



# Revelations — of — Divine Love

*The Writings of*  
**JULIAN OF NORWICH**

*Introduction by Jessica Hooten Wilson*

THE TRINITY FORUM READING

Join the Great Conversation  
THE TRINITY FORUM READING  
*digital library edition*

This electronic edition is released subject to license.  
Please ensure that you have secured appropriate licenses  
for all copies you make or distribute. For terms, email  
The Trinity Forum Store at **store@ttf.org**.

The following excerpts are from the short text of *Revelations of Divine Love* by Julian of Norwich, translated by Edmund Colledge and James Walsh and published by Paulist Press in *Julian of Norwich—Showings* (1978). Used with permission.

© 2025 by The Trinity Forum. All rights reserved.

Project Director: Macrae Hanke

Editor: Britta Eastburg Friesen

Book Design: Jude Landry

Inside cover image: Statue of Julian of Norwich, Norwich Cathedral, by David Holgate FSDC - July 24, 2010. Used under the Creative Commons License.

Printed in the United States of America.

ISSN 1062-2527

The Trinity Forum helps leaders engage the key issues of their  
personal and public lives in the context of faith.

*For more information, visit [www.ttf.org](http://www.ttf.org)*

This Trinity Forum *Reading* is sponsored by:

Patricia Clarke in honor of Nan Clarke and Susan W. Higgins

McDonald Agape Foundation

Richard & Phoebe Miles

Amy Julia Becker, Val Kling, Weezie Thompson, Julie Wilson and

Heidi Metcalf Little in honor of Elaine Lohne Metcalf



## Introduction

**I**N 1900 A LOST manuscript of Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love* was supposedly uncovered under the heading "Magic and Witchcraft" at the British Library.<sup>1</sup> The story—whether or not true—is believable when you realize the prejudices and threats that would have surrounded its composition. The author known as Julian of Norwich was a woman writing in English about God in the late fourteenth century, a time when no one was permitted to translate the Bible into the common language and women in particular were prohibited from studying, let alone teaching, theology. Mystical writings by women may have been popular reading but they were dangerous to compose. "But because I am a woman, ought I therefore to believe that I should not tell you of the goodness of God," Julian asks in her *Revelations*, "when I saw at that same time that it is his will that it be known?"

Only a little over a decade after Julian's death, Joan of Arc was martyred at the stake for claiming similarly to have heard from God.

The first known book penned in English by a woman, *Revelations* has continued to prove relevant over 600 years later, influencing 20<sup>th</sup>-century Christian writers such as T.S. Eliot, Dorothy L. Sayers, and Thomas Merton, and offering contemporary readers a timeless picture of God's love.

### **JULIAN THE ANCHORESS**

We don't know much about Julian for certain because few records were kept regarding medieval women's identities, and, as an anchoress, she abandoned her given name and adopted the name of the church where she chose to reside the rest of her life. An anchoress, or anchorite in the case of men, underwent a voluntary living funeral in which they "died to self" by laying in a coffin before their congregation, then were walled up into a room built on to the church and became a literal part of the church. The author of *Revelations of Divine Love* was the anchoress of St. Julian's Church in the city of Norwich.

As for other details, we can conjecture that Julian was a mother, based on her visceral descriptions of labor and nursing, and we know from her own account that she was very sick at the age of 30 in the year 1373. While we have to guess at her death, we know she was alive when Margery Kempe, another English mystic, visited her in 1413: "Great was the holy conversation that the anchoress and this creature had through talking of the love of our Lord Jesus Christ for the many days that they were together."<sup>2</sup> And as late as 1416, someone left their estate to the anchoress at St. Julian's, likely our same Julian. Beyond these spare facts, however, little is known of her life.

---

2 Spearing, Elizabeth (2022). *Medieval Writings on Female Spirituality*, p. 231. New York: Penguin.

### **“ALL SHALL BE WELL”**

Prior to becoming an anchoress, the woman known as Julian fell gravely ill. Her friends, family, and Julian herself fully expected her to die, and she received last rites. But Julian did not die; instead, she received from God sixteen “showings” or revelations and made a full recovery. Julian went on to write two accounts of her deathbed revelations: one immediately after the event, commonly referred to as the “short text,” and one about twenty years later, which is longer and expounds more deeply on the theological meaning of her experience. The version you will find in this *Reading* is the short text. Though less commonly read, it is thematically nearly identical to the long text—indeed, 80 percent of the short text reappears in the long text<sup>3</sup>—and it provides a concise introduction to Julian’s mystical theology for readers new to her work.

When Julian is depicted in religious art, she usually holds a hazelnut in her hand. Early in the text, God reveals to Julian that all that he has made is good. He shows her “a little thing, the size of a hazelnut, in the palm” of her hand and tells her, “It is all that is made.” Julian asks how God can love this little thing, and God shows her that despite its smallness in relation to him, it is significant because he loves it. However, if God made everything, Julian wonders, how then does sin exist? This question, of course, has been echoed throughout the church tradition by St. Augustine and St. Aquinas, and Julian’s answer does not differ from those of her predecessors: she too argues that sin is a privation of the good. Rather than argue systematically to a conclusion, though, Julian receives a vision of Jesus who tells her directly, “Sin is *behovely*, but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of

---

3 Watson, Nicholas; Jenkins, Jacqueline (2006). *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and A Revelation of Love*. Pennsylvania State University Press.

thing shall be well.”<sup>4</sup>

Translators do not know what to do with Julian’s medieval word “be-hovely,” but it means something like *befitting*, or *necessary*, or *inevitable*. I prefer not to pin Julian to the 21<sup>st</sup>-century connotations of those modern words because we may end up making Julian say something that feels comfortable to us but would be antithetical to her intention. Julian’s revelations and her exposition of these visions have influenced me because they are discomfiting. They extract us from our 21<sup>st</sup>-century expectations and cultural assumptions about God and force us instead to reckon with a timeless and transcendent and irreducible Master. Whatever the word “be-hovely” means, Julian hears Jesus expound upon his three-word sentence about sin with eighteen words that assure Julian of God’s goodness. A student of mine recently pointed out how Julian’s repetition of “shall be well” begins with three different conjunctions: “but,” “and,” then “all manner of thing.” When this student emphasized the structure of the three sentences, I suddenly saw shadows of the liturgy in this phrasing: “but all shall be well” parallels “Christ has died”; “and all shall be well,” “Christ is risen”; “and all manner of thing shall be well,” “Christ will come again.” The “but” precedes the crucifixion, the “and” reminds us of resurrection, and the final phrase points to restoration.

The boldness of the assertion that all shall be well is bolder still when we consider it in light of Julian’s medieval context. Julian was not unaccustomed to suffering. She survived multiple waves of the Black Plague in her region, which ultimately killed about half of Europe’s population, probably including many of the people whom she loved. (If she was a mother, one must wonder what happened to her husband and children.) Norwich itself

---

4 This is the famous formulation found in the longer version of the text; a condensed variant of this quote appears in Chapter xiii of the shorter version excerpted in this volume.

underwent devastating floods during her lifetime. And it's an understatement to say that the Middle Ages lacked the comfort and convenience of 21<sup>st</sup>-century American daily life. The scale of suffering and loss that Julian must have witnessed is difficult for many modern readers to fathom.

So it is all the more surprising to hear her pray to God *for* suffering, asking "that [Christ's] pains might be my pains." She does not want the suffering for itself but for the good it brings—Julian considers suffering to be an instrumental good for it unites her to Jesus Christ. When Julian prays for pain, she does so to feel what Jesus felt in the Passion, his painful death on the cross. The word "passion" comes from the Latin *passio*, which means suffering. To be compassionate is to suffer with. Julian wants to suffer with Jesus so that she not be apathetic to his sacrifice. The inverse of this, of course, is that Christ is also compassionate towards *her* suffering.

The revelation of his suffering begins with a vision of the crucifixion. Julian sees "blood trickling down" from the crown of thorns on a crucifix. This image of a bloody Christ in realistic pain was fairly new for art in the 1300s and may have struck the sick Julian with deeper empathy for Jesus. Unlike our contemporary expectations of solace, the goal for the medieval Christian was participation in the divine life, which was intimately experienced through suffering. All people suffer, and the medieval world did not seek ways to alleviate or placate that suffering, as modern readers may assume. Rather, the medieval world saw suffering as an opportunity to connect to the God who through suffering overcame eternal pain for us. Therein lies the ultimate consolation—intimacy with God himself for eternity.

---

5 Irenaeus *Against the Heresies* IV.38 (130-202). Clement of Alexandria from "Who is the Rich Man That Shall be Saved?"

### GOD AS MOTHER & FATHER

One theme that does not appear in the short text but which Julian takes great care to develop in her long text is that of the motherhood of God. Because she is well known for these sections today, an introduction to Julian would not be complete without a mention of this theme, even though it does not appear in the excerpts you will find here.

Julian was not the first to introduce readers to God as mother. The Scriptures make plenty of mention of God metaphorically as a mother (Isaiah 66:13, Isaiah 42:14, Luke 13:34) and writers in the early church were drawn to these passages.<sup>5</sup> Julian does not replace the language of God as our Father but suggests that God is *also* our Mother. For Julian, the motherhood of God must be read as Trinitarian. God creates us in his image, just as a mother bears her children in her image. Jesus feeds us from himself in the Eucharist, just as a mother nurses her infant with her milk. The Spirit bears with us in pain and groaning as we are painfully sanctified, just as a mother labors for her children.

“Our Savior is our true Mother in whom we are endlessly born and out of whom we shall never come,” Julian writes. The analogy between Jesus and a mother makes sense when we contemplate the life of a mother: through the tearing of her flesh, through blood and water, a mother brings forth life. Jesus Christ likewise, through his crucifixion, bears us into eternity. In Julian’s words, “[O]ur mothers only bring us into the world to suffer and die, but our true mother, Jesus, he who is all love, bears us into joy and eternal life.” By Jesus’s blessed wounds, we are reborn.

### LOVE IS THE MEANING

Overriding all of these theological discussions and underpinning all of their meaning is Julian’s insistence on the love of God, with which she begins and ends her revelation. “He is our clothing,” she writes, “for he is that love



which wraps and enfolds us, embraces us and guides us, surrounds us for his love, which is so tender that he may never desert us.”

Because Julian fixates so much on the love of God, she struggles to understand God’s justice and church teachings about sin and hell. She may sound occasionally like a universalist wanting everyone to be let into the Kingdom of God or like a relativist ancestor of John Lennon: all you need is love. But Julian does not deny the doctrines of the faith; she is orthodox in her assertions. She regularly admits the limits of her knowledge and the mysteries beyond her when it comes to these revelations. “This book is begun by God’s gift and His grace,” Julian writes at the conclusion of the long text, “but it is not yet completed, as I see it.” Julian expects her readers to pick up where she leaves off and move further beyond in understanding than she was capable.

In her final dialogue with God in the long text, the Lord sees that Julian desires to “know thy Lord’s meaning” in these revelations. “Be well aware,” the Spirit tells her, “Love was His meaning. Who showed it thee? Love. What showed He thee? Love. Why did He show it thee? For Love.” Julian can close her book, satisfied with the love of God with which these visions began and with which they will be passed on to readers. For it was from the love of God that she received these revelations and for the love of his church that Julian wrote them down.

### **JULIAN TODAY**

In her own time, the text *Revelations of Divine Love* did not circulate as widely as some contemporaries’ visions, such as those of St. Brigid of Sweden. Our earliest versions of the manuscript are thanks to English Catholic nuns exiled in Flanders who copied the revelations in the seventeenth century. Most of those who read Julian over the next few hundred years loved her for her devotion. She inspired Anglicans, Catholics and others in their love of God. But among academics who study and teach in the classroom, Julian was not

well known until recently.

We must read Julian with our guard down, with love rather than with scrutiny, for that is how she composed her visions and the reason for which God granted them to her. Of Julian, the 20th-century mystic Thomas Merton wrote, “Julian is without doubt one of the most wonderful of all Christian voices. She gets greater and greater in my eyes as I grow older....”<sup>6</sup> While Julian was without a doubt a woman of her time, her revelations are ever timeless, and it is time we read them again, in love.

---

**Jessica Hooten Wilson**, a Senior Fellow of the Trinity Forum, is the Fletcher Jones Endowed Chair of Great Books at Pepperdine University. She is the author of several books, including: *Flannery O'Connor's Why Do the Heathen Rage?: A Behind-the-Scenes Look at a Work in Progress*; *Reading for the Love of God: How to Read as a Spiritual Practice*; and *The Scandal of Holiness: Renewing Your Imagination in the Company of Literary Saints*.

---

6 (1968) *Seeds of Destruction*, p. 274-275. NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux



# Revelations — of — Divine Love



*When she was young, Julian “desired three graces by the gift of God. The first was to have recollection of Christ’s Passion. The second was a bodily sickness, and the third was to have, of God’s gift, three wounds. . . . that is, the wound of contrition, the wound of compassion and the wound of longing with my will for God.” As she explains in her opening chapter, she asks God for these graces in order to deepen her understanding of and appreciation for Christ’s Passion.*

## Chapter ii

**A**nd when I was thirty and a half years old, God sent me a bodily sickness in which I lay for three days and three nights; and on the fourth night I received all the rites of Holy Church, and did not expect to live until day. But after this I suffered on for two days and two nights, and on the

third night I often thought that I was on the point of death; and those who were around me also thought this. But in this I was very sorrowful and reluctant to die, not that there was anything on earth that it pleased me to live for, or anything of which I was afraid, for I trusted in God. But it was because I wanted to go on living to love God better and longer, and living so, obtain grace to know and love God more as he is in the bliss of heaven. For it seemed to me that all the time that I had lived here was very little and short in comparison with the bliss which is everlasting. So I thought: Good Lord, is it no longer to your glory that I am alive? And my reason and my sufferings told me that I should die; and with all the will of my heart I assented wholly to be as was God's will.

So I lasted until day, and by then my body was dead from the middle downwards, it felt to me. Then I was moved to ask to be lifted up and supported, with cloths held to my head, so that my heart might be more free to be at God's will, and so that I could think of him whilst my life would last; and those who were with me sent for the parson, my curate, to be present at my end. He came with a little boy, and brought a cross; and by that time my eyes were fixed, and I could not speak. The parson set the cross before my face and said: Daughter, I have brought you the image of your saviour. Look at it and take comfort from it, in reverence of him who died for you and me. It seemed to me that I was well as I was, for my eyes were set upwards towards heaven, where I trusted that I was going; but nevertheless I agreed to fix my eyes on the face of the crucifix if I could, so as to hold out longer until my end came, for it seemed to me that I could hold out longer with my eyes set in front of me rather than upwards. After this my sight began to fail, and it was all dark around me in the room, dark as night, except that there was ordinary light trained upon the image of the cross, I never knew how. Everything around the cross was ugly to me, as if it were occupied by a great crowd of devils.

After that I felt as if the upper part of my body were beginning to die. My hands fell down on either side, and I was so weak that my head lolled to

one side. The greatest pain that I felt was my shortness of breath and the ebbing of my life. Then truly I believed that I was at the point of death. And suddenly in that moment all my pain left me, and I was as sound, particularly in the upper part of my body, as ever I was before or have been since. I was astonished by this change, for it seemed to me that it was by God's secret doing and not natural; and even so, in this ease which I felt, I had no more confidence that I should live, nor was the ease complete, for I thought that I would rather have been delivered of this world, because that was what my heart longed for.

### Chapter iii

And suddenly it came into my mind that I ought to wish for the second wound, that our Lord, of his gift and of his grace, would fill my body full with recollection and feeling of his blessed Passion, as I had prayed before, for I wished that his pains might be my pains, with compassion which would lead to longing for God. So it seemed to me that I might with his grace have his wounds, as I had wished before; but in this I never wanted any bodily vision or any kind of revelation from God, but only the compassion which I thought a loving soul could have for our Lord Jesus, who for love was willing to become a mortal man. I desired to suffer with him, living in my mortal body, as God would give me grace. And at this, suddenly I saw the red blood trickling down from under the crown, all hot, flowing freely and copiously, a living stream, just as it seemed to me that it was at the time when the crown of thorns was thrust down upon his blessed head. Just so did he, both God and man, suffer for me. I perceived, truly and powerfully, that it was himself who showed this to me, without any intermediary; and then I said: Blessed be the Lord! This I said with a reverent intention and in a loud voice, and I was greatly astonished by this wonder and marvel, that he would so humbly be with a sinful creature living in this wretched flesh. I accepted it that at that time our Lord Jesus wanted, out of his courteous love, to show me comfort before my temptations began; for it

seemed to me that I might well be tempted by devils, by God's permission and with his protection, before I died. With this sight of his blessed Passion and with his divinity, of which I speak as I understand, I saw that this was strength enough for me, yes, and for all living creatures who will be protected from all the devils of hell and from all their spiritual enemies.

### Chapter iv

And at the same time as I saw this corporeal sight, our Lord showed me a spiritual sight of his familiar love. I saw that he is to us everything which is good and comforting for our help. He is our clothing, for he is that love which wraps and enfolds us, embraces us and guides us, surrounds us for his love, which is so tender that he may never desert us. And so in this sight I saw truly that he is everything which is good, as I understand.

And in this he showed me something small, no bigger than a hazelnut, lying in the palm of my hand, and I perceived that it was as round as any ball. I looked at it and thought: What can this be? And I was given this general answer: It is everything which is made. I was amazed that it could last, for I thought that it was so little that it could suddenly fall into nothing. And I was answered in my understanding: It lasts and always will, because God loves it; and thus everything has being through the love of God.

In this little thing I saw three properties. The first is that God made it, the second is that he loves it, the third is that God preserves it. But what is that to me? It is that God is the Creator and the lover and the protector. For until I am substantially united to him, I can never have love or rest or true happiness; until, that is, I am so attached to him that there can be no created thing between my God and me. And who will do this deed? Truly, he himself, by his mercy and his grace, for he has made me for this and has blessedly restored me.

In this God brought our Lady to my understanding. I saw her spiritually in her bodily likeness, a simple, humble maiden, young in years, of the stature which she had when she conceived. Also God showed me part of the

wisdom and truth of her soul, and in this I understood the reverent contemplation with which she beheld her God, marvelling with great reverence that he was willing to be born of her who was a simple creature created by him. And this wisdom and truth, this knowledge of her creator's greatness and of her own created littleness, made her say meekly to the angel Gabriel: Behold me here, God's handmaiden. In this sight I saw truly that she is greater, more worthy and more fulfilled, than everything else which God has created, and which is inferior to her. Above her is no created thing, except the blessed humanity of Christ. This little thing which is created and is inferior to our Lady, St. Mary—God showed it to me as if it had been a hazelnut—seemed to me as if it could have perished because it is so little.

In this blessed revelation God showed me three nothings, of which nothings this is the first that was shown to me. Every man and woman who wishes to live contemplatively needs to know of this, so that it may be pleasing to them to despise as nothing everything created, so as to have the love of uncreated God. For this is the reason why those who deliberately occupy themselves with earthly business, constantly seeking worldly well-being, have not God's rest in their hearts and souls; for they love and seek their rest in this thing which is so little and in which there is no rest, and do not know God who is almighty, all wise and all good, for he is true rest. God wishes to be known, and it pleases him that we should rest in him; for all things which are beneath him are not sufficient for us. And this is the reason why no soul has rest until it has despised as nothing all which is created. When the soul has become nothing for love, so as to have him who is all that is good, then is it able to receive spiritual rest.

### Chapter v

And during the time that our Lord showed me this spiritual vision which I have now described, I saw the bodily vision of the copious bleeding of the head persist, and as long as I saw it I said, many times: Blessed be the Lord! In this first revelation of our Lord I saw in my understanding six things.

The first is the tokens of his blessed Passion, and the plentiful shedding of his precious blood. The second is the virgin who is his beloved mother. The third is the blessed divinity, that always was and is and ever shall be, almighty, all wisdom and all love. The fourth is everything which he has made; it is great and lovely and bountiful and good. But the reason why it seemed to my eyes so little was because I saw it in the presence of him who is the Creator. For to a soul who sees the Creator of all things, all that is created seems very little. The fifth is that he has made everything which is made for love, and through the same love is it preserved, and always will be without end, as has been said already. The sixth is that God is everything which is good, and the goodness which everything has is God.

This everything God showed me in the first vision, and he gave me space and time to contemplate it. And then the bodily vision ceased, and the spiritual vision persisted in my understanding, and I waited with reverent fear, rejoicing in what I saw and wishing, as much as I dared, to see more, if that were God's will, or to see for a longer time what I had already seen.

### Chapter vi

Everything that I say about myself I mean to apply to all my fellow Christians, for I am taught that this is what our Lord intends in this spiritual revelation. And therefore I pray you all for God's sake, and I counsel you for your own profit, that you disregard the wretched worm, the sinful creature to whom it was shown, and that mightily, wisely, lovingly and meekly you contemplate God, who out of his courteous love and his endless goodness was willing to show this vision generally, to the comfort of us all. And you who hear and see this vision and this teaching, which is from Jesus Christ for the edification of your souls, it is God's will and my wish that you accept it with as much joy and delight as if Jesus had shown it to you as he did to me. I am not good because of the revelation, but only if I love God better, and so can and so should every man do who sees it and hears it with good will and proper intention. And so it is my desire that it should be to every



man the same profit that I asked for myself, and was moved to in the first moment when I saw it; for it is common and general, just as we are all one; and I am sure that I saw it for the profit of many others. For truly it was not revealed to me because God loves me better than the humblest soul who is in a state of grace. For I am sure that there are very many who never had revelations or visions, but only the common teaching of Holy Church, who love God better than I. If I pay special attention to myself, I am nothing at all; but in general I am in the unity of love with all my fellow Christians. For it is in this unity of love that the life consists of all men who will be saved. For God is everything that is good, and God has made everything that is made, and God loves everything that he has made, and if any man or woman withdraws his love from any of his fellow Christians, he does not love at all, because he has not love towards all. And so in such times he is in danger, because he is not at peace; and anyone who has general love for his fellow Christians has love towards everything which is. For in mankind which will be saved is comprehended all, that is, all that is made and the maker of all; for God is in man, and so in man is all. And he who thus generally loves all his fellow Christians loves all, and he who loves thus is safe. And thus will I love, and thus do I love, and thus I am safe—I write as the representative of my fellow Christians—and the more that I love in this way whilst I am here, the more I am like the joy that I shall have in heaven without end, that joy which is the God who out of his endless love willed to become our brother and suffer for us. And I am sure that anyone who sees it so will be taught the truth and be greatly comforted, if he have need of comfort. But God forbid that you should say or assume that I am a teacher, for that is not and never was my intention; for I am a woman, ignorant, weak and frail. But I know very well that what I am saying I have received by the revelation of him who is the sovereign teacher. But it is truly love which moves me to tell it to you, for I want God to be known and my fellow Christians to prosper, as I hope to prosper myself, by hating sin more and loving God more. But because I am a woman, ought I therefore to believe that I should

not tell you of the goodness of God, when I saw at that same time that it is his will that it be known? You will see this clearly in what follows, if it be well and truly accepted. Then will you soon forget me who am a wretch, and do this, so that I am no hindrance to you, and you will contemplate Jesus, who is every man's teacher. I speak of those who will be saved, for at this time God showed me no one else; but in everything I believe as Holy Church teaches, for I beheld the whole of this blessed revelation of our Lord as unified in God's sight, and I never understood anything from it which bewilders me or keeps me from the true doctrine of Holy Church.

[...]

### Chapter viii

And after this I saw God in an instant of time, that is, in my understanding, and by this vision I saw that he is present in all things. I contemplated it carefully, knowing and perceiving through it that he does everything which is done. I marveled at this vision with a gentle fear, and I thought: What is sin? For I saw truly that God does everything, however small it may be, and that nothing is done by chance, but it is of the endless providence of God's wisdom. Therefore I was compelled to admit that everything which is done is well done, and I was certain that God does no sin. Therefore it seemed to me that sin is nothing, for in all this sin was not shown to me. And I did not wish to go on feeling surprise at this, but I contemplated our Lord and waited for what he would show me. And on another occasion God did show me, nakedly in itself, what sin is, as I shall tell afterwards.

And after this as I watched I saw the body bleeding copiously, the blood hot, flowing freely, a living stream, just as I had before seen the head bleed. And I saw this in the furrows made by the scourging, and I saw this blood run so plentifully that it seemed to me that if it had in fact been happening there, the bed and everything around it would have been soaked in blood.

God has created bountiful waters on the earth for our use and our bodily comfort, out of the tender love he has for us. But it is more pleasing to him

that we accept freely his blessed blood to wash us of our sins, for there is no drink that is made which it pleases him so well to give us; for it is so plentiful, and it is of our own nature.

And after this, before God revealed any words to me, he allowed me to contemplate longer all that I had seen and all that was contained in it. And then there was formed in my soul this saying, without voice and without opening of lips: With this the fiend is overcome. Our Lord said this to me with reference to his Passion, as he had shown it to me before; and in this he brought into my mind and showed me a part of the devil's malice and all of his impotence, and this by showing me that his Passion is the overcoming of the fiend. God showed me that he still has the same malice as he had before the Incarnation, and he works as hard, and he sees as constantly as he did before that all chosen souls escape him to God's glory. And in that is all the devil's sorrow; for everything which God permits him to do turns to joy for us and to pain and shame for him, and he has as much sorrow when God permits him to work as when he is not working. And that is because he can never do as much evil as he would wish, for his power is all locked in God's hands. Also I saw our Lord scorning his malice and despising him as nothing, and he wants us to do the same. Because of this sight I laughed greatly, and that made those around me to laugh as well; and their laughter was pleasing to me. I thought that I wished that all my fellow Christians had seen what I saw. Then they would all have laughed with me. But I did not see Christ laugh; nevertheless, it is pleasing to him that we laugh to comfort ourselves, and that we rejoice in God because the devil is overcome. And after that I became serious again, and said: I see. I see three things: sport and scorn and seriousness. I see sport, that the devil is overcome; and I see scorn, that God scorns him and he will be scorned; and I see seriousness, that he is overcome by the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ and by his death, which was accomplished in great earnest and with heavy labour.

After this our Lord said: I thank you for your service and your labour, and especially in your youth.

## Chapter ix

[...]

And after this our Lord revealed to me a supreme spiritual delight in my soul. In this delight I was filled full of everlasting surety, and I was powerfully secured without any fear. This sensation was so welcome and so dear to me that I was at peace, at ease and at rest, so that there was nothing upon earth which could have afflicted me.

This lasted only for a time, and then I was changed, and left to myself, oppressed and weary of myself, ruining my life so that I scarcely had the patience to go on living. I felt that there was no ease or comfort for me except hope, faith and love, and truly I felt very little of this. And then presently God gave me again comfort and rest for my soul, delight and security so blessed and so powerful that there was no fear, no sorrow, no pain, physical or spiritual, that one could suffer which might have disturbed me. And then again I felt the pain, and then afterwards the joy and the delight, now the one and now the other, again and again, I suppose about twenty times. And in the time of joy I could have said with Paul: Nothing shall separate me from the love of Christ; and in the pain, I could have said with Peter: Lord, save me, I am perishing.

This vision was shown to me to teach me to understand that every man needs to experience this, to be comforted at one time, and at another to fail and to be left to himself. God wishes us to know that he keeps us safe all the time, in joy and in sorrow, and that he loves us as much in sorrow as in joy. And sometimes a man is left to himself for the profit of his soul, and neither the one nor the other is caused by sin. For in this time I committed no sin for which I ought to have been left to myself, nor did I deserve these sensations of joy; but God gives joy freely as it pleases him, and sometimes he allows us to be in sorrow, and both come from his love. For it is God's will that we do all in our power to preserve our consolation, for bliss lasts forevermore, and pain is passing and will be reduced to nothing. Therefore it is not God's will that when we feel pain we should pursue it, sorrowing and mourning for it,

but that suddenly we should pass it over and preserve ourselves in endless delight, because God is almighty, our lover and preserver.

[...]

### Chapter xi

Thus I chose Jesus for my heaven, whom I saw only in pain at that time. No other heaven was pleasing to me than Jesus, who will be my bliss when I am there; and this has always been a comfort to me, that I chose Jesus as my heaven in all times of suffering and of sorrow. And that has taught me that I should always do so, and choose only him to be my heaven in well-being and in woe. And so I saw my Lord Jesus languishing for long, because of the union in him of man and God, for love gave strength to his humanity to suffer more than all men could. I mean not only more pain than any other one man could suffer, but also that he suffered more pain than would all men together, from the first beginning to the last day. No tongue may tell, no heart can fully think of the pains which our saviour suffered for us, if we have regard to the honour of him who is the highest, most majestic king, and to his shameful, grievous and painful death. For he who was highest and most honourable was most completely brought low, most utterly despised. But the love which made him suffer all this surpasses all his pains as far as heaven is above earth. For his pains were a deed, performed once through the motion of love; but his love was without beginning and is and ever will be without any end.

[...]

### Chapter xiii

[...]

And after this our Lord brought to my mind the longing that I had for him before; and I saw that nothing hindered me but sin, and I saw that this is true of us all in general, and it seemed to me that if there had been no sin, we should all have been pure and as like our Lord as he created us. And so

in my folly before this time I often wondered why, through the great and prescient wisdom of God, sin was not prevented; for it seemed to me that then all would have been well.

The impulse to think this was greatly to be shunned; and I mourned and sorrowed on this account, unreasonably, lacking discretion, filled with pride. Nonetheless in this vision Jesus informed me about everything needful to me. I do not say that I need no more instruction, for after he revealed this our Lord entrusted me to Holy Church, and I am hungry and thirsty and needy and sinful and frail, and willingly submit myself among all my fellow Christians to the teaching of Holy Church to the end of my life.

He answered with these words, and said: Sin is necessary. In the word 'sin', our Lord brought generally to my mind all which is not good: the shameful contempt and the complete denial of himself which he endured for us in this life and in his death, and all the pains and passions, spiritual and bodily, of all his creatures. For we are all in part denied, and we ought to be denied, following our master Jesus until we are fully purged, that is to say until we have completely denied our own mortal flesh and all our inward affections which are not good.

And the beholding of this, with all the pains that ever were or ever will be—and of all this I understood Christ's Passion for the greatest and surpassing pain was shown to me in an instant, and quickly turned into consolation. For our good Lord God would not have the soul frightened by this ugly sight. But I did not see sin, for I believe that it has no kind of substance, no share in being, nor can it be recognized except by the pains which it causes. And it seems to me that this pain is something for a time, for it purges us and makes us know ourselves and ask for mercy; for the Passion of our Lord is comfort to us against all this, and that is his blessed will for all who will be saved. He comforts readily and sweetly with his words, and says: But all will be well, and every kind of thing will be well.

These words were revealed very tenderly, showing no kind of blame to me or to anyone who will be saved. So it would be most unkind of me to

blame God or marvel at him on account of my sins, since he does not blame me for sin. So I saw how Christ has compassion on us because of sin; and just as I was before filled full of pain and compassion on account of Christ's Passion, so I was now in a measure filled with compassion for all my fellow Christians, and then I saw that every kind of compassion which one has for one's fellow Christians in love is Christ in us.

### Chapter xiv

But I shall study upon this, contemplating it generally, heavily and mournfully, saying in intention to our Lord with very great fear: Ah, good Lord, how could all things be well, because of the great harm which has come through sin to your creatures? And I wished, so far as I dared, for some plainer explanation through which my mind might be at ease about this matter. And to this our blessed Lord answered, very meekly and with a most loving manner, and he showed me that Adam's sin was the greatest harm ever done or ever to be done until the end of the world. And he also showed me that this is plainly known to all Holy Church upon earth.

Furthermore, he taught me that I should contemplate his glorious atonement, for this atoning is more pleasing to the blessed divinity and more honourable for man's salvation, without comparison, than ever Adam's sin was harmful. So then it is our blessed Lord's intention in this teaching that we should pay heed to this: For since I have set right the greatest of harms, it is my will that you should know through this that I shall set right everything which is less.

He gave me understanding of two portions. One portion is our saviour and our salvation. This blessed portion is open and clear and fair and bright and plentiful, for all men who are or will be of good will are comprehended in this portion. We are bidden to this by God, and drawn and counselled and taught, inwardly by the Holy Spirit and outwardly, through the grace of the same Spirit, by Holy Church. Our Lord wants us to be occupied in this, rejoicing in him, for he rejoices in us. And the more plentifully we accept

this with reverence and humility, the more do we deserve thanks from him, and the more profit do we win for ourselves; and so we may rejoice and say: Our portion is our Lord.

The other portion is closed to us and hidden, that is to say all which is additional to our salvation. For this is our Lord's privy counsel, and it is fitting to God's royal dominion to keep his privy counsel in peace, and it is fitting to his subjects out of obedience and respect not to wish to know his counsel.

Our Lord has pity and compassion on us because some creatures occupy themselves so much in this; and I am certain that if we knew how much we should please him and solace ourselves by leaving it alone, we should do so. The saints in heaven wish to know nothing but what our Lord wishes to show them, and furthermore their love and their desire is governed according to our Lord's will; and so we ought to wish to be like him. And then we shall not wish or desire anything but the will of our Lord, for we are all one in God's intention.

And in this I was taught that we shall rejoice only in our blessed saviour Jesus, and trust in him for everything.

### Chapter xv

And so our good Lord answered to all the questions and doubts which I could raise, saying most comfortingly in this fashion: I will make all things well, I shall make all things well, I may make all things well and I can make all things well; and you will see that yourself, that all things will be well. When he says that he 'may', I understand this to apply to the Father; and when he says that he 'can', I understand this for the Son; and when he says 'I will', I understand this for the Holy Spirit; and when he says 'I shall', I understand this for the unity of the blessed Trinity, three persons in one truth; and when he says 'You will see yourself', I understand this for the union of all men who will be saved in the blessed Trinity.

And in these five words God wishes to be enclosed in rest and in peace. And so Christ's spiritual thirst has an end. For his spiritual thirst is his



longing in love, and that persists and always will until we see him on the day of judgment; for we who shall be saved and shall be Christ's joy and bliss are still here, and shall be until that day. Therefore his thirst is this incompleteness of his joy, that he does not now possess us in himself as wholly as he then will.

All this was shown to me as a revelation of his compassion, for on the day of judgment it will cease. So he has pity and compassion on us and he longs to possess us, but his wisdom and his love do not permit the end to come until the best time. And in these same five words said before: 'I may make all things well', I understand powerful consolation from all the deeds of our Lord which are still to be performed; for just as the blessed Trinity created everything from nothing, just so the same blessed Trinity will make well all things which are not well. It is God's will that we pay great heed to all the deeds which he has performed, for he wishes us to know from them all which he will do; and he revealed that to me by those words which he said: And you will see yourself that every kind of thing will be well. I understand this in two ways: One is that I am well content that I do not know it; and the other is that I am glad and joyful because I shall know it. It is God's will that we should know in general that all will be well, but it is not God's will that we should know it now except as it applies to us for the present, and that is the teaching of Holy Church.

[...]

### Chapter xvii

Although our Lord revealed to me that I should sin, I understood everything to apply only to me. In this I conceived a gentle fear, and in answer to this our Lord said: I protect you very safely. This was said to me with more love and assurance of protection for my soul than I can or may tell. For just as it was first revealed to me that I should sin, so was consolation revealed to me—assurance of protection for all my fellow Christians. What can make me love my fellow Christians more than to see in God that he loves all

who will be saved, all of them as it were one soul? And in each soul which will be saved there is a good will which never assented to sin and never will. For as there is an animal will in the lower part which cannot will any good, so there is a good will in the higher part which cannot will any evil, but always good, just as the persons of the blessed Trinity. And our Lord revealed this to me in the completeness of his love, that we are standing in his sight, yes, that he loves us now whilst we are here as well as he will when we are there, before his blessed face.

God also showed me that sin is no shame, but honour to man, for in this vision my understanding was lifted up into heaven; and then there came truly to my mind David, Peter and Paul, Thomas of India and Mary Magdalen, how they are known, with their sins, to their honour in the Church on earth. And it is to them no shame that they have sinned—shame is no more in the bliss of heaven—for there the tokens of sin are turned into honours. Just so our Lord showed them to me as examples of all who will come there. Sin is the sharpest scourge with which any chosen soul can be beaten, and this scourge belabours and breaks men and women, and they become so despicable in their own sight that it seems to them that they are fit for nothing but as it were to sink into hell; but when by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit contrition seizes them, then the Spirit turns bitterness into hope of God's mercy. And then the wounds begin to heal and the soul to revive, restored to the life of Holy Church. The Holy Spirit leads him to confession, willing to reveal his sins, nakedly and truthfully, with great sorrow and great shame that he has so befouled God's fair image. Then he accepts the penance for every sin imposed by his confessor, for this is established in Holy Church by the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Every sinful soul must be healed by this medicine, especially of the sins which are mortal to him. Though he be healed, his wounds are not seen by God as wounds but as honours. And as sin is punished here with sorrow and penance, in contrary fashion it will be rewarded in heaven by the courteous love of our Lord God almighty, who does not wish anyone who comes there to lose his labours.

That reward, which we shall receive there, will not be small, but it will be high, glorious and honourable. And so all shame will be turned into honour and into greater joy. And I am sure by what I feel myself that the more that every loving soul perceives this in the gentle and courteous love of God, the more he will hate to sin.

### Chapter xviii

But if you be moved to say or think: Since this is true, it would good to sin so as to more reward, beware of this prompting and despise it, because it comes from the devil. For any soul who deliberately assents to this prompting cannot be saved until he be absolved as though from mortal sin. For if all the pain there is, in hell, in purgatory, on earth, death and other sufferings, were laid before me, together with sin, I should rather choose all that pain than sin. For sin is so vile and so much to be hated that it cannot be compared with any pain which is not sin. For everything is good, except sin, and nothing is wicked, except sin. Sin is neither death nor delight, but when a soul deliberately chooses sin, which is pain, to be his god, in the end he has nothing at all. That pain seems to me the cruellest hell, because the soul has not his God. A soul may have God in every pain, but not in sin.

And God's will to save man is as great as his power and his wisdom to save him. For Christ himself is the foundation of all the laws of Christian men, and he has taught us to do good against evil. Here we may see that he himself is this love, and does to us as he teaches us to do; for he wishes us to be like him, in a unity of undying love for ourselves and for our fellow Christians. No more than is his love for us withheld because of our sin does he want us to withhold our love for ourselves and our fellow Christians; we must hate sin utterly, and love souls endlessly as God loves them. For what God said is an endless strengthening, which protects us very safely.

### Chapter xix

After this our Lord revealed to me about prayers. I saw two conditions in those who pray, according to what I have felt myself. One is that they will not pray for anything at all but for the thing which is God's will and to his glory; another is that they apply themselves always and with all their might to entreat the thing which is his will and to his glory. And that is what I have understood from the teaching of Holy Church; for this is what our Lord too taught me now, to accept faith, hope and love as gifts from God, and for us to preserve ourselves in them to the end of life. For this we say the Our Father, Hail Mary, I Believe, with such devotion as God will give us. And so we pray for all our fellow Christians, and for every kind of person as God wishes, for it is our wish that every kind of man and woman might be in the same state of virtue and grace as we ought to wish for ourselves. But still in all this, often our trust is not complete, for we are not certain that almighty God hears us, because of our unworthiness, it seems to us, and because we are feeling nothing at all; for often we are as barren and dry after our prayers as we were before. And thus when we feel so, it is our folly which is the cause of our weakness, for I have experienced this in myself. And our Lord brought all this suddenly to my mind, and gave me great strength and vitality to combat this kind of weakness in praying, and said: I am the foundation of your beseeching. First, it is my will that you should have it, and then I make you to wish it, and then I make you beseech it. And if you beseech, how could it be that you would not have what you beseech? And so in the first reason and in the three that follow it our Lord revealed a great strengthening.

Firstly, where he says: If you beseech, he shows his great delight, and the everlasting reward that he will give us for our beseeching. And in the fourth reason, where he says: How could it be that you would not have what you beseech? he conveys a serious rebuke, because we have not the firm trust which we need. So our Lord wants us both to pray and to trust, for

the reasons I have repeated were given to strengthen us against weakness in our prayers. For it is God's will that we pray, and he moves us to do so in these words I have told, for he wants us to be certain that our prayers are answered, because prayer pleases God. Prayers make a praying man pleased with himself, and make the man serious and humble who before this was contending and striving against himself. Prayer unites the soul to God, for although the soul may always be like God in nature and substance, it is often unlike him in condition, through human sin. Prayer makes the soul like God when the soul wills as God wills; then it is like God in condition, as it is in nature. And so he teaches us to pray and to have firm trust that we shall have what we pray for, because everything which is done would be done, even though we had never prayed for it. But God's love is so great that he regards us as partners in his good work; and so he moves us to pray for what it pleases him to do, for whatever prayer or good desire comes to us by his gift he will repay us for, and give us eternal reward. And this was revealed to me when he said: If you beseech it.

In this saying God showed me his great pleasure and great delight, as though he were much beholden to us for each good deed that we do, even though it is he who does it. Therefore we pray much that he may do what is pleasing to him, as if he were to say: How could you please me more than by entreating me, earnestly, wisely, sincerely, to do the thing that is my will? And so prayer makes harmony between God and man's soul, because when man is at ease with God he does not need to pray, but to contemplate reverently what God says. For in all the time when this was revealed to me, I was not moved to pray, but always to keep this good in my mind for my strength, that when we see God we have what we desire, and then we do not need to pray. But when we do not see God, then we need to pray, because we are failing, and for the strengthening of ourselves, to Jesus. For when a soul is tempted, troubled and left to itself in its unrest, that is the time for it to pray and to make itself simple and obedient to God. Unless the soul be obedient, no kind of prayer makes God supple to it; for God's love does not

change, but during the time that a man is in sin he is so weak, so foolish, so unloving that he can love neither God nor himself.

His greatest harm is his blindness, because he cannot see all this. Then almighty God's perfect love, which never changes, gives him sight of himself; and then he believes that God may be angry with him because of his sin. And then he is moved to contrition, and through confession and other good deeds to appease God's anger, till he finds rest of soul and ease of conscience; and then it seems to him that God has forgiven his sins, and this is true. And then it seems to the soul that God has been moved to look upon it, as though it had been in pain or in prison, saying: I am glad that you have found rest, for I have always loved you and I love you now, and you love me. And so with prayers, as I have said, and with other good works that Holy Church teaches us to practice, the soul is united to God.

[...]

## Chapter xxii

[...]

And when I had contemplated this with great attention, our Lord very humbly revealed words to me, without voice and without opening of lips, as he had done before, and said very seriously: Know it well, it was no hallucination which you saw today, but accept and believe it and hold firmly to it, and you will not be overcome.

These last words were said to me to teach me perfect certainty that it is our Lord Jesus who revealed everything to me; for just as in the first words which our Lord revealed to me, alluding to his blessed Passion: With this the fiend is overcome, just so he said with perfect certainty in these last words: You will not be overcome. And this teaching and this true strengthening apply generally to all my fellow Christians, as I have said before, and so is the will of God.

And these words: You will not be overcome, were said very insistently and strongly, for certainty and strength against every tribulation which

may come. He did not say: You will not be assailed, you will not be belaboured, you will not be disquieted, but he said: You will not be overcome. God wants us to pay attention to his words, and always to be strong in our certainty, in well-being and in woe, for he loves us and delights in us, and so he wishes us to love him and delight in him and trust greatly in him, and all will be well.

And soon afterwards all was hidden, and I saw no more.

[...]









# The Trinity Forum

## Group Discussion Guide

**1** Prior to this reading, what, if anything, did you know about Julian of Norwich? What were your first impressions of her writing? How did the text compare to your expectations?

**2** In her introduction, Jessica Hooten Wilson writes that “Julian’s revelations and her exposition of these visions have influenced me because they are discomfiting. They extract us from our 21st-century expectations and cultural assumptions about God.” In what ways did you find Julian’s *Revelations of Divine Love* to be discomfiting? What sections felt most modern or familiar to you? What sections felt least familiar?

**3** What do you think it would be like to live, like Julian, in a time of extremely low life expectancy? How might living amidst the Black Death affect one’s expectations and hopes in life? How might it affect one’s view of God?

**4** What do you make of Julian’s three desires listed at the beginning of the excerpts? Why does she desire these things? How do these prayers compare to contemporary expressions of faith or to your own prayers? Would you ever pray for such things?

**5** What is the significance of the “little thing, the size of a hazelnut”? What might be the spiritual benefit of reflecting on the smallness of creation?

**6** “But all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well”: these are perhaps Julian’s most well-known words. What do they mean? Why do you think she repeats the phrase “all shall be well” three times? To what extent are you able to believe these words?

**7** What is sin, according to Julian? What might it mean for sin to be “behovely,” as Julian states in the original Middle English?

**8** In chapter xii, Julian writes, “I often wondered why, through the great and prescient wisdom of God, sin was not prevented; for it seemed to me that then all would have been well.” How does God answer Julian’s question in her various visions? Do you find this answer satisfactory? Why or why not?

**9** In chapter ix, Julian describes swinging between joy and despair, feeling at one moment the love of Christ and at another that she is perishing. What was God trying to teach her with this experience, according to Julian? What is God’s attitude toward our pain? What hope do Julian’s insights offer for those who suffer?

**10** What is prayer, according to Julian? Why should we pray? What should be our response when we feel that our prayers have not been answered?

## Related Trinity Forum Readings

Dante Aligheri, "The Divine Comedy," *The Trinity Forum Reading*, 2015

St. Thomas Aquinas, "On Happiness," *The Trinity Forum Reading*, 2018

John Bunyan, "The Pilgrim's Progress," *The Trinity Forum Reading*, 2019

Charles Dickens, "A Christmas Carol," *The Trinity Forum Reading*, 2017

Isak Dinesen, "Babette's Feast," *The Trinity Forum Reading*, 2010

Flannery O'Connor, "Revelation," *The Trinity Forum Reading*, 2005

O. Henry, "The Gift of the Magi and Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen," *The Trinity Forum Reading*, 2013

Simone Weil, "Wrestling with God," *The Trinity Forum Reading*, 2008

## Further Resources

Claire Gilbert, *I, Julian: The Fictional Autobiography of Julian of Norwich* (Hodder Faith, 2024)

Donyelle C. McCray, *The Censored Pulpit: Julian of Norwich as Preacher* (Fortress Academic, 2019)

Janina Ramirez, *Julian of Norwich: A Very Brief History* (SPCK Publishing, 2016)

Veronica May Rolf, *An Explorer's Guide to Julian of Norwich* (Intervarsity Academic Press, 2018)

Denys Turner, *Julian of Norwich, Theologian* (Yale University Press, 2013)

The **TRINITY FORUM READINGS** are published quarterly.  
Additional copies may be purchased for titles including:

*Abraham Lincoln: The Spiritual Growth of a Public Man* by Elton Trueblood  
*Babette's Feast* by Isak Dinesen  
*Selections from Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley  
*The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness* by Reinhold Niebuhr  
*A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens  
*The City of God* by St. Augustine  
*Devotions* by John Donne  
*The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri  
*The Federalist Papers* by John Jay, James Madison, & Alexander Hamilton  
*Four Quartets* by T.S. Eliot  
*The Gift of the Magi and Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen* by O. Henry  
*God's Grandeur: The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*  
*The Golden Key* by George MacDonald  
*How Much Land Does a Man Need?* by Leo Tolstoy  
*Letter from Birmingham Jail* by Martin Luther King, Jr.  
*Long Walk to Freedom* by Nelson Mandela  
*The Loss of the University* by Wendell Berry  
*The Lost Tools of Learning* by Dorothy Sayers  
*Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl  
*Messiah* by George Frideric Handel  
*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* by Frederick Douglass  
*On Happiness* by Thomas Aquinas  
*Out of My Life and Thought* by Albert Schweitzer  
*The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan  
*Politics and the English Language* by George Orwell  
*Politics, Morality, & Civility* by Václav Havel  
*The Purchase of a Soul* by Victor Hugo  
*Revelation* by Flannery O'Connor  
*Sacred and Profane Love: Poems* by John Donne  
*A Spiritual Pilgrimage* by Malcolm Muggeridge  
*This Child Will Be Great* by Ellen Johnson Sirleaf  
*A Time to Stand* by Helmuth James von Moltke  
*The Wager (and other selections from the Pensées)* by Blaise Pascal  
*Who Stands Fast?* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Order At:  
[www.ttf.org](http://www.ttf.org)  
THE TRINITY FORUM

P.O. Box 9464  
McLean, Virginia 22102-0464 USA  
202.944.9881  
MAIL@TTF.ORG