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‘Have we any mother *Juliana’s* among us?’: The multiple identities of Julian of Norwich in Restoration England

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The true identity of the fourteenth-century anchoress Julian of Norwich has been lost to history. Yet in the seventeenth century Catholic and Protestant polemicists created different ‘Julians’ to construct and contrast their own confessional positions. This article traces the different identities prescribed to Julian and argues that they allow us fresh insight into some of the most prevalent religious and political issues of Restoration England. It begins by tracing the positive reception of Julian’s theology among the Benedictine nuns of Paris and Cambrai, including the role of Augustine Baker in editing Julian’s text. It then explores how the Benedictine Serenus Cressy and the Anglican Edward Stillingfleet created different identities for Julian in their ongoing polemical battles in the Restoration period. For Cressy, Julian was proof of the strength of Catholic devotional and spiritual traditions, while Stillingfleet believed she was evidence of the religious melancholy encouraged by monasticism. By exploring these identities, this article offers new perspective on issues of Catholic loyalty, enthusiasm, sectarianism and doctrinal authority.

Keywords: Julian of Norwich, Melancholy, Restoration, Anti-Catholicism, Enthusiasm.

The identity and reputation of the fourteenth century anchoress Julian of Norwich have been subject to constant revision. Described by the visionary Margery Kempe as an expert in the discernment of spirits in 1413, Julian has since been recast as a proto-Anglican, an irenic promoter of Christian love, an advocate of merciful salvation, an ‘everyday’ writer of universal spiritual truths, and most recently as proof of a growing respect for female spirituality among the late-medieval laity.[1] As we have no original autograph

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[1] *The Book of Margery Kempe* trans. Anthony Bale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 41–2. For the various re-imaginings of Julian see Alexandra Barratt, ‘Julian of Norwich and Her Children Today: Editions, Translations, and Versions of her Revelations’, in Sarah Salih and Denise N. Baker, eds. *Julian of Norwich’s Legacy: Medieval Mysticism and Post-Medieval Reception* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 13–27 at 15–8. Current scholarship has settled

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copy of her work, Julian survives in manuscripts which have been edited and manipulated in subsequent centuries.[2] As a result, Julian is now viewed as 'plural, as multiple, as variable, as unstable, metamorphosing between the centuries and becoming different things for different audiences'.[3] While uncovering the 'true Julian' is rendered almost impossible, the constant reimagining of her identity allows us valuable insight into the concerns and priorities of those projecting these artificial identities onto her work. The multiple ways Julian has been presented reveals more about her subsequent editors and critics than we can ever hope to know of Julian herself.

This article will trace two constructs of Julian's identity that have so far been overlooked.[4] Both of these identities were fabricated in seventeenth-century England and featured in the polemical debates between Protestants and Catholics over points of doctrine. Julian was used by writers on both sides of the debate to very different ends. For the Benedictine monk Serenus Cressy, Julian was proof of the strength of Catholic devotional and spiritual traditions, the validity of doctrines informed by visionary experience, and the authenticity of female religious experience. His efforts in producing the first print edition of Julian's *Revelations* in 1670 was symbolic of a growing confidence among certain English Benedictines over the legitimacy and popularity of their monastic spirituality. His Protestant counterpart, Edward Stillingfleet, argued Julian was indicative of the value the Roman Church placed on false and fanatical 'revelations'. In an effort to unite moderate Episcopalians and Presbyterians under the banner of a comprehensive Church of England, Stillingfleet argued Julian was representative of everything

on the idea of a 'social Julian' who was influential within her locality, see Alexandra Barratt, 'Lordship, Service and Worship in Julian of Norwich', in E.A. Jones, ed. *The Medieval Mystical Tradition: Exeter Symposium VII, Papers read at Charney Manor, July 2004* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 177–88 at 188; Felicity Riddy, '"Publication" before print: the case of Julian of Norwich', in Julia Crick and Alexandra Walsham, eds. *The Uses of Script and Print, 1300–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 29–49; Liz Herbert McAvoy, 'Introduction: "God forbade…that I am a techere": Who, or what, was Julian?', in Liz Herbert McAvoy, ed. *A Companion to Julian of Norwich* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2015), 1–18.

[2] For more on these different manuscripts see Nicholas Watson, 'The Composition of Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Love*', *Speculum* 68 (1993): 637–83; Marleen Cré, '"This blessed beholding": Reading the Fragments from Julian of Norwich's *A Revelation of Divine Love* in London, Westminster Cathedral Treasury, MS. 4' in McAvoy, ed. *A Companion to Julian of Norwich*, 116–26; Barry Windeatt, 'Julian's Second Thoughts: The Long Text Tradition', in McAvoy, ed. *A Companion to Julian of Norwich,* 101–15; Elisabeth Dutton, 'The Seventeenth-Century Manuscript Tradition and the Influence of Augustine Baker', in McAvoy, ed. *A Companion to Julian of Norwich,* 127–39; idem., 'Augustine Baker and Two Manuscripts of Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Love', Notes and Queries* 52 (2005): 329–37 at 336.

[3] McAvoy, 'Introduction: "God forbade…that I am a techere": Who, or what, was Julian?', 8.

[4] The only attention given to them so far is Jennifer Summit, 'From Anchorhold to Closet: Julian of Norwich in 1670 and the Immanence of the Past', in Salih and Baker, eds. *Julian of Norwich's Legacy*, 29–47. See also 'Appendix E' of Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins, eds. *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and A Revelation of Love* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 448–55.

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wrong with the Roman Church.[5] He saw her text as proof of the dangers of relying on revelations when forming doctrine, the invalidity of any doctrines which had no scriptural basis, and the danger Roman fanatics could pose to England. It is these two contrasting but interlinked identities prescribed to Julian that will be given consideration here.

Attacks on Julian's legitimacy were part of a wider attempt by Church of England apologists such as Stillingfleet to continue the tradition of constructing Catholics as the foreign, oppressive and dangerous 'other'.[6] In 1665 Stillingfleet warned Charles II that Catholics in England were working towards the enslavement of the 'Royal Scepter to the mercy of a Forreign Prelat', and that the only 'Foundations of Loyalty' were to be found in membership of the Church of England.[7] Yet this was a boundary which had been slowly blurred. From the Elizabethan period onwards influential members of the English Catholic gentry had stressed that their political allegiance was separate to their religious persuasion.[8] The activities of Thomas White, better known by his alias Blacklo, in the Interregnum had highlighted the willingness of some Catholics to forsake the doctrine of papal supremacy in return for toleration in England.[9] A resurgence of Catholics into influential positions in the Restoration period reinvigorated this debate. Emboldened by the promise of toleration enshrined in the Declaration of Breda, Catholics in the early Restoration produced texts which stressed their loyalty to the king during the Civil Wars and Interregnum to promote a more positive image of their faith.[10] The Benedictines found particular favour at the royal court due to their actions during the Civil Wars; John Huddleston had sheltered the future Charles II after the Battle of Worcester in 1651, while the Benedictine nuns at Ghent transferred news, mail and funds to the royal circle in exile in the 1650s.[11]

[5] Edward Stillingfleet, *Irenicum. A weapon-salve for the Churches wounds* (London, 1660).
[6] Peter Lake, 'Anti-Popery: The Structure of a Prejudice', in Richard Cust and Ann Hughes, eds. *Conflict in Early Stuart England: Studies in Religion and Politics 1603–1642* (London: Longman, 1989), 72–106; Robin Clifton, 'Fear of Popery', in Conrad Russell, ed. *The Origins of the English Civil War* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1973), 144–67; John Miller, *Popery & Politics in England, 1660–1688* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), ch. 4; Anthony Milton, *Catholic and Reformed: The Roman and Protestant Churches in English Protestant Thought, 1600–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), ch. 1.
[7] Edward Stillingfleet, *A rational account of the grounds of Protestant religion being a vindication of the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury's relation of a conference*, &c.*, from the pretended answer by T.C.* (London, 1665), sig. A4r.
[8] John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570–1850* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1975), 37–41; Miller, *Popery & Politics*, 43.
[9] Jeffrey R. Collins 'Thomas Hobbes and the Blackloist Conspiracy of 1649', *The Historical Journal* 45 (2002): 305–31 at 311.
[10] Kendra Packham, 'Praising Catholics "Of Low Degree": Literary Exemplarity, Popular Royalism, and Pro-Catholic Representations, 1660–1725', *Review of English Studies* 65 (2014): 58–77.
[11] Claire Walker, 'Prayer, Patronage, and Political Conspiracy: English Nuns and the Restoration', *The Historical Journal* 43 (2000): 1–23; Caroline Bowden, 'The abbess and

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The servants of Charles II's Catholic wife, Catherine of Braganza, the numerous members of the Catholic religious orders, and the priests servicing the royal chapels filing through the 'rabbit-warren of apartments and corridors' at Whitehall made many Anglicans fearful of the foreign influences at work on the king.[12]

It was in these circles that Serenus Cressy moved, running what has been labelled 'the Roman Catholic propaganda machine' in his role as chaplain to Henrietta Maria at Somerset House.[13] Together with Thomas Clifford, comptroller of the royal household, Cressy devised a plan to reconcile the Church of England with Roman Catholicism, convert Charles II, and generate a strong Anglo-French alliance. These plans had significant bearing on the terms eventually agreed in the 1670 Treaty of Dover, with Clifford being only one of four members of Charles' negotiating team to have knowledge of this 'Catholicity'.[14] Cressy was thus a viable target for anxious Church of England divines who were concerned about the influence of Catholics more widely. It is no surprise that Stillingfleet's barbed attacks on Cressy, which mainly occurred between 1671-74, took place in a context of growing anxiety over the policy decisions of Charles II. 1672 saw a Declaration of Indulgence to suspend penal laws published, the beginning of the third Anglo-Dutch War, and the dominance of Louis XIV in the Low Countries. In 1673 Dutch propaganda linked the Anglo-French alliance with a plan to reinstate Catholicism in England, an argument given weight by subsequent public declarations of Catholicism from the Duke of York and Clifford. York's marriage to Mary of Modena and the prospect of an openly Catholic king in the foreseeable future was an issue which dominated the rest of Charles' reign.

Fears of crypto-Catholicism at court drove most of the anti-Catholic rhetoric in the Restoration, and polemical attacks by Protestants were seen as a useful way to 'flay the phenomenon of court Catholicism'.[15] In his attacks Stillingfleet drew on an image of Catholics that had long been central to the Protestant imagination. This was the characterisation of Catholics as superstitiously over-valuing relics and rosaries, parodying true Christian doctrines with extrascriptual and occult rituals,

Mrs Brown: Lady Mary Knatchbull and Royalist Politics in Flanders in the late 1650s', *Recusant History* 24 (1999): 288–308.

[12] Miller, *Popery & Politics*, 25.

[13] Patricia Brückmann, 'Virgins visited by angel powers: *The Rape of the* Lock, platonick love, sylphs and some mysticks', in George Sebastian Rousseau and Pat Rogers, eds. *The Enduring Legacy: Alexander Pope Tercentenary Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 3–20 at 14.

[14] Gabriel Glickman, 'Christian Reunion, the Anglo-French Alliance and the English Catholic Imagination, 1660–72', *English Historical Review* 128 (2013): 263–91.

[15] Jeffrey Collins, 'Restoration Anti-Catholicism: A Prejudice in Motion', in Charles W. A. Prior and Glenn Burgess, eds. *England's Wars of Religion, Revisited* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 281–306 at 292.

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unthinkingly acting out the orders of the papacy, and giving lip service to celibacy and virginity but copulating promiscuously.[16] Julian of Norwich's *XVI Revelations Of Divine Love*, edited by Cressy and published in 1670, proved to be a timely gift for Stillingfleet by allowing him to demonstrate such characteristics as accurate. As Julian was also central to the spirituality of the Benedictine nuns of Cambrai and Paris, it simultaneously allowed him to attack both monasticism and the influential position of the Benedictines at court. In order to understand Stillingfleet's attack however, we need to first explore the positive reputation of Julian of Norwich among the Benedictines and the motivations of Serenus Cressy in publishing her text.

Lady Juliana's 'Saint-like conversation'

Cressy dedicated his 1670 edition of *Revelations* to Mary Blount of Sodington, the recently widowed matriarch of an aristocratic Catholic family in Worcestershire, who was the dedicatee of a number of Catholic and crypto-Catholic works in the mid-seventeenth century.[17] He acknowledged that both Mary and her late husband Sir George Blount had shown him 'unmerited kindness, and friendship' in previous years. Requesting that she take note of Julian's 'Saint-like Conversation' when undertaking her own 'Devout Retirements', Cressy hoped that Blount would receive similar experiences to those of Julian.[18] It was works similar to Julian's *Revelations* that had led to Cressy's own conversion to the Catholic faith. In the 1630s and 1640s Cressy had been an influential figure within the Church of England, serving as chaplain to Lucius Cary, Lord Falkland. He was a member of the Great Tew Circle, which included the theologian William Chillingworth and the future Earl of Clarendon Edward Hyde, and had contributed to their mission to construct a 'rational' Protestant religion which could combat the spread of Catholicism.[19] The death of Falkland in 1643 had a profound effect upon Cressy, who fled to the Continent, converted to Catholicism and eventually joined the Benedictines in 1648.

Cressy attracted the antagonism of his former co-religionists by penning an explosive attack on the Church of England in the form of his conversion narrative entitled *Exomologesis*, first published in 1647.

[16] Frances E. Dolan, *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 16.
[17] Summit, 'From Anchorhold to Closet', 32.
[18] Julian of Norwich, *XVI revelations of divine love shewed to a devout servant of our Lord called Mother Juliana, an anchorete of Norwich* (n.p., 1670), sig. A2v.
[19] B. H. G. Wormald, *Clarendon: Politics, History & Religion, 1640–1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), 248–51; H. J. McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951); Sarah Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution: The Challenge of Socinianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), ch. 3.

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The work was described by one seventeenth-century observer as 'the golden calf which the English Papists fell down to and worshipped' and by a twentieth-century scholar as a 'body-blow delivered at a reeling institution'.[20] To the horror of his former friends, Cressy defended the Catholic Church's claim to 'authority, unity, and Visibility' and argued for the validity of transubstantiation, invocation of saints, veneration of images and purgatory.[21] He repeatedly attacked the 'Apostate Monke' Martin Luther and the 'furious Gladiatour of Swizzerland' John Calvin, as well as the 'pretended new Evangelicall light' of the Reformation.[22] Yet it was not these doctrinal issues that Cressy believed showed the strength of the Catholic Church, but rather their devotional and spiritual traditions. Cressy's desire to convert had been a result of his exposure to the 'eminent rules of holinesse and true solid devotion' of the Catholic Church, which he first witnessed in a visit to a group of Carthusians in Paris. He was particularly taken with mystical theology and believed that Catholic authors had perfected a system of 'denudation, mortification, and annihilation' which could be found in the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena. Protestants had foolishly rejected meditation and contemplation for fear of being 'censured as half-Catholiques' to the point that the 'very name of Contemplation is unknown among them'. The greatest contemporary writer who taught of 'heavenly instructions' was the Benedictine monk Augustine Baker, a spiritual director and 'very sublime contemplative', whose works had persuaded Cressy that the Catholic Church was the only source of the 'true spirituall life'.[23]

It was from the mainly female followers of Baker within the English Benedictine Congregation that Cressy learnt more about mystical theology. Baker believed the soul of each of the Benedictine nuns he counselled to be a *tabula rasa*, or 'plain smooth table' which needed to be imprinted with 'good exercises'.[24] As a result Baker composed, translated and transcribed dozens of spiritual works for the nuns to read. Following in the tradition of previous spiritual advisors such as the Benedictine Louis de Blois, and contemporaries such as the Jesuits Ignazio Balsamo and Hieremias Drexelius, Baker provided the nuns in his care with carefully

[20] Anthony Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses an exact history of all the writers and bishops who have had their education in the most ancient and famous University of Oxford,* (London, 1692), 387; Hugh Trevor-Roper, *Catholics, Anglicans and Puritans: Seventeenth Century Essays* (London: Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd, 1987), 184.
[21] Serenus Cressy, *Exomologesis, or, A faithfull narration of the occaision and motives of the conversion unto Catholick unity of Hugh-Paulin de Cressy* (Paris, 1653), 411.
[22] Ibid., 459.
[23] Ibid., 463.
[24] John Clark, ed. *Alphabet and Order* (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 2001), 38.

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selected reading lists.[25] Julian held a special place in the devotions of the nuns in the convents at Cambrai and Paris, who most likely identified with her as both an Englishwoman and a fellow contemplative.[26] The surviving library catalogue from the Paris convent reveals that the nuns had 'extracts out of holy mother Julian' as well as a transcript of 'The Revelations of Saint Julian'.[27] An eighteenth-century catalogue of the books at Cambrai records that the nuns owned fifteen copies of Cressy's published edition, suggesting it was especially popular.[28] These surviving sources show that the nuns prized female spiritual works, such as those of Bridget of Sweden and Jeanne de Cambry, as well as writings by the nuns themselves, including works by Gertrude More and Margaret Gascoigne.[29] Baker noted in his account of Gascoigne's life that she often contemplated 'holie wordes, that had sometimes ben spoken by God to the holie virgin Julian the clustresse of Norwich, as appeareth by the old manuscript booke of her Revelations and with the which wordes our Dame had ever formerlie ben much delighted'.[30] In the manuscript account of her devotions, which Baker edited, his comment (in italics) made this connection once again:

> Thou hast saide, O Lord, to a deare childe of thine 'Let me alone, my deare-worthy childe, intend (or attend) to me, I am enough to thee: rejoice in thy Saviour & salvation.' (*This was spoken to Julian the ankresse of Norwich, as appeareth by the booke of Revelations*). This, O Lord, I reade & thinke on with great joy, & cannot but take it was spoken also to me.[31]

Even Gascoigne's death mirrored Julian's visionary experience. After fainting during mass, Gascoigne was carried to the infirmary. Dying, she gazed upon a crucifix and focused on the words of Julian which 'remained before her eyes beneath the Crucifixe, till her death'.[32]

[25] Victoria Van Hyning, 'Augustine Baker: Discerning the "Call" and Fashioning Dead Disciples', in Clare Copeland and Jan Machielsen, eds. *Angels of Light? Sanctity and the Discernment of Spirits in the Early Modern Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 143–68 at 157; J. T. Rhodes, 'Dom Augustine Baker's Reading Lists', *The Downside Review* 111 (1993): 157–73 at 157.

[26] For the textual influence of Julian on the nuns see Nancy Bradley Warren, *The Embodied Word: Female Spiritualities, Contested Orthodoxies, and English Religious Cultures, 1350–1700* (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), ch. 2.

[27] Bibliothèque Mazarine MS 4058, fols. 31v, 206v. The catalogue has been recently transcribed with useful background notes, see Jan Rhodes, 'The Library Catalogue of the English Benedictine Nuns of Our Lady of Good Hope in Paris', *The Downside Review* 130 (2012): 54–86.

[28] J. T. Rhodes, ed. *Book list of the English Benedictine Nuns of Cambrai c. 1739* (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 2013), 81.

[29] For more on the voluminous writings by nuns in early modern convents, see Nicky Hallett, ed. *Lives of Spirit: English Carmelite Self-Writing of the Early Modern Period* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

[30] John Clark, ed. *Five Treatises; The Life and Death of Dame Margaret Gascoigne; Treatise of Confession* (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 2006), 66.

[31] John Clark, ed. *Letters and Translations from Thomas à Kempis in the Lille Archives and elsewhere; The Devotions of Dame Margaret Gascoigne* (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 2007), 61.

[32] Clark, ed. *Five Treatises; The Life and Death of Dame Margaret Gascoigne; Treatise of Confession*, 66.

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Julian's own experiences had a similar focus when she believed herself to be on her deathbed:

> After this my sight began to faile, and it was alle darke aboute me in the chamber as if it had ben night, save in the image of the crosse, wherin held a comon light, and I wiste not how. All that was beseid the crosse was oglye and ferful to me, as if it had ben mekille occupied with fiendes.[33]

This positive reception of Julian's theology, and the promotion of female spirituality more generally among the nuns, was not shared by everyone within the English Congregation. Francis Hull, the official confessor of the Cambrai nuns during Baker's time there, complained that Baker was encouraging the 'simple soules of women' to partake in advanced spiritual doctrines.[34] This was typical of the situation for women religious after the Council of Trent, which had defined the female spiritual life as strictly enclosed, denying the possibility of an apostolic mission outside the cloister due to the residual belief that women were by nature flawed and unsuitable for such work.[35] This strictly regulated lifestyle under the command of a male confessor, administrator or spiritual director often raised issues over the boundaries of control and authority like those which occurred among the English Benedictines.

A few years before Cressy returned to England in 1660 the Benedictines suffered another internal conflict. In 1655 the President of the Congregation attempted to seize the Baker manuscripts from the nuns for fear that they contained heretical doctrines. He worried that if Baker's doctrines were viewed as unorthodox by those outside the influence of the monasteries, the entire congregation could be brought into disrepute. His actions were undoubtedly in reaction to the activities of Cressy, who had started to digest the manuscripts of Baker ready for publication.[36] Once the work was published, it would be hard for the Benedictines to disown Baker's teachings.[37] Regardless of these worries, a spate of Benedictine publications went ahead in 1657 and exposed Baker's work to a much wider audience. Cressy's digest, entitled *Sancta*

[33] Watson and Jenkins, *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, 133.

[34] Bodleian Library Oxford MS Rawl. C. 460, fol. 435.

[35] Laurence Lux-Sterritt and Carmen M. Mangion, 'Introduction: Gender, Catholicism and Women's Spirituality over the *Longue Durée*', in Laurence Lux-Sterritt and Carmen M. Mangion, eds. *Gender, Catholicism, and Spirituality: Women and the Roman Catholic Church in Britain and Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011), 1–18 at 4; Alison Weber, 'Little Women: Counter-Reformation Misogyny', in David M. Luebke, ed. *The Counter-Reformation* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 143–62.

[36] Baker's MS works featured over one million words in total. Cressy digested this down to two hundred thousand. J.P.H Clark, 'Augustine Baker, O.S.B: Towards a Re-Assessment', *Studies in Spirituality* 14 (2004): 209–24 at 211. For more on this process see David Lunn, 'Augustine Baker (1575–1641) and the English Mystical Tradition', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 26 (1975): 267–77.

[37] Claire Walker, 'Spiritual Property: The English Benedictine Nuns of Cambrai and the Dispute over the Baker Manuscripts', in Nancy E. Wright, Margaret W. Ferguson and A. R. Buck, eds. *Women, Property, and the Letters of the Law in Early Modern England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 237–55 at 250–1.

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Sophia, was accompanied by Peter Salvin's *The Kingdom of God in the Soule* and Gertrude More's *The holy practises of a devine lover*, with More's *The Spiritual Exercises* appearing a year later in 1658.[38] Cressy firmly positioned these texts within the ongoing controversy over his conversion, stating that it was Baker's doctrines that had hastened his reconciliation with the Catholic Church. He proposed that Baker and other mystical authors were the cure to the present disorder and infighting in England and that the texts were to be used to convince Protestants to re-join the true Catholic Church.[39] This was because Baker, the Benedictine nuns and previous writers such as Julian of Norwich represented the 'very Soule of Christianity', and their validity was to be found in both 'Scriptures and Universall Tradition'. They were a means for England to recover from the 'fanatick Sectaries' which were swarming the country and claiming inspiration as their authority for 'new Fancies and practises'.[40] As a result of this publicity, much of the ensuing debate between Cressy and his Protestant critics in the Restoration period focused on the issue of the legitimacy of female visionary experience, including that of Julian of Norwich, and the place of mystical and visionary experiences in formulating legitimate doctrine.

Julian the 'melancholick maid'

Cressy's defence of Catholicism and female visionary authority was attacked in two ways by Stillingfleet: via a critique of female spirituality and monasticism as 'religious melancholy', and a rejection of the legitimacy of a second line of doctrinal authority known as 'unwritten tradition'. Both of these issues will be addressed in turn. Stillingfleet's attack on monasticism and female spirituality as melancholy served not only to separate the Church of England from the Catholic Church, but also to defend it from the sectarianism of the English Civil Wars. Catholic polemicists such as Cressy were quick to argue that divine providence had exposed the English Reformation as an unjustified schism, evidenced via the collapse of the Church of England and rise of sectarianism during the 1640s and 1650s.[41] Cressy referred to this as a 'spectacle of desolation', whereas Stillingfleet preferred to describe it as 'an Eclipse in the late confusions'.[42] Because

[38] Peter Salvin, *The Kingdom of God in the Soule* (Paris, 1657); Gertrude More, *The holy practises of a devine lover, or, The sainctly Ideots Devotions* (Paris, 1657); idem., *The spiritual exercises of the most vertuous and religious D. Gertrude More of the holy order of S. Bennet and English congregation of Our Ladies of Comfort in Cambray* (Paris, 1658).
[39] Augustine Baker, *Sancta Sophia, or, Directions for the prayer of contemplation* (Douai, 1657), iv.
[40] Ibid., xv.
[41] John Spurr, *The Restoration Church of England, 1646-1689* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), 11.
[42] Cressy, *Exomologesis,* 4; Edward Stillingfleet, *A rational account of the grounds of Protestant religion* (London, 1665), sig. A3v.

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of these confident claims on the part of Catholics, Stillingfleet developed an attack which inferred that radicalism was deeply respected in the Catholic Church and fiercely rejected by the Church of England. Female writers, such as Julian of Norwich, proved to be a great way to reinforce such an argument. He proposed that both denominations had suffered from enthusiasts, but while the Church of England had disowned such 'enthusiask Follies', the Roman Church had rather 'Canonized and adored' theirs.[43] The writings of Julian, as well as female saints such as Bridget of Sweden and Catherine of Siena, served to prove his point. In order to discredit such writings and show such revelations to be the result of enthusiasm, Stillingfleet capitalized on prevalent medical and polemical conceptualizations of melancholy.

The seventeenth century saw the transformation of the medical concept of 'melancholy' into a polemical tool with which to smear opponents.[44] The early modern understanding of melancholy was inherited from classical authors, especially Hippocrates and Galen, who taught that melancholy resulted from an imbalance of black bile in the four humours of the body. An 'unnatural melancholy' arose from excess melancholic humours being burned by the heating processes caused by overexcitement of the passions, poor diet or fever.[45] Women's melancholy was viewed as different to that of men due to their physiological differences and was thought originate in the womb, arising from suppression of the menstrual cycle or sexual abstinence.[46] Early Protestant reformers capitalized on the idea of 'unnatural melancholy' when attacking monasticism and the Catholic religious orders. The rejection of abstinence and immoderate fasting had been central to these criticisms. Martin Luther had argued against overvaluing virginity as opposed to marriage, while John Calvin rejected the assertion that monks could achieve perfection and labelled the monastic life as one of luxury and idleness.[47] Stillingfleet could

[43] Edward Stillingfleet, *An answer to several late treatises, occasioned by a book entituled A discourse concerning the idolatry practised in the Church of Rome* (London, 1673), 6.

[44] Michael Heyd, 'Robert Burton's Sources on Enthusiasm and Melancholy: From a Medical Tradition to Religious Controversy', *History of European Ideas* 5 (1984): 17–44.

[45] Clark Lawlor, 'Fashionable Melancholy', in Allan Ingram, Stuart Sim, Clark Lawlor, Richard Terry, John Baker and Leigh Wetherall-Dickson, eds. *Melancholy Experience in Literature of the Long Eighteenth Century: Before Depression, 1660-1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 25–51 at 27.

[46] Mary Ann Lund, *Melancholy, Medicine and Religion in Early Modern England: Reading The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 91. See also Kaara L. Peterson, 'Re-Anatomizing Melancholy: Burton and the Logic of Humoralism', in Elizabeth Lane Furdell, ed. *Textual Healing: Essays on Medieval and Early Modern Medicine* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 139–67; Katharine Hodgkin, 'Scurvy Vapors and the Devil's Claw: Religion and the Body in Seventeenth-Century Women's Melancholy', *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 44 (2011): 1–21.

[47] Greg Peters, *Reforming the Monastery: Protestant Theologies of the Religious Life* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2014), 27, 45. There was a more positive attitude towards asceticism forming among Protestants in the seventeenth century however, see Sarah

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thus appeal to this precedent, arguing that visions and mystical experiences, like those experienced by Julian, were simply the product of an inappropriate monastic lifestyle which had caused humoral imbalance and resulted in 'unnatural melancholy'.

Stillingfleet also drew on a pre-existing polemical tradition that had been fostered by previous Church of England apologists. In the early seventeenth century Robert Burton published his influential *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Burton presented the Church of England as a safe middle ground between the extremes of deluded Puritanism and superstitious Catholicism.[48] Like many before him, Burton believed that poor diet was the leading cause of melancholy behaviour, and monks and nuns, with their insistence on fasting, were especially prone to this as a result.[49] The monastics of the Catholic Church had been deceived by their own melancholy nature into believing they were receiving visions and could achieve perfection, a line of argument which blended Reformation critique and medical knowledge. 'Anchorites Monkes, and the rest of that superstitious rancke', Burton insisted, 'through immoderat fasting have been frequently mad'.[50] Julian of Norwich fell into this category as an anchoress. Burton drew on the Reformation critique of monasticism and pre-existing theories of medical melancholy when he described how:

> Some attribute more to such workes of theirs then to Christs death and passion, the divell sets in a foote, and strangely deludes them, and by that meanes makes them to overthrow the temperature of their bodies, and hazard their soules. Never any strange illusion of devils amongst Hermits, Anachorites, never any visions, phantasmes, apparitions, Enthusiasmes, Prophets, any revelations, but immoderate fasting, bad diet, sickenesse, melancholy, solitarinesse … Monkes, Anachorites and the like, after much emptinesse become melancholy, vertiginous, they thinke they heare strange noyses, conferre with Hobgoblines, divells, rivell up their bodies.[51]

Another defender of the Church of England made the link between female spirituality, monasticism and enthusiasm even more overt. Meric Casaubon wrote his *A Treatise Concerning Enthusiasm* in 1654 while exiled to Oxford after being deprived of his ministry, heavily fined and briefly imprisoned for refusing to conform to the Interregnum regime. His critique of Catholicism focused on the Carmelite nun Catherine de Jésus, in particular an account of her life that had been published in French in 1628.[52] Casaubon noted with

Apetrei, '"The Life of Angels": Celibacy and Asceticism in Anglicanism, 1660- c. 1700', *Reformation & Renaissance Review* 13 (2011): 247–74.

48 Angus Gowland, *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy: Robert Burton in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 159.

49 Robert Burton, *The anatomy of melancholy what it is. With all the kindes, causes, symptomes, prognostickes, and severall cures of it* (Oxford, 1621), 86.

50 Ibid., 92.

51 Ibid., 735.

52 Madeleine de Saint-Joseph, *La vie de soeur Catherine de Jesus religieuse de l'ordre de Nostre-Dame du Mont-Carmel, établi en France selon la réformation de sainte Thérèse de*

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disdain that the publication was supported by leading members of the Catholic Church, despite its being 'a long contexture of severall strange raptures and enthusiasms, that had hapned unto a melancholick, or if you will, a devout Maid'.[53] Here Casaubon separated attitudes towards Catherine into two opposite camps; the Protestant view of her as 'melancholick' and the Catholic view of her as 'devout'. This enabled Casaubon to represent Catholicism as a superstitious and delusional religion in which figures such as Catherine, despite their suffering from melancholy, were seen as spiritual authorities. By discrediting her visions, Casaubon reinforced his conceptualization of the Protestant faith as rational, scripturally based and alert to false zeal. Catholics as a consequence were thus gullible, overzealous and easily deceived by false miracles. They fell too easily into believing accounts of visions and mystical experience, like those of Catherine de Jésus, which were actually 'natural effects of a bodily disease'.[54] Because Catholics praised this false religious experience, more and more monastics began to believe their visions to be true, and were thus 'often subject unto relapses into ecstasies, or ecstatical fits' which became a 'proper distemper of the brain'.[55]

It was into this category that Stillingfleet placed Julian of Norwich's text. He argued that the tyranny of the Catholic Church was to prey on an individual's melancholic nature to make them subservient to the will of the papacy. Rather than allowing every individual access to the Scriptures, they instead subjugated those of a melancholic or 'superstitious temper' by commending them to a life of isolation, mental prayer and introversion which would end in enthusiasm or madness. This forced them to leave the plain and sensible form of religion found in the Scriptures and instead fall into 'extravagant illusions of fancy'. Once these people were encouraged into this state, they began to experience 'raptures, visions, and revelations'. They were then distracted by the 'Fanatick Revelations of distempered brains' such as the visions of Julian of Norwich. Even the worst Protestant enthusiasts, according to Stillingfleet, paled in comparison to her. 'Did ever H. N. Jacob Behmen, or the highest Enthusiasts', he asked, 'talk at a more extravagant rate than this Juliana doth?'.[56] By drawing on medical theories and works by Burton and Casaubon,

Jésus (Paris, 1628). Further details on the contents of this work can be found in Barbara B. Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity: Pious Women and the Catholic Reformation in Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), ch. 5.

[53] Meric Casaubon, *A treatise concerning enthusiasme, as it is an effect of nature, but is mistaken by many for either divine inspiration, or diabolical possession* (London, 1655), sig. ¶7.

[54] Ibid., 66.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Edward Stillingfleet, *A discourse concerning the idolatry practised in the Church of Rome* (London, 1671), 258. 'H.N.' is a reference to Hendrik Niclaes, the German founder of the Family of Love, while 'Jacob Behmen' is a reference to Jacob Boehme, the German alchemical mystic.

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Stillingfleet constructed an identity of Julian as a 'melancholick maid'. Her reputation among the Benedictine nuns and Cressy's particular fondness for her writings, despite Stillingfleet seeing clear medical and natural explanations for her visions, was proof of just how deep the problem of enthusiasm ran within the Roman Church.

Yet Stillingfleet took this argument much further than just attacking Julian of Norwich, arguing that the entire tradition of monasticism was set up on the basis of false enthusiastic and melancholic visions. He took particular delight in ridiculing the Benedictines, another indirect attack at those surrounding and influencing Charles II. Saint Benedict was labelled one of the greatest enthusiasts for rejecting scholarly and rational knowledge, and Stillingfleet mocked the idea that Benedict and Sister Scholastica had 'sung very distinctly in their Mother's Wombs' as nonsense.[57] Alongside the Carthusians, Dominicans, Franciscans and Jesuits, the Benedictines valued pretend visions and revelations due to their 'perfect way of life' being set up by 'Enthusiastick persons'. Stillingfleet condemned them all, arguing that the 'highest way of devotion in that Church is meer Enthusiasme'.[58] Such melancholic people, he insisted, were not to be trusted when they could blindly enact the will of the papacy, thus revealing an additional political context to his argument. Robert Burton had said clearly in his work that after being locked in a 'melancholy dark chamber' until becoming mad, blind zeal could become blind obedience. This would make any man 'goe beyond himselfe, to undertake some great businesse of moment, to kill a king or the like'.[59] Conjuring up memories of the assassinations of Henry III and Henry IV of France by overzealous Catholics, Stillingfleet warned of the danger of allowing the Benedictines and Jesuits such easy access to the royal court.

'Tittle tattle' and tradition

This critique of monasticism and revelatory experience fed into a much larger debate between Stillingfleet and Cressy over the nature of doctrinal authority. This was not a new debate, but rather one which had been raging since the Reformation. Elizabethan apologist John Jewel's *Apologia ecclesiae anglicanae* (1562) had challenged Catholics to prove that their doctrines had any basis in Scripture or the teachings of the primitive Church during its first six centuries. Whereas Elizabethan defenders of the Church of England viewed the Church Fathers as *testes veritatis* or witnesses to the truth of Scripture, maintaining the principle of *sola scriptura*, Restoration divines

[57] Ibid., 266.
[58] Ibid., 261.
[59] Burton, *The anatomy of melancholy,* 738.

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justified the episcopal nature of the English Church by appealing to the consensus of the Fathers on a range of issues.[60] Stillingfleet was thus comfortable admitting that English Protestants 'profess to follow the unanimous consent of the primitive Fathers' on doctrinal issues.[61] This was partly to reject the radical claims to direct inspiration which had arisen during the Civil Wars and Interregnum and instead restore authority to the Church. Stillingfleet thus went to great lengths to show that the Church of England's stance on the primacy of Scripture and the events of the English Reformation had not, as Cressy claimed, forced the 'seamelesse garment of Christ', or the true Church, to be 'torne by them into I know not how many rags'.[62] Both Catholics and Protestants could draw upon the authority of Scripture and the Church Fathers, but where they differed, and where Cressy and Stillingfleet fiercely disagreed, was over 'unwritten tradition'.

The Catholic Church from the early Middle Ages had believed in a fundamental harmony between Scripture and the Church as the norms of faith and doctrine. They were not parallel sources, but mutually linked; the Church taught what the Scriptures contained and the Scriptures contained what the Church taught. Derived from the Latin *traditio* which means 'handing over' or 'handing down', tradition became a way to interpret Scripture as the Apostles had done; the handing down of the correct interpretation to safeguard against heresy. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries however, tradition came to be seen as a second source of revelation, provided by God to speak on issues which Scripture did not. This was an 'unwritten tradition', passed down from one generation to the next, which allowed the Catholic Church special insights into the true meaning of scriptural issues. After the Council of Trent, Catholic theologians began to describe this tradition with fewer and fewer references to patristic authors, and more to later ones.[63]

Having smeared monastics as melancholy enthusiasts, Stillingfleet could now question their reliability as sources of doctrinal authority. Rather than rejecting these fanatics—as the Church of England had repudiated the sectarians—he believed the Roman Church had embraced them as central to their beliefs. 'Where are the Visions and Revelations ever pleaded by us in any matter of Doctrine?' Stillingfleet asked his

[60] Jean-Louis Quantin, *The Church of England and Christian Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 397–400; John C. English, 'The Duration of the Primitive Church: An Issue for Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Anglicans', *Anglican and Episcopal History* 73 (2004): 35–52.

[61] Stillingfleet, *A discourse concerning the idolatry practised in the Church of Rome,* 481.

[62] Cressy, *Exomologesis,* 14.

[63] Quantin, *The Church of England and Christian Antiquity*, 397–400; Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 93; George H. Tavard, *The Seventeenth-Century Tradition: A Study in Recusant Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 1. See also idem., *Holy Writ or Holy Church: The crisis of the Protestant Reformation* (London: Burns & Oates, 1959).

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readers, which Protestant doctrines were based on 'the account of Revelations made to Women or to any private persons?'. Unlike Catholics, they had not used 'Visions and Extasies' to justify doctrine. 'Were we to take an estimate of Christian Religion from such Raptures and Extasies' he pressed, 'how much must we befool ourselves to think it sense?'.[64] Catholics saw no difference between the writings of Julian of Norwich and the books of Scripture, between the revelations of Bridget of Sweden and the ancient prophets, or the actions of Ignatius of Loyola and the Apostles.[65] To believe that Julian could be used to inform doctrine was especially galling to Stillingfleet, who believed that 'scarce any thing was ever Printed more ridiculous'.[66]

Criticism was especially focused on female revelatory experience. Stillingfleet referenced a recent controversy in the Catholic Church surrounding the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary. Although not given in great detail, this was probably a reference to the decision of Pope Sixtus IV in 1476 to legitimate the Feast of the Immaculate Conception after years of dispute between Franciscans and Dominicans over the issue. Some theologians argued that Bridget of Sweden's revelations proved the Virgin Mary had not been born with original sin, while others called on the revelations of Catherine of Siena which suggested she had. 'Here', Stillingfleet taunted, 'we have Saint against Saint, Revelation against Revelation, S. Catharine against S. Brigitt, and all the rest of them'.[67] Both women were viewed as sources of authority, but only one could be correct. Stillingfleet believed that this example showed the falsity of allowing such sources to legitimize Christian doctrine, when they were so clearly the product of the 'power of imagination, or a Religious Melancholy'. A more serious conclusion was that successive Popes had approved both the revelations as legitimate, suggesting that infallibility was also to be questioned.[68] The Catholic Church had relied on the visions of Elizabeth of Schönau, Angela of Foligno, Catherine of Sienna and Bridget of Sweden to prove various erroneous doctrines such as purgatory and transubstantiation, when in fact these were nothing more than 'Fanatical Revelations'. These 'melancholy Women' had been exploited by the Catholic Church to enforce tyranny. In order to maintain their power, the Catholic Church had created these new doctrines to ensnare Christians and 'make the conditions of salvation mutable according to the pleasure of the Church'.[69] Thus to go beyond the 'most plain and certain way of Religion' delivered in the Scripture

[64] Stillingfleet, *A discourse concerning the idolatry practised in the Church of Rome*, 257–8.
[65] Stillingfleet, *An answer to several late treatises*, 11.
[66] Ibid., 57–8.
[67] Stillingfleet, *A discourse concerning the idolatry practised in the Church of Rome,* 244
[68] Ibid., 248.
[69] Ibid., 543.

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would lead many to fanaticism and enthusiasm, which would be readily capitalized on by the papacy.

Stillingfleet used Julian of Norwich and other religious women to separate the Church of England from both Catholicism and sectarianism. Like Burton and Casaubon before him, he presented the English Church as the safe middle ground between two extremes. At one stage Stillingfleet even linked sectarianism and Catholic enthusiasm together in an attack on the Jesuits:

> And now let the world judge, whether there hath appeared a greater Enthusiast or pretender to revelations than Ignatius was … Methinks they might be ashamed to upbraid us with the Fanaticism of the Quakers and such persons, the chiefest of whom fall very much short of Ignatius, in those very things for which they are condemned by us, yet any one who compares them would imagine, the life of Ignatius had been their great exemplar. I know not whether any of that innocent and religious order of Jesuits, had any hand in forming this new Society among us (as hath been frequently suggested) but if one may guesse the Father by the Childs likeness, Ignatius Loyola the founder of the Jesuits, was at least the Grandfather of the Quakers.[70]

Stillingfleet attempted to show that rather than offering protection from sectarianism, as Catholics such as Cressy often claimed for the Roman Church, Catholicism may in fact have been one of the main sources of England's sectarian problem. If smearing Loyola as the grandfather of the Quakers did not make this point sufficiently obvious, describing Julian's writings as being full of 'Canting and Enthusiastick expressions' certainly did. The Catholic Church was the ultimate source of enthusiasm, fanaticism and false doctrine and therefore had no right to criticize the legitimacy of the Church of England. Catholicism was a source of tyranny and superstition, something to be contrasted with the rational and Scripturally based Church of England. He asked his readers if it did not now seem a great folly that Catholics gloated over fanaticism and radicalism in England when their very doctrines were based on the false revelations of melancholy monks and the 'Fancies of some Women'.[71] Stillingfleet concluded by questioning whether Cressy had any esteem for Mary Blount in dedicating his edition of Julian's works to her, when there was nothing useful to be found in the 'blasphemous and senseless tittle tattle of this Hysterical Gossip'.[72]

Conclusion

The first printed edition of Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love* in 1670 resulted in two very different opinions of her text which have been previously unexplored. If scholars are now concerned with tracing the 'many Julians' that have existed from her own time until

[70] Ibid., 324.
[71] Ibid., 340.
[72] Ibid., 260.

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now, we need to be aware of her contrasting reputations in the seventeenth century: spiritual role model and melancholy maid, pillar of church doctrine and fanatical anchoress, proof of the legitimacy of Catholic devotion and evidence of Catholic enthusiasm. These conflicting images of Julian helped both Catholics and Protestants to construct their own identities in print. For Cressy she represented the strength of Roman Catholic devotional and spiritual traditions, as well as the sanctity of the monastic orders. He proudly boasted of Julian as proof of the validity of additional 'unwritten traditions' of doctrine which the Roman Church alone had access to. This in turn validated transubstantiation, purgatory, infallibility and a whole range of Catholic beliefs. Stillingfleet used Julian to distance the Church of England from everything he believed was characteristic of the Roman Church: enthusiasm, superstition, tyranny and irrationality. It was also a way of distancing the established Church from the sectarianism of the Civil Wars and refuting Catholic claims that the Church of England was schismatical.

Exploring Julian's contested reputation has allowed new insights into much wider issues which dominated the Restoration period. By attacking Julian, Stillingfleet could express his anxieties over the growing Catholic presence at court, a concern he shared with many in the period. Questioning the loyalty of members of the Catholic religious orders—prone to melancholy and easily influenced to act on behalf of the papacy—continued a debate over the conflicting loyalty of English Catholics to both crown and papacy that had started in 1570 with the papal bull of Pius V. In a time of growing tensions over the power and influence of Louis XIV, concern over the Catholic presence surrounding Charles II, and fears of absolutism and arbitrary government, Stillingfleet's attacks on Serenus Cressy and Julian of Norwich reflected a wider concern about the threat Catholicism posed to the newly reinstated national Church. By 1676 Stillingfleet was comparing Catholics to moles; blind, deceitful and unseen, working underground to undermine the English Church and busily striving 'for the Ruine of our established Religion'.[73]

Julian of Norwich was thus many things to many people in the seventeenth century. By exploring the various identities prescribed to her in the period, we can see how these identities reflected the wider political and doctrinal concerns of influential polemicists such as Cressy and Stillingfleet. To pose the question 'Have we any mother Juliana's among us?', as Stillingfleet did in 1671, was a way to address the doctrinal differences between Catholics and Protestants, the legitimacy

[73] Edward Stillingfleet, *A defence of the discourse concerning the idolatry practised in the Church of Rome in answer to a book entituled, Catholicks no idolators* (London, 1676), sig. A4r.

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of visionary experience, the dangers of religious melancholy, the loyalty of English Catholics, the political decisions of Charles II, the validity of monasticism, and the origins and causes of enthusiasm.[74] Not much was known of Julian herself in the seventeenth century, but through her text, it is clear we can discover much about the identities and concerns of those who discussed her work.

[74] Stillingfleet, *A discourse concerning the idolatry practised in the Church of Rome*, 258.

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