



## Julian of Norwich (late 1342 – after 1416)

*Theologian, anchoress, mystic*

Julian (or Juliana) of Norwich, also known as Dame Julian or Mother Julian was the greatest of all the English anchorites of the Middle Ages. She wrote the earliest surviving book in the English language to be written by a woman, *Revelations of Divine Love*. She lived throughout her life in the English city of Norwich, an important centre for commerce that also had a vibrant religious life. Very little is known of her early life, even her real name. What we know about her is gleaned from her book and from other contemporary writings. She was born in 1342 during the time of the Black Death. This was a very unpleasant age to live in England. The black death or plague led to very bad social conditions and the oppression of the poor. There was a shortage of labour, high taxes and bad harvests, prices were soaring and unrest was bound to follow. The climax of this unrest was the Peasants Revolt in 1381. The wider Church was also in a sorry state: the Religious Orders were at loggerheads, the Papacy had left Rome and was in exile at Avignon in France, and not half a mile from S. Julian's Church, the early followers of the Protestant John Wycliff, The Lollards, were being burnt in the Lollards Pit, just the other side of the river. It is into this dire situation that the girl we know as Julian of Norwich who calls herself a simple, unlettered creature, comes bringing with her a message of divine love and hope.



St. Julian's Church & Shrine

In 1373, aged thirty and so seriously ill she thought she was on her deathbed, Julian received a series of visions or “shewings” of the Passion of Christ and of Mary, mother of Jesus. She recovered from her illness and wrote two versions of her experiences, the earlier one being completed soon after her recovery, and a much longer version being written many years later.

For much of her life, Julian lived in permanent seclusion as an anchoress in her cell, which was attached to St. Julian’s Church, Norwich. Four wills in which sums were bequeathed to her have survived, and an account by the celebrated mystic Margery Kempe exists, which provides details of the counsel she was given by the anchoress.



Nothing is known for certain about Julian’s actual name, family, or education, or of her life prior to her becoming an anchoress. Preferring to write anonymously, and seeking isolation from the world, she was nevertheless influential in her own lifetime. Her writings were first published in 1670, by Serenus de Cressy. She emerged from obscurity when a manuscript in the British Museum was transcribed and published with notes by Grace Warrack in 1901. Since then many more translations of *Revelations of Divine Love* (also known under other titles) have been produced. Julian is nowadays considered to be an important Christian mystic and theologian.

### What is an anchoress?

An anchorite or anchoret (female: anchoress; from Ancient Greek: ἀναχωρητής, anachōrētēs, “one who has retired from the world”, from the verb ἀναχωρέω, anachōréō, signifying “to withdraw”, “to retire”) is someone who, for religious reasons, withdraws from secular society so as to be able to lead an intensely prayer-oriented, ascetic, or Eucharist-focused life. Whilst anchorites are frequently considered to be a type of religious hermit, unlike hermits they were required to take a vow of stability of place, opting instead for permanent enclosure in cells often attached to churches. Also unlike hermits, anchorites were subject to a religious rite of consecration that closely resembled the funeral rite, following which they would be considered dead to the world, a type of living saint. Anchorites had a certain autonomy, as they did not answer to any ecclesiastical authority other than the bishop.

The anchoritic life is one of the earliest forms of Christian monasticism. In the Catholic Church today, it is one of the “Other Forms of Consecrated Life” and governed by the same norms as the consecrated eremitic life. In England, the

earliest recorded anchorites existed in the 11th century. Their highest number – around 200 anchorites – were recorded in the 13th century.

Excerpts from *Revelations of Divine Love*

THIS is a Revelation of Love that Jesus Christ, our endless bliss, made in Sixteen Shewings, or Revelations particular.

Of the which the First is of His precious crowning with thorns; and therewith was comprehended and specified the Trinity, with the Incarnation, and unity betwixt God and man's soul; with many fair shewings of endless wisdom and teachings of love: in which all the Shewings that follow be grounded and oned.

The Second is the changing of colour of His fair face in token of His dearworthy Passion.

The Third is that our Lord God, Allmighty Wisdom, All-Love, right as verily as He hath made everything that is, all-so verily He doeth and worketh all-thing that is done.

The Fourth is the scourging of His tender body, with plenteous shedding of His blood.

The Fifth is that the Fiend is overcome by the precious Passion of Christ.

The Sixth is the worshipful thanking by our Lord God in which He rewardeth His blessed servants in Heaven.

The Seventh is [our] often feeling of weal and woe; (the feeling of weal is gracious touching and lightening, with true assuredness of endless joy; the feeling of woe is temptation by heaviness and irksomeness of our fleshly living;) with ghostly understanding that we are kept all as securely in Love in woe as in weal, by the Goodness of God.

The Eighth is of the last pains of Christ, and His cruel dying.

The Ninth is of the pleasing which is in the Blissful Trinity by the hard Passion of Christ and His rueful dying: in which joy and pleasing He willeth that we be solaced and mirthed with Him, till when we come to the fulness in Heaven.

The Tenth is, our Lord Jesus sheweth in love His blissful heart even cloven in two, rejoicing.

The Eleventh is an high ghostly Shewing of His dearworthy Mother.

The Twelfth is that our Lord is most worthy Being.

The Thirteenth is that our Lord God willeth we have great regard to all the deeds that He hath done: in the great nobleness of the making of all things; and the excellency of man's making, which is above all his works; and the precious Amends that He hath made for man's sin, turning all our blame into endless worship. In which Shewing also our Lord saith: *Behold and see! For by the same Might, Wisdom, and Goodness that I have done all this, by the same Might, Wisdom, and Goodness I shall make well all that is not well; and thou shalt see it.* And in this He willeth that we keep us in the Faith and truth of Holy Church, not desiring to see into His secret things now, save as it belongeth to us in this life.

The Fourteenth is that our Lord is the Ground of our Prayer. Herein were seen two properties: the one is rightful prayer, the other is steadfast trust; which He willeth should both be alike large; and thus our prayer pleaseth Him and He of His Goodness fulfilleth it.

The Fifteenth is that we shall suddenly be taken from all our pain and from all our woe, and of His Goodness we shall come up above, where we shall have our Lord Jesus for our meed and be fulfilled with joy and bliss in Heaven.

The Sixteenth is that the Blissful Trinity, our Maker, in Christ Jesus our Saviour, endlessly dwelleth in our soul, worshipfully ruling and protecting all things, us mightily and wisely saving and keeping, for love; and we shall not be overcome of our Enemy.

The Thirteenth Revelation (Shewing)

## CHAPTER XXVII

AFTER this the Lord brought to my mind the longing that I had to Him afore. And I saw that nothing letted me but sin. And so I looked, generally, upon us all, and methought: *If sin had not been, we should all have been clean and like to our Lord, as He made us.*

And thus, in my folly, afore this time often I wondered why by the great foreseeing wisdom of God the beginning of sin was not letted: for then, methought, all should have been well. This stirring [of mind] was much to be forsaken, but nevertheless mourning and sorrow I made therefor, without reason and discretion.

But Jesus, who in this Vision informed me of all that is needful to me, answered by this word and said: *It behoved that there should be sin; but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.*

In this naked word *sin*, our Lord brought to my mind, generally, *all that is not good*, and the shameful despite and the utter noughting that He bare for us in this life, and His dying; and all the pains and passions of all His creatures, ghostly and bodily; (for we be all partly noughted, and we shall be noughted following our Master, Jesus, till we be full purged, that is to say, till we be fully noughted of our deadly flesh and of all our inward affections which are not very good;) and the beholding of this, with all pains that ever were or ever shall be, – and with all these I understand the Passion of Christ for most pain, and overpassing. All this was shewed in a touch and quickly passed over into comfort: for our good Lord would not that the soul were affeared of this terrible sight.

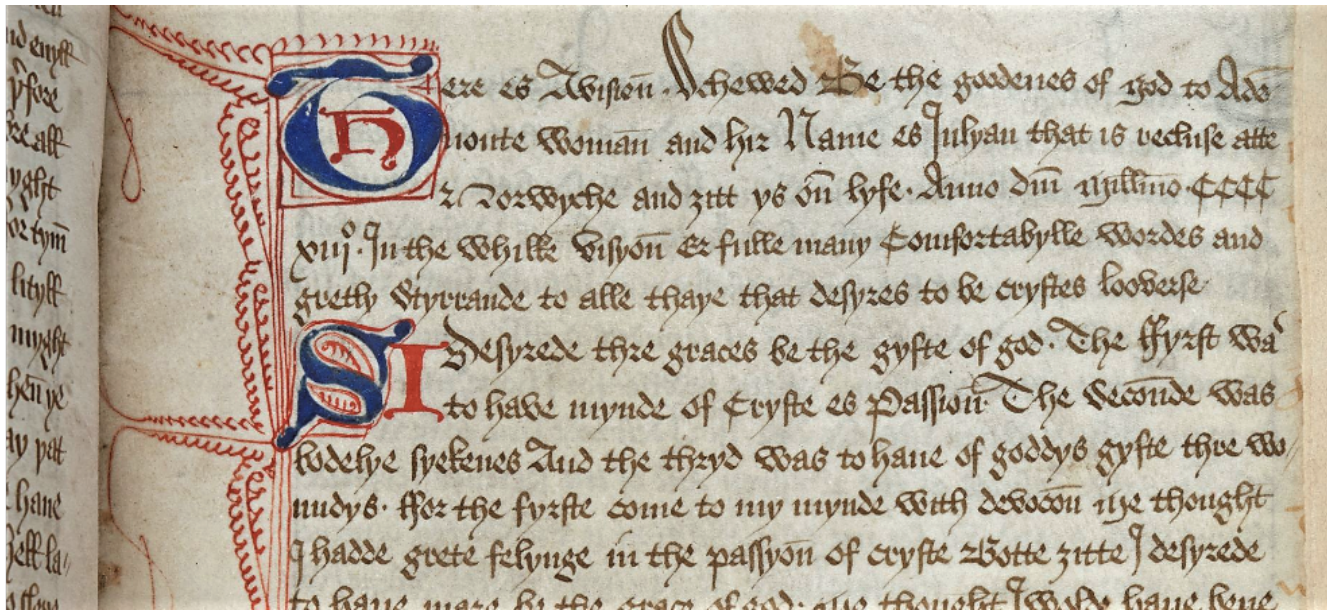
But I saw not *sin*: for I believe it hath no manner of substance nor no part of being, nor could it be known but by the pain it is cause of.

And thus pain, *it* is something, as to my sight, for a time; for it purgeth, and maketh us to know ourselves and to ask mercy. For the Passion of our Lord is comfort to us against all this, and so is His blessed will.

And for the tender love that our good Lord hath to all that shall be saved, He comforteth readily and sweetly, signifying thus: *It is sooth that sin is cause of all this pain; but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner [of] thing shall be well.*

These words were said full tenderly, showing no manner of blame to me nor to any that shall be saved. Then were it a great unkindness to blame or wonder on God for my sin, since He blameth not me for sin.

And in these words I saw a marvellous high mystery hid in God, which mystery He shall openly make known to us in Heaven: in which knowing we shall verily see the cause why He suffered sin to come. In which sight we shall endlessly joy in our Lord God.



The beginning of the 15th century Short Text. Revelations of Divine Love (Add MS 37790) f. 97r from the British Library Manuscript

Here es a vision schewed be the goodenes of god to a devoute woman and hir name es Julyan that is recluse atte Norwyche and yitt ys on lyfe anno domini millesimo ccccxiii. In the which visyon er fulle many comfortabyll wordes and [sic] to all theye that desyreth to be crystes looverse.

[sic] desyrede thre graces be the gyfte of god. The fyrst was to have mynde of Cryste's Passion. The Seconde bodelye sykenes (*in youth, at thirty years of age*) and the third was to have of goddys gyfte thre wundys.

For the first come to my mynde with [devotion] methought I hadde grete felynge in the passyon of christe zbotte yette I desyrede to have more by the grace of God.

## Resources

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julian\\_of\\_Norwich](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julian_of_Norwich)

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anchorite>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revelations\\_of\\_Divine\\_Love#/media/File:Revelations\\_of\\_Divine\\_Love\\_\(Add\\_MS\\_37790\)\\_f.\\_97r.png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revelations_of_Divine_Love#/media/File:Revelations_of_Divine_Love_(Add_MS_37790)_f._97r.png) (Photo of Manuscript)

Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* from the Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/julian/revelations.i.html>