

A Christian Response to Evil: Julian of Norwich

Julian of Norwich lived from 1342 to 1416 in the town of Norwich in England. When she was about thirty years old, she suffered a life-threatening illness and, on the verge of death, she had a series of visions which she later wrote down. She later became an anchoress in the Church of St. Julian – that is, she lived alone in a cell adjoining the church, from which she took the name Julian (her original name is unknown). She produced a longer book about her visions, incorporating the original record, and later theological reflections about the significance of what she saw. This book is known as the *Revelation of Divine Love*, and it is the earliest surviving book written in English by a woman. Julian's style of English is barely comprehensible today, so I have printed sections of a translation made in 1901. This translation modernizes her spelling, but remains very close to the original text – for example, the word “ruth” means “mercy”.

Julian's original visions were a source of comfort when she was facing great physical pain and the danger of death. Her one guiding thought is that God always loves us. This leads her to hint that perhaps nobody will be punished forever in hell, because God will do some amazing deed that will mean nobody is unhappy forever. In the middle ages when she was writings, this would be considered a heresy, and to this day, there are those who doubt her orthodoxy because of this. But she was never accused of heresy in her lifetime, and she frequently states that she is loyal to whatever the Church teaches. I have included the whole of Section XIII in which Julian argues that, since God can fix the sin of Adam, all sin can be solved by God – “all manner of thing shall be well.” I have also included a later chapter (Chapter LI, that is 51) in which she explains how God forgives the sin of Adam. She has a vision in which God sends a servant who falls. The servant is, at the same time, Adam, who fell into sin, and Jesus, who came down in human form. The servant is Adam, and Jesus, because both Adam and Jesus are figures who stand for the whole of humanity: in Adam, we all sin, in Jesus, we are all redeemed.