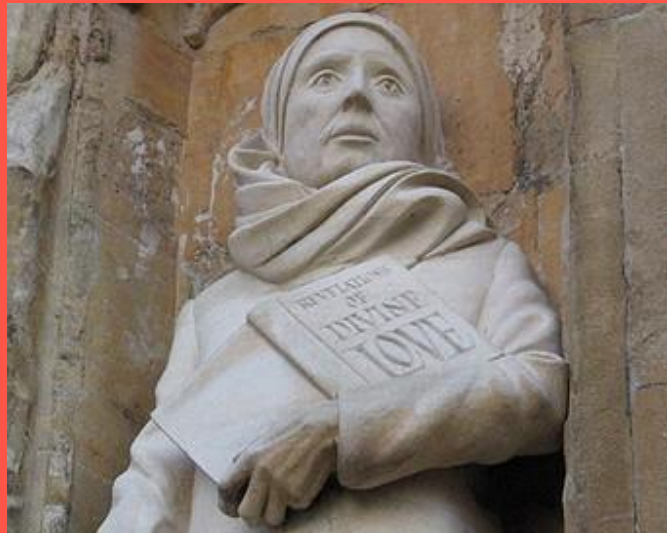




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JULIAN OF NORWICH



Statue at Norwich Cathedral

Very little is really known about Julian of Norwich, not even her real name. She is thought to have been born on November 8th 1342 and died around 1416. She was an 'anchoress', which was someone who was confined in a small cell in a church to live out a religious life of prayer and contemplation. The times during which she lived were very hard for most people. There was much suffering and death especially from the Black Death. People found it very difficult to make sense of the disease and mortality around them and the view at the time was that trouble and suffering was a punishment from God.

When she was thirty years old, Julian herself became gravely ill and thought she was going to die. During this time she had a series of very intense mystical visions. When she recovered from her illness, she reflected further on her experiences and wrote down the visions which became her most important work the Sixteen Revelations of Divine Love. These are thought perhaps to be the first work written by a woman in the English Language. What is astonishing about her reflections, however, is that they concentrate on God, not as a punisher or a judge, but as all-loving. Her understanding, through the visions is of a powerful optimism; an ability to see through all the suffering and misery, a picture of the world as God wants it to be. Her most famous dictum, echoed so strongly in the poet T S Eliot's Four Quartets, is 'all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well'.

Julian is also noted for using unusual language to talk about God and Jesus. Much of her language is domestic and drawn from ordinary life, rather than being endlessly theologically complex. She talks about falling water being like the shining scales on a herring and about contemplating a hazelnut. Talking about God as compassionate and loving, she also talks about Jesus as a mother who is wise, merciful and loving. She uses words and images associated with the feminine to describe how she feels about God and about God's relationship with human beings.

For example:

'And thus I saw that God enjoys that he is our Father, God enjoys that he is our Mother, and God enjoys that he is our true Spouse. And our soul is his loved wife. And Christ enjoys that he is our brother. And Jesus enjoys that he is our Saviour. There are five high joys as I understand in which he will that we enjoy, him praising, him thanking, him loving, him endlessly blessing, all who shall be saved. For the time of this life we have in us a marvelous medley both of weal and woe. We have in us Lord Jesus Christ Uprisen, we have in us the wretchedness and the mischief of Adam's falling dying. By Christ we are steadfastly lastingly kept, and by his grace touching we are raised into secure true trust of salvation. And by Adam's Falling we are so broken in our feeling in diverse manner business by sin and by sundry pains, in which we are made dark and so blind that scarcely we can take any comfort. But in our meaning we abide God, and faithfully trust to have mercy and grace. And this is his own working in us.'

Julian lived a long time ago, but her writings are still important to an exploration of the spiritual journey, since she deals with matters which still concern us in today's world, - where God is in all the turmoil, suffering and brokenness which is present in the world. She offers tremendous hope and a picture of a promise which extends beyond our lives which she finds hidden everywhere in the world around us if we only pay enough attention and interest to look for it.

She is honoured in the Anglican and Lutheran churches on May 8th and in the Roman Catholic Church on May 13th.

www.luminarium.org/medlit/julian.htm
www.julianofnorwich.org
<http://www.umilta.net/julian.html>