that God keeps
it. But what is this to me? Truly,
the Creator, the Keeper, the
Lover. For until I am substantially
oned to him,2 I may never have
full rest nor true bliss. That is to
say, until I be so fastened to him
that there is nothing that is made
between my God and me.3

This little thing that is made, I
thought
it might have fallen to nought for littleness. Of this we need to have knowledge that it is like to nought, all things that are made. For to love and have God who is unmade.\(^1\)

For this is the cause why we are not at ease in heart and soul, for we seek here rest, in this thing that is so little where there is no rest, and know not our God will be known and it lieth hid in us with all good.\(^2\) For he is true rest. God will be known, and he likes us to rest in him.\(^3\) For all that is beneath him cannot suffice us. And this is the cause why no soul is rested, until it is

noughted of all that is made. And when he wills to be noughted for love, to have him who is all, then he is able to receive spiritual rest.\(^1\)

Also our Lord showed that it is the fullest pleasure to him, that an innocent soul come to him nakedly, plainly and humbly. For this is the natural yearning of the soul by the touching of the Holy Spirit.\(^2\) And by the understanding that I have in this showing, 'God, for your goodness, give me yourself. For you are enough for me and I may not ask anything that is less, that may be fully worthy of you.'\(^3\) And if I ask any

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75

it myght haue fall to nought: for lytilnes: Of this nedeth vs to haue knowynge pat it is lyke to nought all pyng p\(^1\) is made: for to loue: & haue god pat is vn made: for pis is pe caufe why p\(^1\) we be not all in efe of harte & Joule: for we feke here refete: In this thynge p\(^1\) is jo lytyll where: no refete is in: & know not our god pat is allmyghty: all wife & all good: for he is very refete: God wyll be known: & it lieth hid hym p\(^1\) we refete sin hym: for all pat is beneth hym: sufficeth not to vs: And pis is pe caufe why pat no joule is refete: tyll it be

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75v

noughted of all pat is made: and when he is wyfully noughted for loue: to haue hym p\(^1\) is all: then is he able to refete: A1fo oure lord [hew ed pat it is full grete pleasance to hym: pat a jesty joule com to hym nakedly: pleynely & homly: for pis is pe kynde yernynge of pe joule by pe toucyng of the holy goote: As by pe vndirston dyng p\(^1\) I haue in pis [hewynge: God for pi gooc es 3eue vnto me thy selfe: fo: pou art I nought: Oratitho: & I may no thyng ake p\(^1\) is lejfe: pat may be full wur: shyppe to thee: And yf I ake any
thing that is less, I am always wanting. But only in you I have all.' And these words, 'God of your goodness', are full lovesome to the soul, and full nigh touching the will of our Lord. For his goodness comprehends all his creation and all his blessed works and overpasses them without end. For he is the endlessness, and he has made us only for himself, and restored us by his precious Passion, and ever keeps us in his blessed love, and all this is of his goodness. This showing was given, as to my understanding, to teach our souls wisely to cleave to the goodness of God.

And in that same time the custom of our prayer was brought to my mind, how that we use the unknowing of love to make many means. Then saw I solely that is more worshippe to god & more very delight, that we pray faithfully for to hym selfe of his goodness and cleave perto by his grace wth true and beleue, Than ye we made all p means pat hart may thinke for pough we make all pis me for pough we make all pis me & not full wor for thy to god. But in his goodness is alle pe whole & pere feyllth no thyng for pis as I shall say.
came to my mynde in pe same
tyme we prayde to god for his
holy fleche & for his precious blode-
his holy pas:ion & his dereworpi
deeh: his worshipful woundis
and all pe ble:fed kyndenes: pe
endeles lyf pat we haue of all
this: it is of hys goodnes: And
we pray hym for his moder loue:
pat hym bare: and all p: helpe
p: we haue in her: it is of his
goodnes: and we pray for hys
holy cro:fe p: he deyd on: and al
pe helpe & vertue that we haue
of pe cro:fe: it is of his goodnes:
And on pe same wyfe: all pe
helpe p: we haue of spe:iall

sayntis: & all pe ble:fed company in
heuen: pe dereworthy loue & p: holy
endeles frendshyp pat we haue
of them: it is all of his goodnes:
ffor god of his goodnes: ffor god
of his grete goodnes hath ordey
ned meanys to helpe vs in moft
loving & ble:fed maner: of whi
che pe cheyff & principall meane is:
pe ble:fed kynde pat he toke of pe
mayden mary: wh: all pe mens
pat goeth before: & commyth aft:
wich: ben longyng to our salua
:ion: & endeles redemption: Where
fore it ple:at hym: p: we jeke
hym & wor/hyp hym by mens:
vndir:ondyng & knowing pat

came to my mind at the same time
we prayed to God for his holy
flesh, and for his precious blood,
his holy Passion, and his worthy
death, his worshipful wounds and
all the blessed kindness, the
endless life that we have of all
this. It is of his goodness.

And we pray him for his
mother’s love, who bore him, and
all the help we have in her, which
is of his goodness, and we pray for
his holy cross that he died on and
all the help and virtue that we have
of the cross, which is of his
goodness. And in the same way,
all the help that we have of special

saints and all the blessed company
of heaven, the precious love and
the holy, endless friendship that
we have of them. It is all of his
goodness.

For God of his goodness, for
God of his great goodness has
ordained means to help us in the
most loving and blessed manner,
which the first and principal
means is the blessed nature that he
took of the maiden Mary, with all
the means that went before, and
come after, which belong to our
salvation, and endless redemption,
wherefore it pleased him, that we
seek him and worship him by
means of understanding and
knowing that
he is goodness of all. For to the goodness of God is the highest prayer, and it comes down to us, to the lowest part of our need. It quickens our soul and brings it to life, and makes it grow in grace, and in virtue. It is closest in nature, and readiest in grace, for it is the same grace that the soul seeks, and always shall until we know our God truly, that has us all be closed in him.¹

A man goes upright, and the soul² of his body is spared as a full fair purse, and when it is his necessary time it is opened and spared again. This is well done. And that is

he that does this. He shows that he sees. He comes down to the lowest part of our need, for he does not despise what he has made, neither does he disdain to serve us with the simplest office that belongs to our natural bodies, for love of the soul that he has made to his own likeness.¹ For as the body is clad in clothes and flesh, and the heart in the breast: so are we soul and body clad and closed in the goodness of God.² Yes and more holy, for all these may wear and waste away,³ but the goodness of God is ever whole and near
heaven. For of all things the beholding and the loving of the Maker causes the soul to seem least in his own sight, and most fills it with reverent dread and true meekness, and with plenty of charity, to his even Christian.\textsuperscript{1}

Furthermore, we are now so blind and so unwise that we can never seek God, until that time that he of his goodness shows himself to us. And when we see ought of him graciously, then are we stirred by the same grace to seek him with great desire so to see him more blissfully. And thus I saw him and sought him

and I had him and wanted him.\textsuperscript{1} And this is and should be our common working in this life, to my sight.

For the continuing seeking of the soul pleases God very much, because it may do more than seeking, suffering and trusting. And this is wrought in each soul that has it by the Holy Spirit, and the clearness of finding is through a special grace of God, when it is his will. The seeking with faith, hope and charity pleases our Lord God, and the finding pleases the soul, and fulfils it with joys. And thus was I taught to my under
standing, that the seeking is as good as the beholding, for the time that he will have the soul be in travail. It is God’s will that we seek into the beholding of him, for by that shall he show us himself through his special grace when he will. And how a soul shall have him in his beholding, he shall teach himself, and that is most nourishing to him, and most profitable to the soul, and it most receives meekness and virtues with the grace and leading of the Holy Spirit. For a soul that only fastens himself to God with true trust

either in seeking or in beholding, that is the most worthy that he may do, it seems to me.¹

It is God’s will that we have three things in our seeking of his gift. The first is, that we seek willingly and busily without sloth, as it may be with his grace gladly and merrily without unskilfull heaviness and vain sorrow.² The second, that we abide with him steadfastly for his love, without complaining and striving against him to our lives’ end, for it shall last only a while. The third is that we trust in him mightily with a fully sure faith, for it is his will that

[Translation and notes]

1. Standing, that the seeking is as good as the beholding, for the time that he will have the soul be in travail. It is God’s will that we seek into the beholding of him, for by that shall he show us himself through his special grace when he will. And how a soul shall have him in his beholding, he shall teach himself, and that is most nourishing to him, and most profitable to the soul, and it most receives meekness and virtues with the grace and leading of the Holy Spirit. For a soul that only fastens himself to God with true trust.

2. Either in seeking or in beholding, that is the most worthy that he may do, it seems to me.

3. It is God’s will that we have three things in our seeking of his gift. The first is, that we seek willingly and busily without sloth, as it may be with his grace gladly and merrily without unskilfull heaviness and vain sorrow. The second, that we abide with him steadfastly for his love, without complaining and striving against him to our lives’ end, for it shall last only a while. The third is that we trust in him mightily with a fully sure faith, for it is his will that.
we shall know that he will appear suddenly and blessedly to all his lovers, for his working is secret, and it will be perceived, and his appearing shall be swift and sudden, and he will be believed, for he is very able, humble and courteous, blessed must he be.

II

And after this, I saw God in a point. That is to say in my understanding. But which sight I saw that he is all things. I beheld with advisement, seeing and knowing in that sight, that he does all that is done, be it never so little. And I saw that nothing is done by chance, nor by happenstance, but

all by the foreseeing of God’s wisdom. And if it be chance or happenstance in the sight of man, our blindness and our lack of foresight is the cause. Therefore, well I know that in sight of our lord God, there is not chance or happenstance. And therefore it needs behoove me to grant that all things that are done, are well done, because our lord God does all. For in this time the working of Creation was not showed but of our lord God, in Creation, for he is in the midpoint of all things, and he does all.

And I was sure that he does no sin. And
here I saw truly that sin is no deed. Also among other showings our good Lord means thus, 'See, I am God.' See, I am in all things. See, I do all things. See, I never lift my hands from off my work, nor ever shall, without end. See, I lead all things to the end, to which I ordained them, from without beginning, by the same Might, Wisdom and Love, that I made them with. How should then anything be amiss?'

I saw full surely that he never changes his purpose in any manner of thing, nor ever shall without end. For there was nothing unknown to him.

in his rightful ordering from without beginning. And therefore all things were set in order before anything was made, as it should be without end.  

Also in the ninth showing our Lord God said to her thus, 'Are you well paid that I suffered for you?' And she said, 'Yes, good Lord, blessed must you be.' Then said Jesus, our good Lord God, 'If you are paid, I am paid. It is a joy, a bliss, and an endless liking to me that I ever suffered the Passion for you. And if I might suffer more, I would suffer more.' And in these same
words if I might. I saw truly that as often as he might die, as often he would, and love should never let him have rest until he had done it. And I beheld with great diligence for to understand how he would die if he might. And truly the number surpassed my understanding in my wits so much, that my reason might not, nor could not comprehend it, nor take it. And when he had thus often died or hulde: yeit he wolde set it at nought for loue: for though pe wete man hed of cripte myght suffer but ones: the goodnes of hym may never cease to profer, every day to the same if it might be. Also, it is God's will that we have true liking with him in our salvation, and therein he will that we be mightily comforted and strengthened. And thus wills he merely with his grace that our soul be occupied, for we are his bliss, his reward and his worship.

And we are his crown. And this was a singular marvel and fully delectable beholding that we are his crown. This which I say is such great bliss to our lord Jesus, that he sets at nought all his travail and his hard Pas-
sion and his cruel and shameful death. The Father is well pleased with the deeds that Jesus had done towards our salvation. There we are not only his by his being, but also by the courteous gift of his Father, for we are his bliss and his reward, as it is said before. And that gift and that reward is so blissfull to our lord Jesus that his Father might have given him no reward that might have pleased him better. For in us he is pleased without end, and so shall we within him with his grace. All that he has done for us and does and

and euer shall do. was neuer cost nor charge to him nor might be, but only that he did in our manhood, beginning at the sweet Incarnation, and lasting until the blessed uprising on Easter day in the morning. So long lasted the cost and the charge about our redemption in deed. Of which deed he joys endlessly, as it is said before.

Also Jesus wills that we pay heed to this bliss that is in the Trinity of our salvation, and that we desire to have as much spiritual liking with his grace as said before. That is to say, that the liking of
of our salvation be like to pe

ioye pat cri[fe] hath of our salua-
cion as it may be whyle we/
ben here. All the ble[sf]ed trny-
te wroght in pe passion of
cri[fe] myn[tryng] abundance
of vertues & plente of grace
to vs by hym; but only pe\ may
denys [one sufferd] whereof all
the gloriou\e trnyte endeles\ly
enioyeh. And pis was [hew]
ed in this worde: art pou wel
payed. By p\ oper word pat
cri[fe] feyd: 3f pou art payed.
15
I am payed: as 3f he had [feyd:
3t is ioy & lykying I nough
to me: and I a[f]ke not el\e of pe

of our salvation is like the joy that
Christ has of our salvation as it
may be while we are here. All the
blessed Trinity wrought, in the
Passion of Christ, ministering
abundance of virtues and plenty of
grace to us by him, but only the
Maiden's Son suffered, whereof
all the glorious Trinity endlessly
joys.1

And this was shown in these
words, 'Are you well paid'. By
those other words that Christ said,
'If you are paid, I am paid'. As
if he had said, 'It is joy and
liking enough\ to me, and I ask
nothing else of you

for my travail, but that I might
pay you'. And it is this he brought
to my mynde: pe propertee of a
glad 3uer. A glad 3uer: takyp
but lytt\ hede at pe thynge p\ he 3euth: but his defyre is &
his entent: to pleace hym &
folace hym to whom he 3euith
it: and 3f pe re\euyer take pe
3eft\e gladly & thankefu\e: then
pe curteys 3euer jetty\e at
nought all his co\e & all his
trau\ele for ioye & deltye pat
he hath: for he hath jo ple\ed
& folacyd hym/ pat he louyth:pe
plenteo\ly & fully was pis

[86v]

Also with glad cheer, our
Lord looked into his side and beheld, enjoying, and with his sweet looking he led forth the understanding of his creatures by the same wound into his side within, and there he showed a fair delectable place and large enough for all mankind that shall be saved to rest in peace and love. And therewith he brought to mind his dear worthy blood, and his precious water, which he let be all poured out for love.

And with that sweet beholding he showed his blessed heart evenly broken in two. And with this sweet enjoying he showed in understanding in

in part the blessed Godhead, as much as he would. At that time strengthening the poor soul to be able to understand as it may be said, that is to mean the endless love that was without beginning, and is and shall be for ever.

And with this our lord God said full blessedly, ‘Lo, how I loved you’, as if he had said, ‘My darling, behold and see your own brother, your king. My child, behold and see your lord God, your maker and your endless joy. See what liking and bliss I have in your salvation, and for my love, enjoy with me’. Also for more
understanding these blessed words were said, 'Lo, how I love you,' as if he had said, 'Behold and see that I loved you so much, before I died for you, that I would die for you. And now I have died for you, and suffered pain willingly that I may. And now is all my bitter pain and all my travail turned to endless joy and bliss both to me and to you. How should it now be that you should anything pray of me that I like, but that I should full gladly grant it you. For my liking is your holiness, and your endless joy and bliss with

me. This is the vndir|tandyng
fymply as I can fery of thys
bles|fede worde. Loo how I lo
ue thee. All this fhwed oure
lorde god to make vs gladde
and mery. Aljo I vndir|lond
fouthly pat all maner thynge
is made redy to vs by p[e grete/
goodnes of god. jo fefurthe
pat what tyme we ben oure
selfe in peace & in charite. we
be veryly flaufe. but for p[e
we may not haue pis in ful
nes while we ben here. ther
fore it befallyth vs euer more
to lyue in fwe|e prayer. and
in louely longyng w^t our lorde
ihesu
Jesus.

Also our Lord showed for prayer,⁰ in which showing I saw two conditions in our Lord's meaning. One is right full prayer.² And the other is sure trust. But yet often our trust is not full, for we are not sure that God hears us, we think, because of our unworthiness, and because of that we feel nothing. For we are as barren and as dry often after our prayer, as we were before. And thus in our feeling, our folly is the cause of our weakness. For thus I have felt in myself. And all this brought our Lord suddenly to my mind and showed these words and said, 'I am ground of your prayer.' First it is my will that you have it, and I make you to will it. How should it then be that you should not have your prayer for it, since I make you to pray it, and you pray it'.² And thus is in the first reason of the three that follow, our lord God shows a great comfort as may be, saying in the same words in the first reason. Where he says, 'And you pray it', there he shows full great pleasure, and endless reward that he

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<td>oure lorde shewed for prayer in whiche shewynge I fawe two condicines in our lوردs meanye: oon is right full prayer and pe oper is fulre trujte: But yet ofte tymis our trujte is not full for we be not sure pat god heryth vs as we thynke for oure vn worthynes: &amp; for p⁵ we fele no thyng: for we be as ba ≤ reyne &amp; as drye often tymes aftir oure prayer: as we were before: and pus in oure felyng: our foly is cauje of our we kenes: for pus I haue felt in my felse: And all pus brought</td>
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<td>oure lord sodenly to my mynde and shewed thees wordis and syeyed: I am grounde of pi beje kyng: firfte it is my wyll p⁵ pou haue it and I make pe to wyll it: how halde it than be pat pou shuldis te not haue pi befeMynge feeth I make pe to befeMynge it: and pou befeMynf it: And pus in pe ferffe rejon of pe thre pat folowyth: our lord god shewyth a myghty comfort as may be syeyng in the same wordis in pe ferffe rejon: where he syeyth and pou befeMynf it: there he shewyth full grete ple jance: and endeles mede pat he</td>
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<td>oure lord sodenly to my mynde and shewed thees wordis and syeyed: I am grounde of pi beje kyng: firfte it is my wyll p⁵ pou haue it and I make pe to wyll it: how halde it than be pat pou shuldis te not haue pi befeMynge feeth I make pe to befeMynge it: and pou befeMynf it: And pus in pe ferffe rejon of pe thre pat folowyth: our lord god shewyth a myghty comfort as may be syeyng in the same wordis in pe ferffe rejon: where he syeyth and pou befeMynf it: there he shewyth full grete ple jance: and endeles mede pat he</td>
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<td>oure lord sodenly to my mynde and shewed thees wordis and syeyed: I am grounde of pi beje kyng: firfte it is my wyll p⁵ pou haue it and I make pe to wyll it: how halde it than be pat pou shuldis te not haue pi befeMynge feeth I make pe to befeMynge it: and pou befeMynf it: And pus in pe ferffe rejon of pe thre pat folowyth: our lord god shewyth a myghty comfort as may be syeyng in the same wordis in pe ferffe rejon: where he syeyth and pou befeMynf it: there he shewyth full grete ple jance: and endeles mede pat he</td>
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will give us for our seeking.

And in the sixth reason there he says, 'How should then this be?' This was said for an impossibility. For it is the most impossible thing that may be that we should pray for mercy and grace, and not have it. For of all things that our Lord makes us to seek, himself has ordained it to us from without beginning.

Here may we see then that our prayer is not cause of the goodness and grace that he does to us, but his own proper goodness, and that he shows truly in all these sweet words, where he says,

'I am ground of your prayer and of your beseeching.' And our Lord wills that this be known of all his lovers on earth. And the more that we know it, the more should we seek it, if it is wisely taken. And so is our Lord's meaning.

Wise seeking is a true, gracious, lastling will of the soul, oned and fastened into the will of our lord God himself. He is the first receiver of our prayer, it seems to me, and he takes it right thankfully and highly enjoys it. He sends it up above and sets it in the treasury, where it shall never perish. It is
there before God with all his holy company continually received, ever fulfilling our needs. And when we shall achieve our bliss, it shall be given to us for a degree of joy with endless worshipful thanking of him. Full glad and merry is our Lord God of our prayer. He looks there after and he would have it. For with his grace it makes us like himself in condition, as we be in nature.

Also he says, 'Pray though you think it not help you'. Also to prayer belong thankings. Thanking is a true inward knowing with

greter reverence and lovely dread, turning ourseyld with all our might into the working that our Lord God stirred us to, enjoying and thanking him inwardly. And sometimes with plenteousness, it breaks out into voice, and says, 'Good lord, grant mercy, blessed must you be'.

And sometimes when your heart is dry and feels nought, or else by temptation of our enemy, then it is driven by reason and grace to cry upon our Lord with voice rehearsing his blessed Passion and his great goodness, and so the virtue
of our lord's words turn in to the soul and quickens the heart and enters in by his grace in to true working, and makes it to pray full blessedly. To enjoy in our lord God, it is a lovely thanking in his sight.

Our Lord wills that we have true understanding, and namely in three things that belong to our prayer. The first is by whom and how that our prayer springs, by whom he showed when he said, 'I am ground!' 1 and how by his goodness, for he says, 'First, it is my will.' And for the second, in what manner and how we should pray. That is that our will be turned into the will of our lord God enjoying. 1 And so means he when he says, 'I make you to will it.' For the third, that we know the fruit and end of our prayer. That is to be oned and like to our Lord in all things. And to this meaning and for this end was all this lovely lesson shown. And he will help us, and he shall make it so as he says himself, blessed must he be. For this is our Lord's will, that our prayer and our trust be both alike large.

For if we trust

we shulde pray. That is to our will be turned into pe wyll of oure lorde god enioyenge And jo meanyth he. whan he fyrst: I make pe to wyll yt- ffor pe thyrde: pat we knowe pe fruyt & thende of oure prayer That is to be oned & lyke to our lord in all thynge: and to pis menyng & for pis ende was all pis louely leffon fhewed: and he wyll helpe vs: & he fhall make/ it jo as he fyrst hym selfe, bleffed mote he be- ffor this is oure lordis wyll: & oure prayer & oure truft be both Spes a lyke large. ffor yf we trufte
not as moche as we pray: we
do not full worship to our lorde
in oure prayer: and also we
tary & payne our selfe: And p's
cause is: as I beleue: for we
know not truely pat our lord
god is grounde hym selfe of whom
our prayer spryngeth: And also
pat we know not: p't it is 3euen
vs by his grace of his grete
and tender loue: for yf we
knewe this: it wolde make vs
trust to haue of our lordis 3e7te:
all pat we defyre: for I am
sury pat no man pat a[s]kyth mer
ency & grace w't true menyng,
but mercy & grace be fyrst 3eue:

vnto hym: But somme tymes it
commyth to oure mende pat we
haue prayed long tymes: & 3et
we thynke pat we haue not
oure a[s]kyng: but here fore
fulde: not we be heuy: for I am
sury by oure lordis menyng: pt
eyther we abyde: a better time.
or more grace: or else a better
3e7te: He wyll pat we haue
trewa knowyng in hym selfe.
pat he is beyng. And in thys
knowyng he wyll pt our vndir
stondyng be grounded w't all our
myghtis: all our entent: & all
oure menyng: And in thys
grounde he wyll pt we take our
not as much as we pray, we do not
fully worship our Lord in our
prayer, and also we tarry and pain
our self. And the cause is, I
believe, that we know not truly
that our lord God is ground
himself of whom our prayer
springs. And also that we know
not, that it is given to us by his
grace of his great and tender love.
For if we knew this, it would
make us trust in having our Lord's
gift, all that we desire.
For I am sure that no man that
asks mercy and grace with true
meaning, but mercy and grace be
first given
to him. But sometimes it comes to
our mind that we have prayed a
long time, and yet we think that
we have not our request. But
therefore we should not be heavy.
For I am sure by our Lord's
meaning, that either we wait for a
better time, or more grace, or else
a better gift.
He wills that we have true
knowing in himself, that he is
being. And in this knowing he will
that our understanding be
grounded with all our might, all
our intent and all our meaning.
And in this ground he wills that
we take our
home and our dwelling, and by the gracious light of himself,\(^1\) he wills that we have understanding of three things. The first is your noble and excellent making.\(^2\) The second is, the precious and dear worthy again buying.\(^3\) The third is, that all things that he has made beneath us, to serve us, he for our love keeps them.\(^4\)

Then he means this, as if he said, 'Behold and see that I have done all this, before your prayer, and now you are and pray to me.'\(^5\) And this our lord God means, that it belongs to us to know that the greatest deeds are done, as Holy Church teaches. And in the self, to our souls we have that we desire. And then—\(\text{we see not for the time what more we should pray, but all our intent, with all our might is set wholly into the beholding of him.}\(^1\)

And this is a high and unperceivable prayer, to my sight. For all the cause why we pray is oned into the sight and the beholding of him to whom we pray, marvelously enjoying with reverent dread and such great sweetness and delight in him that we can not pray
for anything but as he stirs us to at the time. And well I know the more the soul sees of God, the more it desires him by grace. But when we see him not so, then feel we the need and cause to pray, for failing and for enabling of our self to our lord Jesus.

For when a soul is tempested and troubled, and left to itself, then is the time to pray, to make itself supple and compliant, but it, by no manner of prayer, makes God supple to him, for he is ever alike in love. And thus I saw, that that ti-

me we see need wherefore when we pray, then our lord God follows us helping our desire. And when we of his special grace plainly behold him seeing no other needs, then we follow him and he draws us into him by love. For I saw and felt that his marvellous and his fulsome goodness fulfils all other strength.

And therewith I saw that his continuing working in all manner of things is done so godly, so wisely and so mightily that it pleases all our imagining, and all that we can mean and think. And then
we can do no more but behold

hym & enioyng w† a myghti
defyre to be all onydy in to hym
and entendre to his wowyng
and enioyng in his loue and
delyts in his goodnes. And pus
by his ßwete grace ßshall we
in oure owne meke contynuyng
prayer communuyng vnto hym
now in pis lyf by many pre
uey touchyngis of ßwete go†
ly fgyhtis & fleyng mefured to
vs. as oure ßsymplenes may
beer it. And this is wroght
& ßshall be- by pe grace of pe
holy go†: ßfo longe till we
ßshall deye in longyng for loue.

And than ßshall we all come in
to our lord god our ßselfe clerely
knowynng: and god fulsomly
hauyng: and we endelesly be
had all in god: hym vereely
Þeyng & fulsomly fleyng: & hym
goostly felynge & hym goostly
derynge & deltyably ßmelyng:
and ßwetely ßwallowynge: and
thus ßshall we ßgod face to
face: ßhomly & ßfulsomly. The
creature pat is made ßshall se
and endelesly beholde god p†
is the maker: for pus may
no man ßgod and leue aftir-
that is to ßey in pis dedly lyf.
But whan he of his ßspecial grace

we can do no more but behold him
and enjoying with a mighty desire
to be all oned into him and listen
to his wooping1 and enjoying in his
love and delight in his goodnes.2
And thus by his sweet grace we
shall in our owne meek continuing
prayer coming to him now in this
life by many privy touchings of
sweet spiritual sights and feeling
measured to us, as our simpleness
may bear it.3 And this is wrought
and shall be, by grace of the Holy
Spirit, so long until we shall die in
longing for love.

And then shall we all come into
our Lord ourself clearly knowing,
and God fursomely having, and we
endlessly be had all in God, him
truly seeing and fursomely feeling,
and him spiritually hearing and
deflectably smelling, and sweetly
swallowing,1 and thus shall we see
God face to face, homely and
fursomely.

The creature that is made shall
see and endlessly behold God that
is the maker. For thus may no man
see God and live after,2 that is to
say in this deadly life. But when
he of his special
grace will show him here, he strengthens the creature above the self, and he measures the showing after his own will, as it is most profitable at the time.

Truth sees God, and wisdom beholds God, and of these two comes the third, and that is a marvelous holy delight in God, which is love. Where truth and wisdom is, truly there is love and truly coming of them both, and all of God's making. For God is endless sovereign truth, endless sovereign wisdom, endless sovereign love un-

made. And man's soul is a creature in God, which has the same properties made, and ever more does what it was made for. It sees God, and it beholds God, and it loves God, when God joys in the creature and the creature joys in God, endlessly marvelling. In which marvelling he sees his God, his lord, his maker so high, so great and so good in relation to himself who is made that without this the creature seems nought to itself, but the clearness and cleanness of truth and wisdom makes
hym to fe & to be known he
is made for loue in whiche
loue god endelesly kepth hym.  
Aljo he wyll pat we wet. p
oure joule is a lyf whiche lyf
of his goodnes & grace jhall
lefte in heuen w'oute ende hym
louyg hym thankynge &
hym prayinge. Aljo he wyll
pat we wet. pat pe nobleste
thyng pat euer he made is man
kynde & pe fulleste substance
and pe h yeft e vertue is pe blet
fed joule of criaste. And ferther
more he wyll p we know pat
pis dereworthy joule was pre
ciouly knytt to hym in the ma

kyng. Whiche knat is jo jotyl
and jo myghty pat it is oned
in to god in whiche onyng
it is made endelesly holyffer
ther more he wyll p we wet
& vnderfonde pat all p joulis
pat/ jhall be fauyd in heuen
w'oute ende be knyt in thys
knot & onydyd in pis onyng-
and made holy in pis holynes.
and for grete endeles loue pat
god hath to all mankynde he
makith no departynge in loue be
twene pe blef joul e of criste
and pe leef joul e p jhall be fa
uyd for it is well eafe to lyue
& to trowe p pe dwellyg of p
Also the Almighty truth of the Trinity is our Father, for he made us and keeps us in him. And the deep wisdom of the Trinity is our Mother, in whom we are all enclosed, and he is in us. All mighty, all wisdom, and all goodness, one God, one Christ.

XIV

Our soul is made to dwell in God. The dwelling place of our soul is in Christ. Christ, the Lord's Christ, is our life in God, and the dwelling of our soul in the Lord's Christ is man's duty. And the dwelling of our soul is in Christ, where the substance of all the souls that shall be saved by the glorious godhead and faith in the blessed soul of Christ is full high in the glorious godhead. And truly as I understand in our Lord's meaning, where be blessed souls, this is the substance of all Christ's, there is substance of all Christ's, and we ought to enjoy in our soul and much more highly we ought to enjoy in our soul, which is in made / A high understanding it is inwardly to see and to know that God which is in made.
Lord and one goodness. Also, I saw that Christ, having us all in him, that shall be saved by him, worshipfully presents his Father in heaven with us. Which present, well thankfully his Father receives and courteously gives it to his son Jesus Christ. Which gift and working is joy to the Father and bliss to the Son and liking to the Holy Spirit. And of all things that belong to us, it is most liking to our Lord that we enjoy in this joy, which is in the blessed Trinity of our salvation.

Also I saw full surely that it is readier to us and more easy to come to the knowing of God than to knowing of our own soul. For our soul is so deep grounded in God and so endlessly treasured that we may not come to the knowing thereof until we have first knowing of God which is the maker to whom it is oned. But, notwithstanding, I saw that we have naturally of fullness to desire wisely and truly to know our own soul, whereby we are taught to seek it where it is, and that is in God, and thus by the gracious leading of the holy
gooste we shulde knowe them
bothe in oon whether we be
stered to knowe god. or our selfe
foole it ar bothe good & trewe:
5
God is nere to vs pan owre
owne foule for he is grounde
in whom oure foule stondyth:
and he is mene pat kepith pe
substance pe senfulyte toge

der, so pat it shal neuer depart.
for oure foule fyttith in god. in
verye reste. and oure foule stan
dith in god in sure stength. &
oure foule is kyndely rooted in
god. in endelesse loue. & perfere
yf we wyll haue knowynge
of oure foule. & communyang & da

liance per with: It behouyth
to seke into oure lord god in
whom it is enclojyd. And an
\[P118^v\]
mentis oure substance it may
rightfully be called oure foule:
and anentis our senjualite it
may rightfull be called oure
foule: and pat it is by pe onyng
pat it hath in god. That wur
\[A112.15\]
yhpfull cite pat our lord ihesu
fytith in it is our senjualite:
in whiche he is enclojed: and
our kyndely substance is beclo
fyd in ihesu criste: w\[1\] pe bleffec
foule of criste fytyng in reste
in pe godhed: And I awfe ful
surely pat it behouyth nedis

101

Spirit, we should know them both
in one, whether we be guided to
know God, or our own soul, both
are good and true.

God is nearer to us than our own
soul, for he is ground in whom our
soul stands, and he is the means
that keeps the substance and the
sensuality together so that it shall
never depart.\[1\] For our soul sits in
God, in true rest, and our soul
stands in God in sure strength, and
our soul is naturally rooted in
God, in endless love.\[2\] And
therefore if we will have knowing
of our soul, and communing and
day

liance\[1\] therewith, it is right to seek
into our lord God in whom it is
enclosed.

And then our substance may
rightfully be called our soul, and
then our sensuality may rightfully
be called our soul, and that is by
the oneing that it has in God. That
worshipful city that our lord Jesus
sits in,\[2\] it is our sensuality, in
which he is enclosed, and our
natural substance is beclosed in
Jesus Christ, with the blessed soul
of Christ sitting in rest in the
Godhead.\[3\]

And I saw full surely that it is
right
that we shall be in longing and in penance, until the time that we be led so deep in to God that we may verily and truly know our own soul. And truly I saw that into this great deepness our Lord himself leads us in the same love that he made us, and in the same love that he bought us, by his mercy and grace through virtue of his blessed Passion.

And notwithstanding all this we may never come to the full knowing of God, until we first know clearly our own soul. For until the time that it be in the full strength we may not be all fully holy. And that is that our sensuality by the virtue of Christ’s Passion be brought up into the substance with all the profits of our tribulation that our Lord shall make us to get by mercy and grace.

Also, as truly as God is our Father, so as truly God is our Mother. And that he shows in all and namely in these sweet words, where he says, ‘I it am’. That is to say, ‘I it am, the might and goodness of Fatherhead; I it am, the wisdom and the kindness of Motherhood; I it am, the light and the grace, that
is all blessed love; I it am,¹ the Trinity; I it am, the Unity; I it am, the high sovereign goodness of all manner of things;² I it am, that makes you to love; I it am, that makes you to long, the endless fullness of all true desires'.

For there the soul is highest, noblest and worthiest, where it is lowest, meekest and mildest. And of this substantial ground we have all our virtues in our sensuality by right of nature, and by helping and granting mercy and grace without which we may not profit.

Also Jesus Christ, the Second Person in the Trinity

in whom is the Father and the Holy Spirit,¹ he is truly our Mother in nature of our first making. And he is our true Mother in grace, by taking of our made nature.²

I understand three manners of beholding of Motherhead in God. The first is ground of our natural making. The second is taking of our nature, and there begins the Motherhead of grace. The third is Motherhead of working and therein is a spreading forth by the same grace of length and of breadth, of height and of deepness without end.³
and all is oon love. But now

me behouyth to fely a litle more

of this furthe spreading. As I

vnderonde in pe menynges

of oure lorde: how pe we be

brought ayen by pe moderhed

of mercy & grace into oure kyndely

fledes: Where pe we wer made

by pe moderhed of kynde loue:

whiche kynde loue pe never leuith

vs. Oure kynde moder our gra-

cious moder: for he wolde all

wholy become our moder in

all ping: He toke pe grounde

of his werke full lowe & full

myldely in pe maydens wombe-

takyng flefhe of her redy in

And all is one love.

But now I ought to say a little
more of this spreading forth.1 As I
understand, in the meaning of our
Lord, how that we are brought
again by the Motherhead of mercy
and grace into our natural state,
where we were made by the
Motherhead of kind love, which
natural love that never leaves us.
Our kind Mother, our gracious
Mother, for he would all wholly
become our Mother in all things.2
He took the ground of his work
full lowly and full mildly in the
Virgin's womb, taking flesh of
her,3 ready in

oure pore flefhe hym felfe to do

pe feryuce and pe ofifice of moder

hed in all thyng: the moder

feryuce: is nerefle rediefte and

furefte: It is nerefle: for it ys

of kynde: rediefte: for it is moft

of loue: and furefte: for it is of

trewth: This office ne myght

coude neuer non do to pe

full: but cripte ihesu god and

man alone: We knowe wel

pat all oure moderere vs wte

peyne & to deyeng: but our

verey moder ihesu he alone

beryth vs to ioy & to bleyfye:

and endele lyung, bleffed

moft he be. Thus he jufteyn

our poor flesh himself to do the

service and the office of

Motherhead in all things.1

The mother's service is nearest,
readiest and surest. It is nearest,
for it is natural, readiest, for it is
most of love, and surest for it is of
truth. This office might nor could
anyone ever do to the full, but
Christ Jesus, God and Man alone.2
We know well that all our mothers
bear us with pain and for dying.3
But our true Mother Jesus, he
alone bears us to joy and to bliss,
and endless living, blessed must he
be.

Thus he sustains
us within him in love. And travailed into the full time that he
would suffer the sharpest throes and the most grievous pains that
ever were or ever shall be, and died at the last and when he had
done and so borne us to bliss, yet might not all this be enough to his
marvellous love. And that showed he in these high overpassing words
of love, 'If I might suffer more I would suffer more'.

He might no more die, but he would not cease working.
Therefore then he needs must feed us,

for the dear worthy love of Motherhead has made him debtor
to us. The mother may give her child to suck her milk, but our
precious Mother Jesus, he may feed us with himself, and does full
courteously and full tenderly with the blessed sacrament of his body
and blood that is precious food of very life. And with all the sweet
sacraments he sustains us well mercifully and graciously.

And so meant he in these gracious words, where he says, 'I
am the true vine, the Father is the husbandman and I am the
true grafter, I, the holy church preaches to you. That is to say

105

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105v

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And so meant he in these gracious words, where he says, 'I
am the true vine, the Father is the husbandman and I am the
true grafter, I, the holy church preaches to you. That is to say
all pe helthe & pe lyf of sacra mentis: all pe vertue & pe grace of my worde: all pe goodnes 
pat is ordeyned in holy church 
to pe it am: The moder may 
ley her chylde tenderly to her 
breste: but oure tender lorde 
hesu he may homly lede vs to his 
blessed breaste by his swete open 
fyde: and he swe vs there in par ty of his godhed: and pe joyes 
of heuene w't goatly furenefte 
of endeles blysse: that he newed 
he in thees swete words: wher 
he seyd./ loo, how I loued the 
holdynge into his fyde: enioyng
this feyrle louely worde: moder,

it is fo swete & fo kynde in it feffe: 
pat it ne may vereyly be seyd 
of noon: ne to noon: but to hym 
and of hym pat is verey mo 
der of fyfe & all: to the partes 
of modehed: belongyth kynde 
love wyjedom & knowyng: and 
it is god: for though it be fo 
pat oure bodyly furth brynging 
be but lytyll: lowe & fympel in 
rewarde of oure gojely furth 
brynger: yet it is he pat dothe 
it in the creature: by whom 
pat it is done: The kynde lo 
uynge moder pat wote and 
knowyth pe nede of her chylde,
She kepyth it full tenderly: as

it is so sweet and so natural in itself, that it may not not truly be said of anyone, not to no one, but to him and of him that is truly Mother of Life and all. To the property of Motherhead belongs natural love, wisdom and knowing, and it is God. For though it be so that our bodily bringing forth be but little, low and simple in reward of our spiritual forthbringer, yet it is he that does it in the creature, by whom that it is done.

The natural loving mother that understands and knows the need of her child; she keeps it full tenderly, as
the kynde & condicion of moder- 

ished wyll- and euer as it wex 

ith in age & in stature fo she 

chaungith her wurkyng- but 

not her loue- and whan it is 

waxed of more age- she fuf 

ferith/ it to be cha[t]yf d in bre 

kyng downe of vicis to make 

pe chylde to rejceyue vertues 

& grace- This workyng with 

all oper pat be good our lord 

doeth in them by whom it is 

done- Thus he is our moder in 

kynde by pe wurkyng of grace 

in vs· lower partith for loue 

of the hygher- And he whiche 

pat we knowen it· for he wolde

107

the nature and condition of motherhead will. And ever as it grows in age and in stature so she changes her working, but not her love. And when it is grown of more age, she allows it to be chastised in breaking down of vices to make the child receive virtues and grace.¹ This working with all others that are good our Lord does in them by whom it is done. Thus he is our Mother in nature by the working of grace in us, separating the lower for love of the higher.

And he which we know it, for he would

107v

have all our love fastened to hym. And in pis I saw that all our debts that we owe by God’s bidding, to Fatherhead and Motherhead is fulfilled in true loving of God.² Which blessed love Christ works in us.

And this was showed in all, and namely in the high plentiful words where he said, ‘I it am, that you love’.³ And in our spiritual bringing forth he uses more tenderness in keeping without comparison, by as much as our soul is of more price in his sight. He kindles our understanding, he
addith oure weyes· he efyth
oure conscien· he confortith our
fos· he lyghtith our hart &
seyth vs in party knowynge
and louyng in his blessed god
hed· w· gracious mynde in his
manhed & his blessed passyon·
w· curtseys merueyllyng in his
high ouerpassyng goodnes· and
makyth vs to loue alle pat he
loyth· for his loue· and to be
payed w· hym & w· all pat he
dothe & in all his werkis· and
whan we fall haftily· he rey
fith vs by his louely bleslep·
& his gracious touchyng· and
when we be strengthened by his

fweyng· than we wyl
fully cho· hym by his grace to be
his seruantis & his louers las·
ly w· oute ende· And yet aftyr
pis he sufferith somme of vs to fall
more greuously & more
hard pan euer we dydde before·
as we thynkyth· & pen wen·
we pe whiche be not all wise·
pat all were nought pat we
haue begon· but pl· is not jo·
for it nedith vs to fall· & it
nedith vs to know it & to je it·
ffor yf we fall not· we shuld
not know how feble & how
wretched we be of oure sel·
And alfo it nedith vs to see our

aids our ways, he eases our conscience, he comforts our soul, he lightens our heart and gives us in part knowing and loving in his blessed Godhead, with gracious mind in his manhead and his blessed Passion, with courteous marvelling in his high overpassing goodness. And makes us to love all that he loves, for his love, and to be pleased with him and with all that he does and in all his works.

And when we fall hastily, he raises us by his lovely calling and his gracious touching, and when we are strengthened by his sweet working, then we wilfully choose him by his grace to be his servants and his lovers lastingly without end. And yet after this he allows some of us to fall more grievously and more hard than ever we did before, and then we think, who are not all wise, that all were nought that we have begun. But that is not so, for we need to fall, and it is necessary for us to know it and to see it. For if we do not fall, we should not know how feeble and how wretched we are of our own.
falling, for if we see it not, though we fail, it should not profit us. And commonly first we fall, and after we see it, and through that sight by the mercy of God are we low and meek.

The mother may suffer her child to perish, but our heavenly Mother Jesus Christ may never suffer us that are his children to perish for he is all mighty, all wisdom and all love. And so is no one but he, blessed must he be. Also often when our falling and our wretchedness is shown us, we are so much afraid and so greatly ashamed of

"Our self, that we scarcely know where we may hold us. But then our courteous Mother wills not that we flee away, for nothing were more loathsome to him, but he wills then that we use the condition of a child, for when it is diseased or afraid, then it runs quickly to his mother, and if it may do no more, it cries on the mother for help with all its might. So will our Lord that we do as a meek child, saying thus, "My kind Mother, my gracious Mother, my dear worthy Mother, have mercy on me. I have made"
self foul and unlike to you, and I may not nor can amend it, but with your help and grace. And if we feel us not eased then quickly, then be sure that he uses the condition of a wise mother. For if he sees that it is more profitable for us to weep and mourn, then he will suffer it with ruth and pity into the best time for love.

And he will then that we use the property of a child that ever more naturally trusts in the love of the mother in weal and in woe. And our lord God wills that we take strongly to the faith of holy

Church, and find there our dear worthy Mother in solace of true understanding with all the blessed common. For one singular person may often be broken as it seems to the self. But the whole body of Holy Church was never broken, nor ever shall be without end. And therefore a sure thing it is and good and gracious to will meekly, and mightily to be fastened and oned to our Mother Holy Church that is Christ Jesus. For the flood of mercy that is his dear worthy blood and precious water, it is plenteous to make us fair and clean, the blessed
wounds of our Saviour are open and joy to heal us. The sweet gracious hands of our Mother are ready and diligent about us. For he in all this working uses the true office of a kind nurse, that has nothing else to do, but to attend about the salvation of her child. It is the office of our lord Jesus Christ to save us. It is his worship to do it, and it is his will, we know it. For he wills that we love him sweetly and trust in him meekly and strongly. And this he showed in these gracious words, I keep you most.

surely'. Furthermore a natural child despair not of the mother's love, and naturally the child presumes not of itself, naturally the child loves the mother, each of them loves the other.

Also I had great desire and longing for God's gift to be delivered of this world and of this life. For often I beheld the woe that is here in this life, and the weal and the blessed being that is in heaven, and I thought sometimes, though there had been no pain in this life but the absence of our lord God, it was more than I might bear, and this made
me to moorne & beslyly to long.

And also myne owne wretched neffe, slouth & irkeneffe halpe perto. So pat me lyked not to lyue & to trauyle as me fell to do. And to all our curteis lord god answered for conforte & pa
cience: and jeyd pees wordis: Sodeynly pou shalt be taken fro all pi peyne: & fro/ all thy jeykeneffe: fro all pi dife: & fro all pi woo: and pou shalt cum vp a bouse: and pou shalt haue me to pi mede & rewarde: and pou shalt be fulfilled of ioye & of blyffe: and pou shalt neuer more haue no maner of peyne:

neper no maner of jeykeneffe:
no maner of my/Lykyng: ne no wantyng of wyll: but euer in ioye & blyffe w'outen ende. What shulde it pat greue the to suffer a whyle: sitthen it is my wyll & my wurship:

It is godis wyll that we jett the poynt of our pought in this bleffe behodyng: as often as we may: & as long:

neither any manner of sickness, nor manner of misliking, nor no wanting of will, but be ever in joy and bliss without end. What should it then grieve you to suffer a while, since it is my will and my worship'.

It is God's will that we set the point of our thought in this blessed beholding, as often as we may, and as long.
APPENDIX B

JOHN OF THE CROSS

The Dark Night
The Spiritual Canticle
The Living Flame

Centred on Love: The Poems of St John of the Cross,
translated by Marjorie Flower OCD, Varroville, NSW,

Pages 12-23.

The Dark Night

Songs of the soul that rejoices
at having reached the high state of perfection,
which is union with God,
by the path of spiritual negation.

So dark the night! At rest
and hushed my house, I went with no one knowing
upon a lover's quest
-- Ah, the sheer grace! -- so blest,
my eager heart with love aflame and glowing.

In darkness, hid from sight
I went by secret ladder safe and sure
-- Ah, grace of sheer delight!--
so softly veiled by night,
hushed now my house, in darkness and secure.

Hidden in that glad night,
regarding nothing as I stole away,
no-one to see my flight,
no other guide or light
save one that in my heart burned bright as day.
Surer than noonday sun,
guiding me from the start this radiant light
led me to that dear One,
waiting for me, well-known,
somewhere apart where no-one came in sight.

Dark of the night, my guide,
fairer by far than dawn when stars grow dim!
Night that has unified
the Lover and the Bride,
transforming the Beloved into him.

There on my flowered breast
that none but he might ever own or keep,
he stayed, sinking to rest,
and softly I caressed
my Love while cedars gently fanned his sleep.

Breeze from the turret blew
ruffling his hair. Then with his tranquil hand
wounding my neck, I knew
nothing: my senses flew
at touch of peace too deep to understand.

Forgetting all, my quest
ended, I stayed lost to myself at last.
All ceased: my face was pressed
upon my Love, at rest,
with all my cares among the lilies cast.
The Spiritual Canticle

Songs between the Soul and the Bridegroom

Bride:
My Love, where are you hidden?
Why have you left me sorrowing alone?
I followed you unbidden,
but like a stag you'd flown:
wounded, I called, but you, my Love, were gone.

Shepherds, if you should find him
as you go through the sheepfolds to the hill,
him I love most, remind him -
heartsick, I grieve and will
die of my grief, for pain of love can kill.

In search of love I'll go
beyond the mountains, lowlands, far away,
no fear of wild beasts know,
to gather flowers not stay;
no fortress or frontier will bar my way!

O forests, wooded bowers
planted by that dear hand I love so well,
meadows studded with flowers
gem-like in verdant dell,
if you have seen him pass, I pray you, tell!

Creation's Answer:
A thousand blessings casting
among these leafy groves he hastened by,
his passing glance a lasting
beauty imposed, his eye,
his face alone clothed them with harmony.

Bride:
Ah, who can heal my sorrow!
In true surrender yield to me, most dear,
and send me from tomorrow
no envoys who appear
and cannot tell me what I long to hear!
All those who come and go
freely, speak of your graciousness, but they
wound worst of all, and though
it leaves me dying, stay
and stammer - what? - I know no way to say.

Life, how can you continue
a life that's death-in-life, with no reprieve?
Death near - embedded in you
by arrows you receive
from what your Love within makes you conceive.

This heart you have enraptured -
why leave it sorely wounded? Why not heal?
Taken by force and captured,
Beloved, I appeal -
why not bear off the prey you swooped to steal?

Quench all my grief! Draw near!
Your touch alone brings comfort in my plight.
Light of my eyes, appear!
You are indeed their light,
and for your sake alone I guard my sight.

Show me your face, my Lover,
even though beauty seen unveiled should kill,
let it be so! Discover
your presence, if you will,
at once the cause and cure of all my ill.

O crystal spring clear-shining,
if on your silver surface could appear
those eyes for which I'm pining -
suddenly, and quite near! -
whose image printed deep within I bear.

Turn them away, my Love!
I'll fly from here!

**Bridegroom:**
Return, small dove, alight!
For on the hill above
the wounded stag in sight
finds freshness from the fanning of your flight.
**Bride:**

My Love's a mountain range,
deep lonely valleys, wooded down below,
far islands, rare and strange,
streams singing as they flow,
whisper of loving breezes, soft and low.

My Love's the hush of night
so still when dawn steals softly through the skies,
solitude's sounding might,
silent music, delight
of love-feast that consoles and gratifies.

Our vines with blooms are bright,
so drive the little foxes far from here.
With roses clustered tight
we'll make a bunch, my dear,
while on the hillside no-one must appear.

Cold northern wind, cease blowing!
Come, warm wind of the South, awakening Love,
breathe through my garden, flowing
with fragrance as flowers move
where my Beloved, pasturing, may rove.

You daughters of Judea,
dwell in the outskirts, do not seek to touch
our threshold, or draw near,
while amber sheds forth much
perfume among the flowers and roses here.

Hide yourself now, my dearest,
and turn your face unto the mountains; say
not a word, see her nearest
companions, those who stay
with her and sail to strange isles far away.

**Bridegroom:**

Birds on a lilting wing,
lions and harts, does leaping feather-light,
mounts, valleys, waves that sing
sad songs, winds, flames alight,
dread rulers of the watches of the night,
I call upon you all
by melodies of lyre and siren songs,
let now your angers fall
and do not touch the wall;
wake not my Bride from sleep for which she longs.

At last the Bride has entered
the garden of her heart’s desire, a place
wherein to rest, all centred
on Love, whose arms embrace
her neck, the while he gazes on her face.

Beneath the apple tree
there did you come to plight your troth, and I
gave my hand, set you free,
redeemed, betrothed to me
there where your ravished mother learned to die.

Bride:

A thousand shields surround
our flowered bed with glint of brightest gold,
brave lions all around;
peace is its root and ground
and kingly purple tapestries enfold.

Young maidens follow, yearning
to find the sandal-prints where you have trod,
the well-spiced wine, the burning
spark, whose quick touch is turning
the heart to wax, but filled with things of God.

In secret cellar deep
I drank of my true love, then to the plain
went forth, as one asleep,
knew nothing, joy or pain,
and of the flock I followed none remain.

His heart he gave me there,
most sweet and secret knowledge there revealed,
and casting all my care
on him, nothing concealed,
I gave myself as bride, my promise sealed.
Surrendered now my soul,
all that was mine yielded to him as Lord,
no flock I guard, my whole
service is love outpoured;
love is my task and love my one reward.

Tell them, if from today
I am not seen or heard on common ground,
tell them I lost the way,
love-stricken, roamed around;
for love I lost myself, and I was found.

With emeralds green-glowing
and flowers gathered in cool morning air,
let us wreath garlands showing
your love, your tender care,
all intertwined with one thread of my hair.

With but a single hair!
Upon my neck you watched it flutter, fall,
your gaze held captive there,
a prisoner in thrall:
one glance of mine wounded you past recall.

You looked with love on me,
and deep within your eyes imprinted grace;
this mercy set me free,
held in your love's embrace,
to lift my eyes, adoring, to your face.

Let none despise me now:
if you have found me dark, am I not fair?
Your look that can endow
all things, sought me - see how
your eyes on me left grace and beauty there!

**Bridegroom:**
The little snow-white dove
back to the ark with olive branch has flown.
The mate she sought, her Love,
on verdant banks, alone,
this turtle-dove found, and is now his own.

In solitude she lives,
and there in solitude has built her nest;
in solitude he gives
her guidance, love, and rest,
wounded, like her, in solitary quest.
Bride:
Rejoicing, let us go
and see ourselves in your own beauty; wait
at mountain heights where flow
purest of streams, and know
more of the woods we deeper penetrate.

Beloved, we'll go then
among the high rock caverns unsurpassed,
lofty and far from men,
there enter, hidden fast,
and taste new pomegranate wine at last.

There you'll reveal to me
all that my soul has longed for on the way -
you, Love, my life will be! -
there give without delay
the gift you gave to me that other day.

Soft breathing of the air,
sweet song of nightingale above the plain,
the graceful thicket, where
a night serene and fair
brings flame that burns, consuming with no pain.

No-one was there to see,
Aminadab's last battles now were ended;
raised was the siege and free
the place; the cavalry
at sight of waters peacefully descended.
The Living Flame

Flame, living flame, compelling,
yet tender past all telling,
reaching the secret centre of my soul!
Since now evasion's over,
finish your work, my Lover,
brake the last thread, wound me and make me whole!

Burn that is for my healing!
Wound of delight past feeling!
Ah, gentle hand whose touch is a caress,
foretaste of heaven conveying
and every debt repaying:
killing, you give me life for death's distress.

O lamps of fire bright-burning
with splendid brilliance, turning
deep caverns of my soul to pools of light!
Once shadowed, dim, unknowing,
now their strange new-found glowing
gives warmth and radiance for my Love's delight.

Ah! gentle and so loving
you wake within me, proving
that you are there in secret and alone;
your fragrant breathing stills me,
your grace, your glory fills me
so tenderly your love becomes my own.
APPENDIX C

THE WRITINGS OF JOHN OF THE CROSS


Toledo Prison (1578)

The Spiritual Canticle (poem, 31 stanzas)
For I Know Well the Spring (poem)
The Romances: On the Gospel text “In principio erat Verbum” (poem)
On the psalm “Super flumina Babylonis” (poem)

Calvario – Beas – Baeza (1578-81)

The Dark Night (poem, 1578 or 1579)
The Sketch of the Mount
The Sayings of Light and Love
The Precautions
Counsels to a Religious
The Ascent of Mount Carmel (treatise, 1581-85)
Additions to the Spiritual Canticle (poem); other poems (1580-84)

Granada (1582-88)

The Spiritual Canticle (commentary in a first redaction, 1584)
The Dark Night (commentary 1584-85)
The Living Flame of Love (poem, 1584)
Last poems in Granada (1585)
The Living Flame of Love (commentary in a first redaction, 1585-86)
The Spiritual Canticle (commentary in a second redaction, 1585-86)

La Peñuela (1591)

The Living Flame of Love (commentary in a second redaction)

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