Religious Conviction

Because there are so many individuals that claim to be oriented towards religion, one can make the assumption that most of these people have probably witnessed or experienced something that has helped them make this decision. In A Book of Showings, Julian of Norwich delivers an ethereal example of this concept to the readers. Throughout the entirety of the story, Julian describes a series of mystical visions that correlate with her religious beliefs. Many references of the holy trinity are made, along with the idea that God is the maker, keeper and the lover of everything. Julian implements many examples of symbolism and imagery within the story, to better explain and translate the importance or meaning of these astounding visions. Through the usage of these literary devices, Julian is able to affect the emotional feeling of the reader and paint a more vivid image of what she is witnessing. Throughout the story, Julian offers her work as a description of her religious conviction.

Early in the story, Julian makes her prevalent religious beliefs known to the reader. While she is describing the pain that she is enduring, Julian states: “And when I was thirty year old and a half, God sent me a bodily sickness in the which I lay three days and three nights; and on the fourth night I took all my rites of the holy church, and went not to have liven till day” (414). Considering that Julian describes her illness as lasting three days and three nights and that is was sent by God, readers should see that Julian’s illness is symbolic for the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the son of God. Another prominent example of religious symbolism, within this quote, is
the repetition of the number three. The number three, in religious context, represents the holy trinity. Considering that the holy trinity is derived from the belief that ‘God is everything’, and it is widely accepted by those of the Christian orientation, readers can see that Julian is extremely devout in her religious beliefs.

Towards the beginning of chapter four, Julian provides a quote that can be categorized as an example of symbolism, and, due to the vivid description, this example of symbolism induces imagery for the reader. Soon after the curate sets the crucifix in front of Julian’s face, Julian states:

> And in this suddenly I saw the red blood running down from under the garland, hot and freshly, plenteously and lively, right as it was in the time that the garland of thorns was pressed in his blessed head. Right so, both God and man, the same that suffered for me, I conceived truly and mightily that it was himself that shewed it me without any mean. (415)

Within this quote, the reader can see that Julian believes that God has sent this vision for her, so that she may witness and realize the pain that was inflicted upon him during his time of suffering, as he was crucified. Because Julian is as thoroughly descriptive as she is, in explaining the vision, an image of Jesus’ suffering is painted for the reader, the same pain that Julian wishes to endure. Readers should be able to conclude that the garland is symbolic for the oppression that Jesus felt and the punishment that was given to him. Also, because blood can easily be associated with pain or hardship, this imagery that Julian induces is symbolic for the pain that Jesus endured.

This empathetic feeling, that Julian claims to have towards Jesus, is introduced to reader early in chapter three. Julian does not seem to merely pity Jesus, but wishes to embrace the pain
that he experienced. Because of this, readers should be able to see that Julian is more empathetic than sympathetic. This concept is delivered to the reader soon after Julian is cured of her illness:

Then came suddenly to my mind that I should desire the second wound of our Lord’s gift and of his grace, and that my body might be fulfilled with mind and Feeling of his blessed passion, as I had before prayed, for I would that his pains Were my pains, with compassion and afterward longing to God. (415)

Although Julian is cured of her illness, after three days and three nights, it seems as if she wishes to continue suffering, to better understand the painful endeavor of her savior. This helps readers to see that Julian practices affective piety. This is made obvious, due to the fact that she is attempting to feel what Jesus felt during his time on earth. Julian feels as if she will have a stronger relationship with the lord if she undergoes the same amount of pain that he experienced. If Julian is able to re-create the pain of Jesus, she feels as if she will be able to form a type of unity between her and her savior.

In chapter five, Julian describes an item, within one of her visions, that is symbolic for a certain, well-known and universally accepted Christian idea. Julian’s curate offers this item to her, and Julian states: “And in this he showed me a little thing, the quantity of a hazelnut, lying in the palm of my hand, as me seemed, and it was as round as a ball” (416). Christians, such as Julian, tend to believe that God is the maker, keeper and lover of everything, and, through God, all things are taken care of. This hazelnut that the curate delivers to Julian is symbolic of this Christian ideology. This hazelnut further describes Julian’s belief that God loves everything that he creates and that he will treat it accordingly, despite the size of it. This idea is further elaborated upon by Julian; “The first is that God made it, the second that God loveth it, the third that God keepeth it. But what beheld I therein? Verily, the maker, the keeper, the lover” (416).
Although this quote describes the symbolic nature of the hazelnut, it also represents another important and recurring theme within the reading. This quote is symbolic of the holy trinity, referred to many times throughout the story. Although the holy trinity traditionally represents God as the father, the son and the Holy Ghost, Julian symbolizes the trinity in different ways, but she still describes the entity of God’s being as a state of three. These symbolic items and quotes help the reader to better understand Julian’s religious conviction.

As the story progresses, Julian begins using different literary devices to induce imagery for the reader. With one accord, Julian uses a simile to paint an execrable picture for the reader; Julian states: The plenteous is like to the drops of water that fall of the evesing of an house after a great shower of rain, that fall so thick that no man many number them with no bodily wit” (417). This simile compares the profuse amount of blood that is flowing from beneath the crown of thorns, upon the head of Jesus, to that of water falling from the eaves of a house, after a heavy downpour of rain. This grotesque image that Julian delivers is implemented to help the reader fathom the abhorrent sight that she is witnessing during her vision. Because this example of imagery is induced by the crucifix, readers can see that it symbolizes the recurring theme of the pain that Jesus endured. Along with the example of water droplets, Julian compares the blood to pellets and scales of a herring. This ‘three-way’ comparison reflects the often referred to idea of a holy trinity, the description of God’s being as a state of three. These image inducing similes help readers to understand the extent of Julian’s religiosity.

Towards the end of reading, within chapter fifty-eight specifically, Julian delivers one of the most notable examples of symbolism to the reader. Julian is describing the being of God when she states: And thus in our making God almighty is our kindly father, and god all wisdom is our kindly mother, with the love and the goodness of the Holy Ghost, which is all one God,
one Lord” (419). It should be apparent to the reader that this quote is symbolic of the holy trinity, but this example is different than most, considering that Julian refers to God as being a mother, as well. Although it would be a stretch to consider this example derogative as a way of viewing the trinity, it is certainly untraditional. During the time of this book’s composure, women were not as respected as men, and the belief that God is male was widely accepted. Julian is not being literal when she describes God as a mother. Julian describes God as having the wisdom of a mother, not the physical characteristics. Julian uses this analogy as an example of symbolism to explain the vast wisdom of her creator.

As the story draws to a close, readers can see that Julian has thoroughly expressed her religious conviction. Throughout the story, Julian strives to prove her faith to God and to create a unity between her and her savior. Readers are able to recognize Julian’s practice of affective piety, due to the recollected accounts the she describes and her yearning to embrace the suffering of Jesus. The prominent and repetitive usage of symbolism allows the reader to understand the underlying meaning within Julian’s text. The persistent insertion of imagery inducing descriptions helps Julian paint a sufficient image, of what she is witnessing, for the reader. These literary techniques allow Julian to more thoroughly describe her accounts and the religious significance of them. In the end, readers can see that Julian of Norwich has devised a story, which explains the widely-respected Christian view of religions and adequately proves her devoutness to the Lord.
Work Cited