

Dear reading group and friends, **please bathe in these wonderfully healing reflections** by Julian and her scholar, Veronica Mary Rolf. Then come reading on in our Julian sharing after coffee this Sunday, August 3. Below is the posting in this group you might choose to hear from and talk to...See you Sunday and perhaps Wed, at midweek Eucharist.

"In her reflections on the **Fourteenth Revelation, Julian of Norwich** writes:

And thus in our creation God almighty is our natural father, and God all wisdom is our natural mother, with the love and the goodness of the holy ghost, who is all one God, one lord. And in the knitting and in the oneing he is our very true spouse, and we are his beloved wife and his fair maiden, with which wife he was never displeased. For he says: "I love thee and thou lovest me, and our love shall never be separated in two."

Julian does not treat God's Motherhood merely as a *metaphor* for divine wisdom, kindness, compassion, authority, or justice. Neither does she speak of God's maternity as an apt *simile*, inferring that Christ is "like" an earthly mother. She considers the Motherhood of the Son of God as perfectly equal to the Fatherhood: *existentially*, God *is* our Mother as truly as God *is* our Father. In fact, God's Motherhood is not a metaphor at all. For Julian, it is divine Revelation.

Theological Risk

One cannot underestimate the theological risk that Julian took, as an uneducated layperson, in developing a theology of the Motherhood of God. She stretched the maternal analogy far beyond the earlier monastic and devotional traditions. To her way of thinking, there is absolutely no reason why God is

not *equally* Father and Mother. By the knitting and *oneing* to humanity that is effected through the incarnation, Christ becomes our true Spouse, and we, his beloved wife (not to mention his dearest children). In the course of her exposition, Julian will have no qualms about interchanging gender references for Christ, referring to him repeatedly as “our mother” and then, in the same sentence, using the pronoun, “he.” Julian’s creative use of language enables her to consider Christ “double,” just as she learned to see the lord and the servant “double.”

Christ is *both* our Mother and our Spouse (although Julian never mentions experiencing a mystical “espousal,” as do Catherine of Siena and Margery Kempe). Likewise, all of humanity is his “beloved wife” and “fair maiden.” And the human wife is assured that this Spouse is “never displeased. . .” Whether considering Christ as Mother or Christ as Spouse, Julian attests that the words said to the human soul at its creation are the same: “I love you. And you love me. And nothing can break that love.” She strongly implies: *not even sin. . . .*

It Am: Mother

As truly as God is our father, as truly is God our mother. And that he shewed in all the revelations, and namely in these sweet words where he said: “I it am.” That is to say: “I it am, the might and the goodness of the fatherhood. 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, the trinity. I it am, the unity. I it am, the high sovereign goodness of all manner of thing. I it am that maketh thee to love. I it am that maketh thee to long. I it am, the endless fulfilling of all true desires.”

Julian declares that all the Revelations bore witness to God’s Motherhood being equal to the Fatherhood, most especially, when Christ said: “I it am” in the Twelfth Revelation. Now Julian adds to

the previous litany of meanings that she intuited from Christ's words. She writes an outpouring song of the Divine "I AM." Whatever is good, Christ is that. And because Christ is all that is good, he *is* Motherhood itself, in its myriad aspects of wisdom, kindness, light, and love. Where Christ is, there is Trinity, unity, the highest good in everything. Most personally, Christ's Motherhood teaches Julian herself to love and to long, and then fulfills all her truest desires. (It also enabled her to become a mother.)

Julian adds that the soul's substantial being, which is so high and noble and honorable when considered on its own, is extremely low, meek, and mild before the majesty of Christ's united divine and human natures. The Father, "who is being," knew and loved us from before time began. And out of this wisdom and love, in union with the whole Trinity, the Father ordained that the second person should become "our mother, our brother, and our savior."

Our father wills, our mother works, our good lord the holy ghost strengthens. And therefore it belongs to us to love our God in whom we have our being, reverently thanking and praising him for our creation, mightily praying to our mother for mercy and pity, and to our lord the holy ghost for help and grace.

Julian sees that in these three, Father, Mother, and Holy Spirit, "is all our life: nature, mercy, and grace . . ." And from these three, we receive the virtues of meekness, mildness, patience, and pity, all conducive to living a holy life. We also learn to hate sin and wickedness, which we need to do if we would be virtuous. Julian clarifies that Jesus is the true Mother of our *original* human nature through the creation. Jesus is also the true Mother of our *restored* human nature through the incarnation, when he took on our humanity and suffered his passion and death.

All the fair working and all the sweet natural function of dearworthy motherhood is appropriated to the second person. For in him we have this godly will, whole and safe without end, both in nature and in grace, from his own proper goodness.

Julian understands three ways of beholding Motherhood in God: first, in the ground of our human creation when God gave us birth; second, in the assuming of our sensual human nature when Christ begins his “motherhood of grace”; and third, in the “motherhood of working,” by which grace spreads itself abroad “in length and breadth, in height and in depnesse,” covering everything that is, without end. And these various manifestations of God’s motherly love are *all one love*.

A Mother’s Love

Julian feels compelled to explain how we are brought back “by the motherhood of mercy and grace” into our pristine natural state, in which we were first created “by the motherhood of essential love,” a love that never leaves us. Christ, Mother of our nature and Mother of grace, wanted to become our Mother in all things. He chose as the ground of his divine work the humble and gentle womb of the maiden. Julian comments that she saw this in the First Revelation, when Mary was revealed to the eye of her mind “in the simple stature that she had when she conceived,”
Stunningly, Julian interprets the fact of the incarnation as the maternal desire of the most exalted Wisdom of God *to become our Mother in physical form*. Christ arrayed and prepared himself in our poor flesh in the maiden’s womb precisely so that he could “do the service and the office of motherhood in all thing. . .”

NOTE: Quotations translated from the Middle English and excerpts above are from my book, ***Julian’s Gospel: Illuminating the Life & Revelations of Julian of Norwich*** (Orbis Books).