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Julian of Norwich and the mystical body politic of Christ / Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt.

p. cm. — (Studies in spirituality and theology ; 5)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Julian of Norwich, b. 1343. 2. Christianity and politics—History of doctrines—Middle Ages, 600-1500. 3. Jesus Christ—Mystical body—History of doctrines—Middle Ages, 600-1500. 4. Mysticism—England—History—Middle Ages, 600-1500. I. Title. II. Series.
BV5095.J84B38 1999
230'.2'092—dc21 98-41339

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INTRODUCTION
AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book consists of an argument for a single claim—that Julian of Norwich may fruitfully be read as one who “imagines the political.” However, the argument is rather obliquely made, because the expli­cation of what that claim means and the evidence to support it require several journeys down what might seem to a reader to be lengthy de­tours. So I offer here a very brief map of what lies ahead, followed by acknowledgment of those who have helped me follow this sometimes twisting path.

In the first chapter I argue that all political and social theory and practice is undergirded by a “metaphysical image” that is, broadly speaking, “theological.” I then briefly display the metaphysical images supporting both feudalism and modernity and argue that the four­teenth century was a volatile mixture of feudal and modern structures and ideas that provided Julian with the opportunity to put forward a metaphysical image that is quite different from the images of both feudalism and modernity. In the remaining chapters I gradually unfold the alternative that Julian offers: the mystical body politic of Christ. In chapters 2 and 3 I examine the way Julian sees the body of Christ, and argue that her image of that body as an open and generative one both runs counter to the persecutory imagining of the body of christen­dom that was prevalent in the later Middle Ages, and presents us with the possibility of a social body infinite in scope. Using the language of traditional theological categories, one might say that chapter 2 deals with issues of christology and the epistemology of revelation, while chapter 3 focuses on ecclesiology and soteriology. In chapter 4 I turn to the exemplum of the lord and servant to see how Julian rereads feudal social relations through the trinitarian relations of Father, Son, and Spirit so as to reimagine them as a reciprocal exchange of
gifts. Again in traditional theological terms, one might describe this chapter as continuing to pursue the question of soteriology by means of an exploration of Julian’s theological anthropology as well as her understanding of the Trinitarian life of God. In the conclusion I argue briefly that there is a certain thwarted quality to Julian’s imagining of the social because it was a *mythos* that was virtually impossible to perform under the conditions of late medieval christendom, and I point to ways in which that *mythos* might be performed today. More technical issues of who Julian was are discussed in an appendix.

I do not claim to have unlocked the “real” significance of *A Revelation of Love*. There are many important issues in Julian’s book, both theological and otherwise, that I do not touch on, at least not in the depth they deserve. Other productive approaches could be and have been offered. What I have tried to present is a reading of her *Revelation of Love* that brings into the foreground Julian’s images of Christ’s body and her *exemplum* of the lord and servant as ways in which her understanding of God both grows out of and recommends a particular understanding of human community. But beyond this, I am not so much trying to read the text of Julian’s *Revelation of Love* as I am trying to read the text that Julian herself read, the text of Christ’s crucified body that she describes. It is in this sense that I seek to enter into Julian’s imagining of the political and her rendering of the *mythos* of power beyond violence, both the violence of “order” and the violence of “freedom.”

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This book is my attempt to say something about Julian of Norwich and her theology. But, as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have noted, behind every direct discourse there is a “collective assemblage” that is “the murmur from which I take my proper name, the constellation of voices, concordant or not, from which I draw my voice.” Some of those voices can be discerned from perusing the notes and bibliography of this book; others, however, are not so apparent.

I first wish to acknowledge the tremendous debt of gratitude that I owe to the teachers I have had over the years, especially James Clayton and James Peterman at the University of the South, George Lindbeck and the late Hans Frei at Yale Divinity School, and Kenneth Surin, Stanley Hauerwas, and Sarah Beckwith at Duke University.
I would also like to thank those who have read all or a substantial portion of this book in its various manuscript forms and have offered suggestions with regard both to particular points and to the overall shaping of the argument: David Aers, James Buckley, Lawrence Cunningham, L. Gregory Jones, Susan Keefe, D. Stephen Long, Bernard McGinn, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Nicholas Watson. I am particularly grateful to Michael Baxter, C.S.C., and William Cavanaugh, who have offered not only helpful comments, but also intellectual companionship and spiritual friendship.

I have attempted to write this book with concrete Christian communities in mind, for it is only such manifestations of the mystical body politic of Christ that make the claim that “all shall be well” intelligible. During the time of writing this I have been sustained by many different communities: Holy Cross Catholic Church in Durham, North Carolina, the Trappist monastery of Our Lady of Mepkin in Moncks Corner, South Carolina, and the Monastery of the Carmelite Sisters in Baltimore. During my time in North Carolina I was also blessed to be part of an ecumenical prayer group that met weekly to challenge and support one another. To these “even christians,” and countless others, I owe an immeasurable debt.

Finally, I would like to thank my family. My parents and brother continue to inspire me with a love for both the life of the mind and the life of the church. My children, Thomas, Sophia, and Denis, have been to me a means of grace and a source of wonder. My wife Maureen read this manuscript in an early form and helped to deflate a bit of its academic hot air. But more importantly, in both her work and in our family life she has been a vivid reminder of the divine compassion of which Julian speaks so eloquently. It is to Maureen that I dedicate this book.

NOTE ON TEXTS AND CITATIONS

Unless otherwise noted, I have used Edmund Colledge and James Walsh’s edition of both the short text (British Museum MS Additional 37790) and the “Paris” manuscript of the long text (Bibliotheque Nationale MS Fonds anglais 40), found in A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich, 2 vols. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1978). Parenthetical citations of the short text are to chapter (roman numeral) and line number (arabic). Citations of the
long text are to chapter and line numbers (both arabic). On occasion I have quoted or cited the “Sloane” manuscript of the long text (British Museum Sloane MS 2499), using Marion Glasscoe’s edition (3rd rev. ed., Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1993). Citations to this edition are made by chapter and page number. With the exception of chapter fifty-one, Julian’s chapters are fairly short, so it should be possible for a reader using any edition or one of the many modernizations available to locate quotations. The Paris manuscript will be referred to as “P” and Sloane 2499 as “S.”

Though Julian’s Middle English, at least in the extant manuscripts, is on the whole comprehensible to modern readers, I have provided modernizations in square brackets following each quotation. For readers unfamiliar with Middle English, I would note the use of two archaic characters found in the short text and the Paris manuscript: ð, which corresponds to a “th,” and ð, which corresponds to a “y” or “gh.” Other Middle English texts have been quoted in the original, where I have had editions available, and these too are translated, with the source of the translation (where it is not my own) provided in square brackets in the notes. Latin texts are quoted in translation. In general, I have cited ancient and medieval texts according to their book and chapter divisions, so as to facilitate locating references in the various editions and translations available. The particular translation I am using is given in square brackets in the first citation, and page numbers from that translation are given in square brackets in subsequent citations. An exception to this is the citations from Thomas Aquinas’s Summa Theologica, for which I do not give page numbers.

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