The long version of Julian of Norwich’s *A Revelation of Love* merges Julian’s goals of reaching God and reaching others by acting as an intermediary device to help others reach God. Negotiating between her desire to annihilate the self and the personal attention that her textual practice and role as an anchoress garnered, Julian’s self-characterization offers her audience a way to think of her that deflects admiration and gratitude for her teaching to its proper recipient—God—but that also positions the anchoress and her message for continued popular appeal. Julian constructs herself as an intermediary for the community she addresses, a tool authorized to guide and participate in her audience’s devotional practice and conception of divinity. In *A Revelation of Love*, the visionary contemplative is unworthy of adoration in herself, yet she remains integral to the religious climate of Norwich.

This chapter contends that to encourage such an understanding of Julian’s role, *A Revelation* structures Julian’s memories of her showings around what Mary Carruthers has termed “publicly held commonplaces” about Marian qualities, especially Mary’s maternal intercession, and about female visionary experience. By aligning contemplative practice and the gift of revelation with teachings about the Virgin Mary, Christendom’s intercessor par excellence, *A Revelation* establishes Julian as a legitimate authority on humanity’s relationship with God. The potential for clerical criticism of a writing woman, present throughout the Middle Ages, was exacerbated by Julian’s subject matter—her God-given revelations—requiring her to reconcile her visionary experience with the institutional
authority of the church. By embracing the *imitatio Mariae* (or imitation of Mary) trope, Julian foregrounds similarities between the visionary recluse and the mother of Christ, especially in terms of their contributions to the Christian community. The anchoress thus activates readers’ “strategic memory networks” surrounding Mary. As Barbara Zimbalist also demonstrates in this volume, such “imitative rhetorical strategies play a crucial part in the construction of narrative identity.” To follow this thread in Julian’s text, I briefly sketch some contemporary trends in English spirituality and illustrate their creation of demand for a Marian mediatrix. I then examine the passages in *A Revelation of Love* that involve Mary, suggesting that Julian’s identification with the Virgin shapes her subjectivity and self-characterization in a manner that establishes her relevance without threatening clerical primacy. I conclude by considering Julian’s Marian imagery in conjunction with earlier writings by several well-known holy women, as well as with hagiographical representations of these women.

Julian’s account of her revelations operates as a devotional tool for both lay and religious audiences, mediating their understanding of God. All Christians relied on their priests for communion, absolution, and advice on godly living. But at times, believers sought out supplementary avenues to God, such as pilgrimages to saints’ shrines, readings from personal devotional texts such as the primer, or conferences with local anchorites. Julian’s revelation and vow of reclusion gave her the personal authority and institutional authorization to advise and to pray on behalf of such petitioners. This function might have particularly appealed to people embracing new expressions of piety that not all clergy accepted as orthodox—think, for example, of Margery Kempe. Julian’s vernacular narrative and interpretation of her revelatory experience provide her audience with another accessible way to meditate on God’s love, bridging between the mundane and the divine. Her text thus functions as a material realization of the links between God and man that her narrative explicates.

Julian’s self-construction creates a place for her and her text as mediators in this milieu, but it also upholds traditional ecclesiastical authority by foregrounding Julian’s dissimilarity to the clergy while repeatedly referencing her theological alignment with church doctrine. A spiritual adviser and intercessor of Julian’s nature would have proved especially attractive in fourteenth-century England because of a persistent gap between the idea and reality of pastoral care. “The clergy was removed further and further from the lifestyle of the laity and from certain kinds of contact with women and family,” the very people for whom they were to intercede with God. However, although Julian did not preach from a pulpit, her vernacular textual production could have threatened clergics