"AND YET I STOND": POSTURE AND CONTEMPLATIVE THEOLOGY IN JULIAN OF NORWICH'S *REVELATIONS OF DIVINE LOVE*

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ABSTRACT

Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love* engages extensively with the representation and experience of the human body, including the author's own experience of illness. This article argues that bodily posture helps Julian to understand the relationship between the physical body and the highly abstract, theologized body of the servant in the famous lord and servant parable, who suffers pains that bear a striking similarity to Julian's own. The article also argues that Julian's use of posture constitutes a "postural theology" traceable to works of contemplative theology from earlier in the Middle Ages (e.g., Gregory the Great) and to her contemporary Christine de Pizan.
KEYWORDS: posture, contemplation, Gregory the Great, Christine de Pizan, scripture

Lance Look thee, I'll but lean, and my staff understands me.
Speed It stands under thee indeed.
Lance Why, "stand under" and "understand" is all one.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona, act 2, scene 5

Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love* is one of the most detailed and self-reflective witnesses to contemplation in Middle English. It survives in two authorial versions, a Short Text and a Long Text, that together give an increasingly sophisticated account of contemplation as a distinct feature of the Christian life. In the late medieval period, contemplation was understood as "the soul's penetrating and easy gaze on things perceived"; more recently and even more succinctly, Bernard McGinn has defined it as "attentive regard for God alone."[1] The purpose of the contemplative life was to cultivate this singular attentiveness to God, and it demanded a special ethical framework.

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One of the chief ethical principles elaborated by works of contemplative theology is the monastic virtue of *stabilitas* (stability). Derived from the Rule of St. Benedict, *stabilitas* names the self-discipline of commitment to a particular place, and it applied to men and women undertaking a variety of ascetic practices, not just those in monasteries: The early Middle English guide *Ancrene Wisse*, for example, makes it clear that for anchorites such as Julian, *stabilitas* means literal, physical confinement to a cell.[2] But *stabilitas* also denoted the internal state of contemplative attunement, a "stability of heart [that] complements [the anchoress's] stability of abode."[3] This essay argues that Julian's *Revelations* develops a heretofore unnoticed account of contemplative *stabilitas*. This account builds over the course of Julian's composition and revision of the work and is most fully formed in her exegesis of the parable of the lord and servant, chapter 51 of the Long Text. Julian sees the servant as a contemplative and, through identification with him, highlights the wound of desire that they have in common. Let me explain.

The rhetorical tissue connecting physical (or locational) *stabilitas* and the more internalized, abstract mode of this virtue was the shape of the human body—that is, posture. Ancient and premodern thought searched for order and understanding in the cosmos (Plato) or in God (Christianity) rather than through, say, Cartesian introspection; for medieval contemplatives, God was in some sense "above" the sublunary realm.[4] Upright posture or stance provided contemplative theorists with a rich symbolism through which to describe the projection of vision and hearing "toward the horizon."[5] It was also a visual trope for humanity's ontological priority among the animals, an emblem of its unique vocation. Indeed, the connection between contemplation and upright posture was usually not so much argued for as it was assumed; uprightness seemed to express, almost without loss or remainder, the special discipline of which humanity alone was capable.

The parable of the lord and servant, perhaps the most theologically significant passage in the whole work, tells of an eager servant who falls into a ditch while attempting to do his lord's bidding.[6] Julian understands this parable, which she sees in a vision, as a representation of Genesis 3. By the late Middle Ages, under the influence of Augustine, Genesis 3 was normatively interpreted as the beginning of human sinfulness; Thomas Aquinas writes in the *Summa theologiae*, "According to the Catholic Faith we are bound to hold that the first sin of the first man is transmitted to his descendants, by way of origin."[7] Prompted by a "techyng inwardly" to reexamine "all the propertes and condition that weryn shewid in the example,"

Julian dwells at length on the two figures' postures.[8] But precisely what she fails to see in the parable is the origin of sin. The absence of any profound moral or ontological loss renders the servant's fall radically open to interpretation, and while some scholars have read the parable as a version of the felix culpa—that is, that the evil of sin led to the greater good of God's incarnation in Christ—I will advance the view that Julian sees the servant as an allegory for her own experience of the contemplative life.[9] The basis for this claim is the close similarity between the injuries sustained by the parable's servant and Julian's own body, which has been severely weakened when we first meet her at the beginning of the *Revelations*. Lying in bed, unable to stand, she asks to be "sett upright . . . for to have more fredom of . . . herte to be at Gods will" (3.12–13), a request that resonates with the incapacitation of the servant, who "ne may risen ne helpyn hymself be [by] no manner wey" (51.12–13). Both Julian and the fallen servant are wounded by a desire for contemplative sight, which they seek to embody through an ascetical practice of upright stance.

In the devotional culture of the Middle Ages, posture was a crucial means of disciplining the sinful body: On Good Friday, for instance, congregants approach the cross on their knees in penitence for their imagined abandonment of Christ.[10] Yet little sustained attention has been paid to the specific rhetorical and theological functions of posture in major works of theology and spirituality from this period.[11] What interests me in this essay is the use of posture as a rhetorical bridge between physical regimes such as creeping toward the cross, or anchoritic enclosure, and the inner lives of ascetic theologians, whose *stabilitas* is both bodily and intellectual. Julianists in particular have been divided on the relation between these: As Jessica Barr observes, studies tend to argue "either that the *Showings* is a work of intellectual theology or that Julian's theology is a theology of the body, centered upon physical experiences and vivid images of blood, wombs, and the suffering Christ."[12] Yet as Barr goes on to observe, Julian often "shuttles back and forth between these two modes."[13] One important but heretofore unnoticed avenue for that shuttling is the rhetorical figure of posture.

Other intellectual domains provide suggestive context for medievalists and theologians. The social psychologist Michael Argyle, for example, has studied the ways that posture structures human relationships and communicates internal states: "Dominance and status are shown by drawing up to full height, expanding the chest," etc., while "submission is shown by lowering the head, shrinking, and bowing."[14] In her recent book *Slouch: Posture*

Panic in Modern America, the historian of science Beth Linker argues that posture mediated moral discourse through much of the twentieth century. If we simply consider the moral overtones of the buzzy axion "Sitting is the new smoking," lately suggested by the Mayo Clinic physician James Levine, we can detect the lingering appeal of ascetic virtue by way of postural rhetoric.[15] Though clearly intended as a public-spirited health warning, the admonition to stand up more—at work, say, or even during one's leisure time at home—bespeaks the relevance in modernity of totalizing regimes, such as anchoritic enclosure, that operate in tandem on the body and the rhetorical structures of the mind.

Julian's identification with the fallen servant would help to explain Barr's important observation that, aside from isolated references to "Adam," the parable has little to say about gender. As we shall see, Julian's approach compares and contrasts interestingly with Christine de Pizan's discussion of creation in the *Book of the City of Ladies*, which uses posture as an emblem of prelapsarian equality between man and woman. The limited role of gender in chapter 51 also aligns it with other important changes to the Short Text, especially the deletion of Julian's apology for her gender, in which she seems to accept the common misogynist idea that women should not be teachers: "Botte God forbede that ye schulde saye or take it so that I am a techere, for I meene nought soo, no I mente nevere so. For I am a woman, leued, febille, and freylle" (S 6.34–5). This deletion, Barr suggests, might reflect Julian's newfound confidence in the interpretive role that she assumes in order to make her visions intelligible to a readership of "evencristen."[16] I would simply add that it might also reflect her growing confidence as a contemplative theologian within a late medieval English society that was witnessing a growth of interest in contemplative practice.[17]

The structure of the article is as follows: In the first section, I argue that human, bodily posture facilitated reflection on the relation between contemplation, the will, and natural inclination, which I distinguish from desire. Uprightness expressed the Christian-anthropological "truth" of human beings' orientation to the divine, but achieving uprightness was difficult, both physically and spiritually. The second section turns to a detailed account of contemplative will in the *Revelations of Divine Love*, which opens, famously, with the author on her deathbed. It argues that Julian extends the postural analysis of earlier works of contemplative theology, especially in her exegesis of the parable of the lord and servant. Yet what makes her exegesis so persuasive is the subtle incorporation of her own experience of desire into the text.

"STUD, BEHELD": POSTURE AND CONTEMPLATIVE THEOLOGY BEFORE JULIAN

Gregory the Great's monumental *Moralia in Iob* (late sixth cent.) depicts Adam "first and foremost as a contemplative."[18] The devotional and ethical purpose of the *Moralia* is to advance Gregory's ideal of the Christian life, one of detachment from the world and singular desire for God. The *Moralia* was widely read throughout the Middle Ages; when the printing press was invented, it was one of the first works to be printed.[19] McGinn writes that Gregory anchored his contemplative ideal "in the Christian story of creation, fall, and redemption in a more decisive way than those who went before him."[20] The rhetorical substrate of Gregory's representation of the creation and fall is a sustained postural metaphor. So in *Moralia* VIII, Gregory asserts that humans were created so "that they might rise inside the citadel of contemplation [arcem . . . contemplationis] with their minds alert [stante mente], and so that no corrupting influence might turn them aside [declinaret] from love of their creator."[21] Before the fall, there was upright stance. The passage narrates the fall from contemplative bliss with echoes of the verb *stare* (to stand) throughout, first in the form *stante*, then *standi*, then *stationis*. (In Bliss and Marriott's translation, the human mind is "erect" within the citadel of contemplation.[22]) Humans prove themselves unable to stand (*nec in se consistere potuit*) due to "slippery changeability" (*lubricae mutabilitatis*), which leads them to "action when they are at rest, and . . . leisure in the midst of occupation" (VIII.x.19, 166). This condition permits only intermittent contemplative sight, which is marred by the internal estrangement of the individual from herself (*infra se*) and a residual disunity of intention.

Postlapsarian man may, however, regain a measure of edenic, contemplative uprightness through an ascetical regime summed up in the term *stabilitas*. Carole Ellen Straw, glossing Gregory, observes that the soul possessed of *stabilitas* "stands as a citadel (*arx*)" because "its intention is unified and fixed in God."[23] The image of the citadel evokes the self-sufficiency expected of anchorites: Though not entirely cut off from the world, they were normally enclosed only after the local bishop had ensured that arrangements had been made for their long-term self-sustenance.[24] Yet the virtue was theological as well as material. Gregorian *stabilitas* denotes "more capacious and interior a reality than the communal and geographical fixity enjoined by Benedict's *Rule*," according to Jordan Joseph Wales; it is the rational soul's "participatory imitation" of the divine life through

contemplation.[25] In Wales's words, (human) bodily life "manifests and transmits outwardly the likeness of divine life to which one is inwardly conformed." The idealized shape taken by this bodily life is upright stance.

Adriana Cavarero observes that uprightness, or what she calls *rectitude*, has a history in Western philosophy that begins with Plato and extends to Kant. Its normal concomitant is a profound suspicion of *inclination*, or that "slippery changeability" to which Gregory attributes the loss of contemplation in Genesis. Like Gregory, these philosophers worry about "inclinations that are too impetuous and difficult to master."[26] As Cavarero points out, the etymological source of *inclination* is the Greek *klinè*, "bed," emblem of the lover's irresistible attraction to the beloved, but also the necessary support for a wounded or suffering body such as Julian's at the beginning of the *Revelations*. For Cavarero, the oblique line created by the image of maternal care—a mother leaning over her newborn child, for example—generates a recurring stereotype of femininity that contrasts with "the paradigm of the vertical axis, appropriated by man because of his inborn rationality": "He is straight, solid, autonomous, and autarchic. . . . By contrast, she is inclined, unbalanced, and pendant."[27]

I find Cavarero's geometric analysis useful for Christian contemplative writing because this genre was (and is) profoundly attuned to the relation between bodily form and theological insight. But medieval Christian thinkers did not associate upright, rational autarchy exclusively with masculinity. Consider, for instance, Christine de Pizan's *Book of the City of Ladies* (early fifteenth cent.); though not normally classified as contemplative theology, her personification of Reason "draws on a number of contemplative and philosophical tropes."[28] She interprets Genesis 2:21–22, on the creation of Eve, not as an allegory of subordination but as one of equality: "There Adam slept, and God formed the body of woman from one of his ribs, signifying that she should stand at his side as a companion and never lie at his feet *like a slave*."[29] Reason then links Eve's stance to redemption through the postural iconography of Mary at the scene of the crucifixion: "For as low as human nature fell through this creature woman, was human nature lifted higher by this same creature."[30] The postural analysis here restores not just "human nature" but also the equality of male and female stance that had obtained in Eden before the fall.

Marian posture was indeed crucial for vernacular reflection on contemplation. Many Middle English lyrics, for example, link her stance at the scene of the crucifixion to her exemplary act of contemplation.[31] In a

thirteenth-century paraphrase of the liturgical sequence *Stabat iuxta Christi crucem*, Mary's posture is mentioned twice in a stretch of six lines:

> Jesu Cristes milde moder
> Stud, biheld hire sone o rode
> That he was ipined on.
> The sone heng, the moder stud
> And biheld hire childes blud,
> Wu it of hise wundes ran.[32]

The repetition of "stud," which becomes prominent through the contrast with Christ's posture ("The sone heng"), mirrors the repetition of the word "biheld" in the same stanza. The second line drives the point home by erasing the syntactic difference between the two words: Standing and beholding are, simply, one and the same action. Julian evokes this Marian iconography in the eleventh revelation ("our gode Lord lokyd downe on the ryte syde and browte to my mynde where our Lady stode in the tyme of his passion" [25.1–2]), and, in an earlier chapter, she describes Mary as a model of beholding (7.1–8). Though she does not draw the metaphorical connection between posture and contemplation that she does in her analysis of the parable of the lord and servant, she is clearly attuned to a visual motif that would become more significant in the final stages of her revision. After all, like Mary, Julian pays close attention to the "childes blud."

Posture also embedded what we might call the anthropocentric dimension of contemplative theology—the specifically human prerogative to contemplate the divine. For example, Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* (early seventh cent.) represents upright posture as an expression of mankind's God-given contemplative telos. He derives his support for this point, however, from Ovid rather than from Genesis. Quoting a passage from the *Metamorphoses* ("While the rest of the stooping animals look at the ground, he gave the human an uplifted countenance, and ordered him to see the sky" [1.84]), Isidore translates this celestial gaze into theological terms: "And the human stands erect and looks toward heaven so as to seek God, rather than look at the earth, as do the beasts that nature has made bent over and attentive to their bellies."[33] As it does for Gregory, posture here emblematizes the human capacity to defy inclination, which Isidore evokes through the *ventri oboedientia* of the "beasts" (*pecora*). Yet, perhaps because Isidore is working in a classical rather than a biblical key, this passage makes no

direct reference to human beings' continued moral deficiency. This suggests that the asceticism of Gregorian contemplation does not require the Christian framework through which it is initially articulated; that, perhaps by way of anthropocentric reason, posture can break free from theology and enter new domains of inquiry such as philosophy, medicine, etc.

The most significant contemplative theorist in the century prior to Julian was arguably Richard Rolle. Rolle was intimately familiar with Gregory's *Moralia*, which he used as source material for what would become his *Super nouem lectiones mortuorum*, these *lectiones* being pericopes from the book of Job. So we should not be surprised that Rolle discusses *stabilitas* in terms of posture in *Ego Dormio*, one of his earliest Middle English treatises about spiritual perfection, which may have been written for the Richmondshire anchorite Margaret Kirkeby.[34] Rolle writes, "Ful entirely þe behoueth gif þi hert to Ihesu, if þou wil cum to þis degree of loue. Fro þou be þerin, þou hast no need afterward of no lykynge, of no liggynge, ne of bed, ne of worldes solace, bot euer þe wil list sit, þat þou be euer louynge thy Lord." [You must quite absolutely give your heart to Jesus if you want to reach this degree of love. As soon as you are in it you will have no subsequent need of any affection, nor any accommodation, not even a bed, nor of the comforts the world gives, but all the time you will want to be sitting so that you can be loving your lord.][35] Hard though it may be to imagine even greater self-abnegation than what Kirkeby would undergo through enclosure, Rolle recommends a practice of ascetic sitting that compares to the heroic feats of early Christian stylites. Rolle's exhortation resonates closely with guidance given by present-day teachers of contemplation, who may "point beginners to the need to sit upright in a particular space . . . and to synchronize one's breathing with one's heartbeat so that one may begin to attune oneself to God."[36] For these teachers as for Rolle, posture represents the contemplative subject's limited but crucial volition within an overall economy of inclination, here symbolized by the comfort of a bed. Sitting in particular seems to preempt the endless demands that the world can make on us, even on the enclosed contemplative.[37] Rolle notes in the *Form of Living*, also addressed to Kirkeby, that "þai er Goddes trone, þat dwelles still in a stede, and er noght abowte rennand, bot in swetnes of Cristes lufe er stabyld" [those who remain constantly in one place, not dashing about, but firmly established in the sweetness of the love of Christ, are indeed 'the throne' of God].[38] In short, the remedy for this tendency to dash about ("abowte rennand") is to plant oneself as firmly as possible on the ground.

Julian's achievement in chapter 51 of the *Revelations*, which tells the parable of the lord and servant, is to bring together the strands that I have

highlighted so far as part of a profoundly self-aware, ambitious theological experiment. Across its multiple stages of composition, the *Revelations* constructs a powerful ethical framework for contemplative life that is then crystallized in the parable, one of the last sections of the work to be completed. The parable suggests that contemplation originates in the fall of Adam and Eve, which it figures as a wound of potentially infinite desire. In parallel, the parable also incorporates Julian's own suffering, narrated at the beginning of the *Revelations*, into the ethical paradigm of contemplative desire.

"FREDOME OF HERTE": INCLINATION, DESIRE, AND CONTEMPLATION IN THE *REVELATIONS OF DIVINE LOVE*

Though Julian's work now exists in only two versions, there may have been at least three major stages in its composition. Barbara Newman has called these the A text, the B text, and the C text on an analogy with William Langland's *Piers Plowman*.[39] Newman's crucial insight is that between the two extant versions—the Short Text and the Long Text—there must have been an intermediate draft: The Long Text *minus* the so-called lord and servant interpolation, which makes up chapters 44 through 63 of the *Revelations of Divine Love*. Among other reasons and evidence she gives for this tripartite division is the table of contents in the C text, which outlines the work's sixteen showings, beginning with the "bodily sight" of the Passion that Julian had desired before her visions began in May 1373.[40] This table continues through the sixteenth revelation with no mention of the lord and servant or its framing chapters, suggesting that the parable was *added* to some earlier recension. Newman recommends that we call this version the B text.

Between the A and C texts, the *Revelations* grows substantially more attuned to the theological significance of posture. In the A text, Julian uses the verb *stonden* (or a variant thereof) in the first person precisely twice, and only once to describe herself. Tellingly, the other figures described as standing are her mother beside Julian's deathbed and the Virgin Mary beside Christ at the crucifixion. In the C text, however, Julian uses the same verb in the first person *fourteen* times; she also undertakes an extensive inquiry into the postures of the two figures in the parable of the lord and servant. While the difference certainly reflects the C text's length relative to A, it also signals a stronger rhetorical concern for the body as a site of theological (self-)understanding. If there is indeed a rhetorical link

between contemplation and posture such as I have argued for above, it seems plausible that Julian was increasingly willing to refer to *herself* as standing because, more and more, she saw herself as a contemplative.[41]

As I also have argued, contemplative writers used postural rhetoric at least partly because of its intuitive connection to the will: Contemplatives stand (or sit and then stand) in order to activate the human capacity for ascetic self-denial. In the very first version of her work, the A text, Julian recasts this idea as a tension between two *different* wills in everyone who is saved: a "goodely wille" that does not sin and resides in the "over partye" (the "upper part"), and a "bestely wille" that "may wille na good" and resides in the "nethere partye" (S 17.8–10).[42] To illustrate the point further, Julian notes that God has revealed to her "the holehed of luffe that *we stande in, in his sight*—ya, that he luffez us nowe als wele whiles we ere here as he schalle do when we ere thare before his blissid face" (12–13; my emphasis). The word *stande* in this context has a distinctly spatial resonance: Human beings are seen by God as if "before his . . . face." The image also anticipates the more concrete image of the servant standing "aforn the lord" in chapter 51, which I discuss below. *Stande* therefore triggers a postural interpretation of the preceding sentences about the two wills: The "goodely wille" located in the "over partye" of everyone who will be saved is revealed in and through their stance before God.

Julian's analysis chimes quite closely with a passage from William Flete's *The Remedy Against the Troubles of Temptations*. Flete's version makes the connection between the two wills and inclination explicit, summoning up the "oblique line" described by Cavarero: "every man and woman hath two wylles: a good wyll and an evyll. The evyll wyll cometh of sensualyte, *the which is ever inclynynge downwarde to synne* and the good wyll cometh of grace whiche alwaye styreth the soule vpwarde to all goodnes."[43] The second will is evil, at first blush, not because of sin but because subject to sensuality, which *inclines* the person toward cares and concerns that lead, it seems inevitably, to sin. The first will is good insofar as it turns someone "vpwarde," a geometric orientation that connotes stability and freedom.

We are now in a position to see the role of ascetic virtue in shaping our very earliest glimpse of Julian. Lying in her deathbed in S 2, Julian attests that, in the depths of her illness, she felt "dede fra the myddys downward" (2.15): She is unable to walk, a terrifying experience for one otherwise accustomed to being able to do so. As if in response to this, Julian next observes, "Than was I styrrede to be sette uppe ryghttes, lenande with clothes to my heede for to have the mare fredome of my herte to be atte Goddes wille" (2.16–17). Julian is now literally inclined, although it is neither physical

nor spiritual inclination against which Julian struggles here: Posture represents human volition in the face of that exigency from which neither human nor nonhuman animal can escape. Nevertheless, by making her torso partially "uppe ryghttes," Julian embodies the division between the two wills in S 17: Her "over partye" is now physically oriented toward God while her legs remain horizontal. As we learned in S 17, *all that God sees* is Julian's "over partye." Thus the modicum of volition ("fredome") that she has exercised allows her, theologically if not physically, to stand.

Julian develops this insight further in chapter 6 of the B text through more explicit attention to the anthropological aspect of posture. The chapter begins with a discussion of prayer by "menys"—that is, intermediaries such as Mary, the cross, or the saints—and contains the notorious "soule" crux, an enigmatic passage that hinges on the ambiguity of the Middle English word *soule*. Julian describes a process that scholars have interpreted variously as death (the "soule" leaving the body), the Eucharist, or simply defecation.[44] Most editors read "soule" as the Middle English word *sowl*—"something eaten with bread, such as meat, pottage, a sauce, etc.; food in general, nourishment"—and, concomitantly, the process described as the opening and closing of the human alimentary canal through digestion and excretion.[45] Without trying to settle this crux, I want to draw attention to the passage's opening reference to posture:

> A man goyth uppe ryght, and the soule of his body is sparyde as a purse fulle feyer. And whan it is tyme of his necessary, it is openyde and sparyde ayen fulle honestly. And that it is that he doyth this, it is schewed ther wher he seyth he comyth down to us to the lowest parte of oure nede. (6.26–29)

Julian's point is that the idealized shape of the human body conduces to whatever process is denoted by the phrase "sparyde as a purse full feyer," just as "menys" can conduce to growth "in grace and vertue." It is a claim about the "behovely" relation between humanity's upright posture and God's care for human "nede." Arabella Milbank, noting the "stark contrast" that the reference to "uppe ryght" posture creates between humans and four-legged animals, interprets the reference in these words: "Man's top end . . . is so receptive to the knowledge of God just as the purse in its location receives and gives forth its contents by opening."[46]

Milbank's paraphrase highlights the overlap between Julian's anthropocentric figuration of the upright body—receptive, open, attentive—and

Isidore's claim that upright posture conduces to the search for God. The passage may therefore be read as a step between Julian's initial focus on the two wills and a more fully developed, postural theology of contemplation: It establishes the "upright" will of humanity as an expression of openness to God, which is essential for the contemplative life.

The C-text interpolation begins with a sudden shift from a discussion of prayer in chapter 43 to renewed focus on the will in chapter 44, the will of God as manifest in the "work" of mankind: "God shewid in al the revelations oftentymes that man werkyth evermore his will and his wership lestyngly withoute ony styntyng" (44.1–2). This claim is both a restatement of the conclusion in S 17 and a prelude to the theological problem posed by the parable of the lord and servant, namely the apparent conflict between God's judgment ("dome") and the Church's. In Julian's words, "God demyth [judges] us upon our kynde substance *which is ever kept on* [one] *in hym, hoole and save without end*; and this dome is of his rythfulhede" (45.1–2, my emphasis). Yet humanity qua Church, with an echo of Gregory, "jugith upon our changeabil sensualyte, which semyth now on, now other" (2–3). Julian's "desire," a word that becomes especially prominent in the lord and servant interpolation, is to "sen in God in what manner the dome of holy church herin techyth is trew in his syte" (45.19–20). Julian then articulates this desire in postural terms: "And yet I stond in desire, and will into my end, that I myte be grace knowen these ii domys as it longyth [pertains] to me" (45.23–24). In their edition of the text, Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins gloss the word "stond" as "remain," which is sensible enough.[47] I would argue, however, that the word is doing more theological work here. The word "stond" points forward rhetorically to chapter 51's figuration of contemplative *stabilitas* through the parable of the lord and servant. In this brief but momentous phrase, Julian both claims the virtue of *stabilitas* for herself and depicts it as a dynamic and desirous form of life.

Lexicographical evidence supports the collocation of posture and desire in Julian's self-description. The *Middle English Dictionary* cites several late fourteenth- and fifteenth-century works in an entry that defines *stand* as "of the heart: to be inclined (to sth.), long (for sth.)."[48] In Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, for example, some men's hearts "stod upon knyhthode"—that is, desired or longed to become a knight—while in a midcentury medicine book the reader is advised to "ete what mete hys herte stondeþ to most."[49] When used with a preposition (*upon, to*), *stand* denotes something like the opposite of ascetic self-sufficiency, and its metaphorical connection to the

heart suggests the lover's erotic longing for the other. The phrase "stond in desire" thus raises an important question: What kind of desire is this longing that Julian apparently experienced even at the end of the *Revelations*'s composition? And how does it relate to, or contrast with, the inclinations that ascetic virtue must overcome?

In her introduction to Chapter 51, Julian tells us that she had witnessed the parable of the lord and servant along with her other revelations but did not begin to write it or its interpretation down until she was encouraged by a "techyng inwardly" to reexamine "all the propertes and condition that weryn shewid in the example" (i.e., the parable) (51.70–71). This occurred almost twenty years later, in about 1393. The property to which she is encouraged to attend most closely by this "techyng" is the "manner of stondyng of the servant, and the place wher and how"—that is, to his bodily posture (76–77). Despite this, Julian points out other postures. The lord, for example, is seated, signaling "rest and . . . peace"—perhaps the rest that God takes at the end of the creation narrative (Genesis 2:2). Later in the same chapter, Julian interprets the lord's seated position to mean that "he made mans soule to ben his owen cyte and his dwellyng place" (114–15), evoking the Gregorian figure of the *arx* (citadel).

The other significant posture in this chapter is, of course, the servant's postlapsarian, prone position. As I suggested at the beginning of this essay, the similarity between the servant's injuries and Julian's own is remarkable but has so far gone unnoticed.[50] When the servant falls into the ditch, Julian sees that "he myte not rysen" and that "he lay alone" (51.24–25); she also mentions the "hevynes of his body" and the "febilnes" that results from the fall, phrases that are deeply evocative of Julian's own inability to sit up or stand on her own. The servant's fourth injury ("he was blinded in his reason and stonyed in his mend" [51.22–23]) echoes concerns that Julian mentions about her own sanity in chapter 66 (the B text): "Than cam a religious person to me and askid me how I farid. And I seyd I had ravid today, and he leuhe loud and inderly. And I seyd, 'The cross that stod afor my face, methowte it blode fast.' And with this word the person that I spake to waxid al sad and mervelid. And anon I was sor ashamid and astonyed" (11–14).[51] A comparison to the A-text version of the same passage shows that Julian has added the word "astonyed" in the B text, suggesting that this moment was important enough in her revisionary process to warrant further self-scrutiny. It seems quite plausible that this self-scrutiny was informed at least partially by Julian's memory and deepening understanding of the parable of the lord and servant.

Both Julian and the servant experience their injuries as a lack or wound that is deeply bound up with—perhaps caused by, and certainly indicative of—a certain kind of desire. The narrative of events at the beginning of the *Revelations* asserts that Julian "*desired* afore iii gifts by the grace of God: the first was mende of his passion, the ii was bodily sekenesse, the iii was to have of Gods gift iii wounds" (2.2–4, my emphasis). Likewise, the servant: "Only his good will and his grete desire was cause of his fallyng" (51.30–31). As Domenico Pezzini reminds us, in Christian (read: Augustinian) anthropology, this kind of desire is distinctive of humanity among the animals because it only increases and enlarges as the soul turns toward God.[52] Unlike inclination, it cannot be slaked or healed but only nursed. The soul afflicted by this wound is at once passive and active—that is, acted on by the desire but also affirming and enlarging it through an exercise of the will.

The *Revelations* is insistent that this wound is not in any sense moral; it is not, in other words, a consequence of inclination. Rather, its most important consequence is an initial loss of vision: "And of all this the most myscheif that I saw him in was faylyng of comforte; *for he cowde not turne his face to loke upon his lovyng lord*, which was to hym ful nere, in whom is ful comfort" (51.14–16, my emphasis). To Julian's surprise, the lord is not at all displeased with the servant, who "was as onlothful and as good inwardly as whan he stode afor his lord redy to don his wille" (31–32). Julian's surprise measures the gap between the Church's "dome"—its teaching that mankind is fallen—and God's. It also measures Julian's distance from earlier medieval versions of a similar parable. For example, when Anselm adduces a lord-and-servant parable in *Cur Deus homo* (late eleventh cent.), he makes a diametrically opposed point, claiming that it illustrates Adam's perfidy.[53] Julian's interpretation of the servant's fall anticipates her later, crucial realization, "Whan Adam fell, Godes Son fell" (171) and its consequent, that God "may, no will, no more blame assigne to us than to his owen Son" (183). Though scholars have focused on the effect of a temporal shift to what M. L. del Mastro calls "God's timeless view," it becomes clear that Julian is also thinking about the *servant's* contemplative vision:[54]

> The lord that sate solemnly in rest and in peace, I understond that he is God. The servant that stode aforn the lord, I understode that it was shewid for Adam, that is to seyen, on man was shewid that tyme, and his fallyng, to maken that therby understonden how God beholdith alle man and his fallyng. For in the syte of God al man is on man,

> and on man is all man. This man was hurte in hys myte and made ful febil; and he was stonyed in his understondyng, for he turnyd from the beholdyng of his lord. (51.80–85)

The final sentence of this passage equates the servant's spiritual sight of God, his "beholdyng of his lord," with "his understondyng," which is damaged ("stonyed") when he turns and falls into the slade.[55] Though she does not use the term *contemplation* or *contemplative* here, Julian's reference to *understanding* is deeply resonant with Richard of St. Victor's (d. 1173) claim in *The Mystical Ark* that "contemplation cannot exist at all without a certain liveliness of understanding."[56] For both Julian and Richard, *the understanding* is precisely what enlarges in order to take in the mysteries of contemplative reflection.

Julian reinforces the latent metaphorical link between standing and (contemplative) understanding through the rhetorical figure of paranomasia, ancient ancestor of the pun. Echoing the word *stond* in *understond*, the passage forges a lexical connection between two etymologically distant words, a recognition of difference that also suggests similarity: Posture has no intrinsic relation to contemplation, but it *might* in this instance. The device crops up earlier in the *Revelations*—Julian avows in chapter 32, "Thus I was tawte by the grace of God that I should stedfastly hold me in the faith as I had afornehand understonden, and therewith that I should stonde and sadly levyn that al thyng shal be wele, as our Lord shewid in the same tyme" (32.39–41)—and it was familiar to later, early modern audiences, as we see in the epigraph from *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Finally, it is familiar to modern audiences from a slogan often used to acknowledge white privilege in antiracist protest: "I understand that I will never understand, however I stand." The statement works by unfolding from within the word "understand" the physical act of solidarity itself—that is, to stand with one another at a protest. Even as it acknowledges epistemic limits and human frailty, the repetition of the morpheme *stand* suggests a virtuous stability of intention. Posture therefore represents not only solidarity but also the possibility of a more just world in which understanding replaces the need for resistance.

The *Revelations*'s rhetorical play on the words *stand* and *understand* tends toward a similarly utopian vision while emphasizing the radical dynamism of stance. As Julian interprets the parable, upright posture even entails a measure of instability and uncertainty because it includes, as its theological precedent, God's longing to dwell in and as humanity. That is, Julian

interprets the servant's posture to mean not only humankind's prelapsarian condition but also Christ's own readiness to "fall" into human form (i.e., the Incarnation). She signals this desire partly through an alliterative proliferation of postural words that seem almost to collide, so eager is the servant to do the lord's will: "Lo, my der Fader, I stond before the in Adams kirtle, al redy to sterten and to rennen. I wold ben in the erth to don thy worship whan it is thy will to send me. How long shal I desiren?" The collocation of stance and desire in chapter 45 is here echoed by none other than Christ himself. In a subsequent virtuoso passage, Julian claims that the desire Christ expresses in this utterance is also the desire of "al mankynd that shal be savid":

> And al that shall ben under hevyn that shal come thider, ther wey is be longyng and desire; which desir and longing was shewid in the servant stondyng aforen the lord, or ell thus, in the Sons stondyng aforn the Fadir in Adams kirtle. For the langor and desire of al mankynd that shal be savid aperid in Jesus. For Jesus is al that shal be savid and al that shal be savid is Jesus. (51.203–7)

Though the passage concludes with an image of Christ "stondyng aforn the Fadir," it also recognizes and draws attention to the spiritual stance of "al . . . that shal be savid." They, too, are standing in desire, a posture I believe we should describe as the figure of *stabilitas*.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that the *Revelations of Divine Love* deserves to be read as a major work of contemplative theology.[57] Through the rhetorical figure of upright stance, Julian develops a nuanced understanding of desire and places it, like many had done before her, at the center of the contemplative life. She does this, however, through a subtle but powerful alignment of her own experience with that of the servant, whose falling and rising emblematize the dynamic character of contemplative *stabilitas*. This essay suggests that Julian's self-textualization as a contemplative emerges through a dialectic with her analysis of the servant, and that she was likely thinking about the parable from the very beginning of her compositional process. There is still much to learn about Julian's thought by reading the different versions of her work—Newman's A, B, and C texts—in light of each other.

NOTES

I am grateful to Emelye Keyser and John Parker, as well as to the two anonymous readers at *JMRC*, for their comments on earlier versions of this essay.

1. Bernard McGinn, "Contemplation in Gregory the Great," in *Gregory the Great: A Symposium*, ed. John Cavadini (University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 146–167, at 146; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II IIae, Blackfriars edition, trans. Jordan Aumann, vol. 6 (Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1966), q. 180 art. 3 ad 1. See also n. 52.

2. Nicole Rice, *Lay Piety and Religious Discipline in Middle English Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 20. See *The Rule of St. Benedict*, 4th ed., trans. Justin McCann (Sheed and Ward, 1985), chap. 66: "The monastery should, if possible, be so arranged that all necessary things . . . may be within the enclosure, so that the monks may not be compelled to wander outside it, for that is not at all expedient for their souls" (74).

3. Rice, *Lay Piety*, 31.

4. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Harvard University Press, 1989), 174.

5. Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (University of Chicago Press, 2002), 21.

6. For sources of the parable, see Martin Chase, "The *Elucidarius* and Julian of Norwich's Parable of the Lord and Servant," *Notes and Queries* 58, no. 3 (2011): 360–64; see also Denise Baker, *Julian of Norwich's "Showings": From Vision to Book* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 100–106.

7. *Summa theologiae* I–II, q. 81, a. 1. Thomas's position is of course more nuanced than what I have represented here; the relative length and detail of his response suggest that he understood the weaknesses of the Church's teaching on original sin. Pace Augustine, patristic interpretation, following Rabbinic commentary, tended to read Adam and Eve's rebellion as *a* fall, not necessarily *the* Fall; see Andrew Louth, "The Fathers on Genesis," in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, ed. Craig A. Evans, Joel N. Lohr, and David L. Petersen (Brill, 2012), 561–78, at 574.

8. Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love: The Short Text and the Long Text*, ed. Barry Windeatt (Oxford University Press, 2016), Long Text, chap. 51, lines 69–71. Subsequent citations refer to chapter and line numbers from the Long Text in this edition (unless noted otherwise) and will be made parenthetically in the text.

9. For the felix culpa, see M. L. del Mastro, "Juliana of Norwich: Parable of the Lord and Servant—Radical Orthodoxy," *Mystics Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (1988): 84–93, at 87.

10. For a description of the service, see Joanne Pierce, "Holy Week and Easter in the Middle Ages," in *Passover and Easter: Origin and History to Modern Times*, ed. Paul Bradshaw and Lawrence Hoffman (University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 161–85, at 168–71.

11. One important exception is Mary Clemente Davlin, "Devotional Postures in *Piers Plowman* B, with an Appendix on Divine Postures," *Chaucer Review* 42, no. 2 (2007): 161–79.

12. Jessica Barr, *Willing to Know God: Dreamers and Visionaries in the Later Middle Ages* (Ohio State University Press, 2010), 98. See also Nicholas Watson's related critique in "Desire for the Past," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 21 (1999): 59–97, with a précis at 84.

13. Barr, *Willing to Know God*, 98.

14. Michael Argyle, *Bodily Communication* (Taylor and Francis, 2013), 208.

15. See James Levine, *Get Up! Why Your Chair Is Killing You and What You Can Do About It* (St. Martin's Griffin, 2014).

16. Barr, *Willing to Know God*, 112–14. References to Julian's "even-cristen" abound; for just one example, see 28.3–6.

17. Eleanor Johnson, *Staging Contemplation: Participatory Theology in Middle English Prose, Verse, and Drama* (University of Chicago Press, 2018), 3.

18. McGinn, "Contemplation," 146.

19. On the composition, circulation, and eventual printing of the *Moralia*, see the introduction in Gregory the Great, *Moral Reflections on the Book of Job*, vol. 1, trans. Brian Kerns, OCSO, 6 vols. (Cistercian, 2015). For a general introduction to Gregory's life and works, see Jacques Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* (Fordham University Press, 1982), 25–29.

20. McGinn, "Contemplation," 146. On the continuing importance of Adam for contemplative theory in the Middle Ages, see Barbara Newman, "What Did It Mean to Say 'I Saw'? The Clash Between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture," *Speculum* 80, no. 1 (2005): 1–43, at 10.

21. *S. Gregorii Magni Moralia in Iob*, ed. Marcus Adriaen, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina; vols. 143, 143A, 143B (Brepols, 1979), VIII.x.19; English translation: *Moral Reflections on the Book of Job*, trans. Brian Kerns (op. cit.), 166.
22. *Morals on the Book of Job*, trans. James Bliss and Charles Marriott, 4 vols. (J. H. Parker, 1844–1850).
23. Carole Ellen Straw, *Gregory the Great: Perfection in Imperfection* (University of California Press, 1988), 75.
24. Ann Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons in Medieval England* (University of California Press, 1985), 43.
25. Jordan Joseph Wales, "The Narrated Theology of *Stabilitas* in Gregory the Great's *Life of Benedict*," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (2014): 163–98, at 166–67.
26. Adriana Cavarero, *Inclinations: A Critique of Rectitude* (Stanford University Press, 2016), 3.
27. Cavarero, *Inclinations*, 10, 43. On the Stoic principle of *autarkia*, see the *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., ed. Simon Blackburn (Oxford University Press, 2016), under "autarkia."
28. Christina Van Dyke, *A Hidden Wisdom: Medieval Contemplatives on Self-Knowledge, Reason, Love, Persons, and Immortality* (Oxford University Press, 2022), 79.
29. Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Earl Jeffrey Richards (Persea, 1998), I.9.2, p. 24; my emphasis.
30. Christine de Pizan, *City of Ladies*, I.9.2, p. 24.
31. For a very different approach to Passion lyrics of the kind I discuss here, see Sarah Stanbury, "The Virgin's Gaze: Spectacle and Transgression in Middle English Lyrics of the Passion," *PMLA* 106, no. 5 (1991): 1083–93.
32. "Jesu Cristes milde moder" (poem 32) in *Middle English Marian Lyrics*, ed. Karen Saupe (Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), lines 1–6; the poem is recorded in British Library, Arundel MS 248, a thirteenth-century manuscript. See also poem 33, "Stond wel, Moder, under rode," in the same volume.
33. "Qui ideo erectus caelum aspicit, ut Deum quaerat, non ut terram intendat veluti pecora, quae natura prona et ventri oboedientia finxit." Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, ed. Stephen A. Barney et al. (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 231. The English translation of Ovid is supplied by Barney.
34. On Rolle's self-feminization as "the sitter," see Claire Elizabeth McIlroy, *The English Prose Treatises of Richard Rolle* (D. S. Brewer, 2004), chap. 5.
35. Richard Rolle, "Ego Dormio," in *Richard Rolle: Prose and Verse Edited from MS Longleat 29 and Related Manuscripts*, ed. S. J. Ogilvie-Thomson, EETS No. 293 (Oxford University Press, 1988), 26–33, at 32; translation from "Ego Dormio" in *Richard Rolle: The English Writings*, ed. and trans. Rosamund S. Allen (Paulist Press, 1988), 140.
36. Kevin Hart, *Contemplation: The Movements of the Soul* (Columbia University Press, 2024), chap. 1, Kindle book.
37. Anchorites "encamp[ed] in the heart of the community." Warren, *Anchorites*, 7.
38. Richard Rolle, "The Form of Living," in *English Writings of Richard Rolle, Hermit of Hampole*, ed. Hope Emily Allen (Clarendon, 1963), 82–119, at chap. 10, lines 258–60; translation from "The Form of Living" in *Richard Rolle: The English Writings*, 180.
39. Barbara Newman, "Redeeming the Time: Langland, Julian, and the Art of Lifelong Revision," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 23 (2009): 1–32, at 18–21. For an extension of Newman's insight, see Nicholas Watson, "'Sixteen Shewinges': The Composition of Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Love* Revisited," in *Mystics, Goddesses, Lovers, and Teachers: Medieval Visions and Their Modern Legacies; Studies in Honour of Barbara Newman*, ed. Steven Rozenski, Joshua Byron Smith, and Claire Waters (Brepols, 2023), 131–54.
40. Newman, "Redeeming the Time," 8.
41. As Nicholas Watson points out, Newman's hypothesis makes it likely that Julian *also* reworked the B-text material as or after she wrote the C-text interpolation. Watson, "Composition Revisited," 144–46.
42. For Julian's soteriology, see Nicholas Watson, "Visions of Inclusion: Universal Salvation and Vernacular Theology in Pre-Reformation England," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 27, no. 2 (1997): 147–87, at 163–64.
43. *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole, an English Father of the Church, and His Followers*, ed. Carl Horstmann, 2 vols. (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1895), 2.114; my emphasis. Horstmann's version is based on a fifteenth-century printing of the fourteenth-century Flete's treatise.

44. It may also be, of course, that Julian is punning on "soule," evoking its many senses at once: see Liz Herbert McAvoy, "'For we be Doubel of God's Making': Writing, Gender and the Body in Julian of Norwich," in *A Companion to Julian of Norwich*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy (Boydell and Brewer, 2008), 166–80, at 177–78.

45. *Middle English Dictionary*, "sŏuel" (n.) (2), University of Michigan, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary.

46. Arabella Milbank, "Medieval Corporeality and the Eucharistic Body in Julian of Norwich's *A Revelation of Love*," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 46, no. 3 (2016): 629–51, at 638.

47. *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and A Revelation of Love*, ed. Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 45.28 n., p. 260.

48. *Middle English Dictionary*, "stōnden" (v.) (20).

49. Citations in *Middle English Dictionary*, "stōnden" (v.) (20).

50. Barry Windeatt, private correspondence, March 2021.

51. Felicity Riddy calls this encounter the "originary" moment of the text: "Julian of Norwich and Self-Textualization," in *Editing Woman: Papers Given at the Thirty-First Annual Conference on Editorial Problems*, ed. Ann Hutchinson (University of Toronto Press, 1998), 101–24, at 102.

52. Domenico Pezzini, "The Language and Doctrine of Desire in Julian of Norwich's *Revelations*," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (2011): 305–35. "Desire is . . . intensified and enlarged towards its infinite potentiality since God is the only adequate response by which a wounded and thirsty creature can be perfectly healed and totally satisfied" (310).

53. See Martin Chase, "*Elucidarius*," 362.

54. Mastro, "Radical Orthodoxy," 89; see also Johnson, *Staging Contemplation*, chap. 2; and Jennifer Bryan's lovely précis: "In our own beholding we hardly stand; in God's beholding we never fall" (*Looking Inward: Devotional Reading and the Private Self in Late Medieval England* [University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008], 161).

55. See Maggie Ross, "Behold Not The Cloud of Experience," in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Papers Read at Charney Manor, July 2011 [Exeter Symposium 8]*, ed. E. A. Jones (D. S. Brewer, 2013), 29–50.

56. Richard of St. Victor, "The Mystical Ark," in *The Twelve Patriarchs; The Mystical Ark; Book Three of The Trinity*, ed. Grover Zinn (Paulist Press, 1979), 152–370, at 159.

57. To be distinguished from works of systematic theology such as Thomas's *Summa*, etc.; for a more scholastic Julian, see Denys Turner, *Julian of Norwich: Theologian* (Yale University Press, 2011).