

Sin and Love Revealed Through Visions in A Revelation of Love

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It is uncommon for literary scholars to study the devotional writings of the fourteenth century; however, early Christian writing, since religion was a major part of the aesthetic of that period, is of as much interest as other works of arts which centered around religious subjects. A Revelation of Love, which exists in both long and short versions, is a Christian meditation based on the revelatory experiences of Julian of Norwich. It is generally assumed that the shorter version was written soon after Julian experienced the sixteen visions while every detail was still fresh in her mind. The longer version was written almost twenty years later after she had meditated upon these revelations and more clearly understood of their significance. For this paper, I have considered the longer version because it not only contains three times as much material as the short version, but also reflects her more mature thought.

In the beginning of A Revelation, Julian says that she hoped to contract a bodily sickness in order to be entirely purified, and hence to live only for God. Julian considers extraordinary phenomena, such as sickness and vision, as a means of conveying deeper spiritual good; although sickness and revelation are not to be desired for their own sake. During the sickness -- she attributes her sickness to a direct divine intervention -- Julian abandoned her wish for a "bodily sight" and only desired compassion, more knowledge, and more love for Christ. It was in this state of mind that she first experienced a "showing." For about five hours -- from four o'clock till past nine of that Sunday morning -- she

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continued to gaze as "showings" followed in sequence. She began to learn fifteen lessons of divine love from the visions which occurred during those five hours, and a sixteenth on the following night: these showings form the basis for *A Revelation*.² Julian has a conviction that her showings came from God: "This is a revelation of love that Iesus Christ, our endless blisse, made in XVI sheweings or revelations particular."³ The common denominator of Julian's sight in each of her revelations is Christ. Jesus is the focal point of her every showing.

In *A Revelation*, Julian represents the reasons why she was granted these showings and why she wrote this book:

And fro that time that it was shewid I desired oftentimes
to witten what was our lords mening. And xv yer after
and more I was answerid in gostly vnderstanding, seyand
thus: 'Woldst thou wetten thi lords mening in this thing?
Wete it wele: love was his mening. Who shewid it the?
Love, What shewid he the? Love. Wherefore shewid it he?
For love. Hold the therin and thou shalt witten and knowen
more in the same: but thou shalt never knowen ne witten
therein other thing without end.' Thus was I lerid that love
was our lords mening. (102)

God's redeeming love is the main theme of *A Revelation*. According to Julian, in order to obtain this divine love, a man should have no sin. Hence, in this paper I should like to examine how sin and love are depicted and interpreted through the sixteen showings in *A Revelation*.

Twice in her book, Julian describes three types of spiritual experiences: "All this was shewid by thre: that is to sey, be bodily sight and by word formyd in my understanding and be gostly sight" (11). By

"spiritual," she means here "a realization of immaterial reality as differing from physical appearance or mental function" (Chambers, 43). In her showings, these three are intertwined. Paul Molinari, S.J. places these three types of revelations into the traditional medieval categories for visions, which originated with St. Augustine, i.e., corporeal, imaginary, and intellectual vision (67). Hilda Graef's division of these three experiences differs from Molinari's: imaginary visions, intellectual apprehension, and intellectual vision (264). However, I do not think that any classification is necessary because Julian is not consistent in the use of her own terminology. Moreover, she does not make any distinctions of value between them. E. I. Watkin insists that in *A Revelation*, ghostly sight is fuller, deeper, and more valuable than bodily sight (32). There is, however, no evidence for this argument in *A Revelation*. In addition, Wolfgang Riehle holds that "although the terminology may be unclear, it is far more important to recognize that her visions have an extremely intellectual character" (126). This argument seems to be valid. The underlying vision that supports all else is the realization of the sufferings of Christ. These physical sufferings of Christ are by no means the most important part in her showings;⁴ they are but the external expression of the mystery of God's love for man. The supreme revelation of God's love is the crucifix. Hence, Julian's showings begin with a vision of the Crucified and continue with a series of showings of the Passion.

According to Julian, the purging of man's sinful nature involves awareness of and participation in Christ's suffering. When man has the desire to know God, this knowledge of God will be affected to a degree which corresponds to the person's sinful nature. Since man is frail and easily falls into sin, the person striving for the contemplative state must recognize these flaws in himself and understand how they are keeping

him from a fuller knowledge of God:

And thus was the blisfull cheere of our lord shewid in
 pite: in which shewing I saw that is most contrarie, so
 ferforth that as long as we be medled with ony part of
 synne we shall never see cleerly the blisfull cheere of our
 lord. And the horibler and the greivouser that our synnes
 bene, the deeper are we for that time fro this blisfull syte.
 (87)

Julian sets up a contrast between love and sin to emphasize how the sinful state of man limits his knowledge of God. She also uses several words in this passage which indicate a vision. All these references stress the idea that through sin the soul loses sight of God. In order to gain a fuller knowledge of God, the person must rid himself of all earthly desire. But this state cannot be accomplished without the grace of God. Once a person realizes the incomparable difference between his own nature and that of God's, he also begins to understand the concept of sinfulness more completely, and this understanding makes the soul more dependent on God's help. Knowledge about the inner self must lead the person to a fuller knowledge of God, for Julian contends that God lives in the soul.

Julian is unable to see sin because it has no substance, and thus she cannot portray it:

But I saw not synne: for I believe it hath no maner of
 substance ne party of being, ne it myght not be knowin
 but by the peyne that it is cause of: and thus peyne, it is
 somethyng, as to my syte, fot a tyme, for it purgith and
 makyth us to knowen ourselfe and askyn mercy (29)

It is the pain caused by sin which Julian can comprehend, but not the sin itself. Her statements about sin show it to be the absence of God, and therefore since God is in everything, his absence means that sin must have no substance.

Julian then takes this idea of pain and reveals that it is overcome by the love of God. She sees men as sinners and lovers of God, and she neither condemns man for his sins nor allows him to become complacent because he is a lover of God. Her own hatred of sin is a result of love--her love of God. Her showings give her triumphant assertion of an optimistic faith in face of the apparently hopeless facts of sin. The core of Julian's teaching on the necessity of avoiding sin is that our efforts in this direction should spring from love rather than from fear. The questions awakened by the first showing--the problem of the creation and preservation of the universe--is answered by the sight of a small hazel-nut lying in the palm of her hand, a symbol of the loving care of God who holds all things in the hollow of His hand.

Though Julian receives all her showings with great gratitude and love, throughout she is convinced that they are merely optional and not an essential means to advancement in the love of God (Tuma, 56). Despite the fact that Julian uses the passion of Christ as the base of a revelation, she customarily considers it in terms of its symbolic meaning, e.g., Christ's physical suffering as indicative of his love for man. Julian considers Christ's love and compassion to be the dominant characteristics of His nature. She often notes the graciousness, tenderness, and gentleness with which this love is given.

In this same time our lord shewed to me a ghostly sight of his homely loving. I saw that he is to us everything that is

good and comfortable for us. He is our clothing that for
 love wrappith us, [halseth] us and all beclosyth us for
 tender love, that hee may never leave us, being to us
 althing that is gode, as to myne understanding. (5)

Julian considers the vision of God in terms of the aid it provides her in understanding God and herself, the comfort she receives from the showing, and a general increase in her love and knowledge of God.

As the mystical life on earth is a foretaste of the beatific vision in heaven, Julian's showings culminate in an intellectual vision of the Trinity in the soul. Thus, Julian is led from the showings of Christ's Manhood and His love in the Passion to the deepest understanding of the relations between the Trinitarian God and the soul made in His image. However, Julian does not attempt to describe the union in detail. She does just refer to the mystical union in terms of "the highest bliss" (87). That any union with God in the natural order is a transitory experience is a fixed constant for Julian. The beholding of God remains only for a brief moment:

Any yet in al this I beheld in the shewing of God that this
 manner syte of him may not be continuant in this lif, and
 that for his owen worship and for encreas of our endles
 joy. (50)

Julian feels that she is unable to depict precisely the content of the beholding of God and its mysteries. The final disclosure and understanding is reserved for heaven.

In conclusion, *A Revelation* is less theoretical and ascetic in tone than *The Cloud of Unknowing*; more limited in scope, more personal

and speculative than Walter Hilton's *The Scale of Perfection* and more intellectual in approach than Richard Rolle's writings. Robert K. Stone argues that "the work of Julian is strikingly intellectual. She is an analytical mystic, carefully examining her visions, her conclusions, and her questions about the conclusions" (29). Also, Margery Kempe's description of the passion tends to be rather vague and general, whereas Julian's is objective, specific, and vivid. In *A Revelation*, the reality of intense suffering and acute consciousness of sin are closely tied to Julian's absolute conviction of the goodness and the love of God (Webster, 228).

Julian believed that through her visions God manifested His love for all men, and this knowledge gave her great peace and joy. She did not fully understand the meanings of her visions at the time they occurred, but came to that understanding only after twenty years of meditation. The higher form of contemplation is a "sight" but not "face to face" as in the beatific vision. It is transitory: these showings soon go, and the soul returns to its usual state in which it lives by faith. But this faith is stronger because it has been momentarily enlightened, and is now enriched by the experiences which enable more ardent love. Since the seeing of these showings becomes for Julian a source of knowledge, then for her "see and know" and "sight and understanding" are synonymous terms.

Julian's message for the troubled fourteenth century, a period in which Christianity provided a small island of sanity in an otherwise chaotic world, was one of peace, confidence, and joy. In the end, all would be well, she repeated, and this happy conclusion would be the result of the great deed of Christ.

Notes

1 Julian states that she “cowde no letter,” but this statement could mean that she was not formally trained in Latin, although she may have been able to read and write in English. Another possibility is that this statement of illiteracy is only a conventional disclaimer.

2 Most writers assume that Julian’s showings were experienced when she was already a recluse in her small cell at St. Julian’s church.

3 Julian of Norwich, *A Revelation of Love*. Ed. Marion Glasscoe, p. 1. Further quotations from Julian are taken from this edition.

4 Rolle and Julian both exhibit great devotion to the passion of Christ and share a sincere compassion with Him in His physical sufferings, which they describe with vivid and realistic detail. However, Julian does not touch upon “the spiritual agonies of Christ in his passion, an aspect which Rolle treats with tender sympathy and understanding” (Knowlton, 82).

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국문초록

사랑의 현현에 있어서 계시들을 통해 나타난 죄와 사랑

이인성

14세기 영국의 소위 "mystical writings"를 쓴 대표적인 작가들 중의 한 사람인 Julian of Norwich가 쓴 *A Revelation of Love* [사랑의 현현]은 같은 제목 하에 긴 것과 짧은 것의 두 종류가 있다. 아마도 짧은 것은 Julian이 16개의 환상들을 경험한 직후에 모든 경험들이 아직 그녀의 마음속에 생생할 때에 쓴 것이고, 긴 것은 그로부터 약 20년 동안 그녀가 체험한 환상들을 충분히 묵상하고 그 의미들을 더욱 자세히 이해하고 난 후에 쓴 것으로 추측된다. 본 논문에서는 longer version을 사용하고 있는데, 그 이유는 이것이 short version보다 3배나 더 많은 내용들을 포함하고 있을 뿐만 아니라 또한 Julian의 보다 성숙한 사상들을 보여주고 있기 때문이다.

*A Revelation of Love*의 서두에 보면 Julian은 육체적인 병을 갖기를 원했는데, 왜냐하면 그녀는 완전히 순수해져서 오직 하나님만을 위해 살기를 원했기 때문이다. 육체적인 고통을 당하고 있는 동안 그녀는 오직 예수 그리스도를 향한 연민과 더 깊은 사랑 그리고 더 많은 지식을 갖기를 갈망했다. Julian이 처음으로 현현(a showing)을 경험한 것은 바로 그녀의 마음가짐이 이와 같은 때였다. 약 5시간동안 그녀는 연속적으로 현현들을 체험했다. 15개의 현현들을 통해 Julian은 하나님의 사랑을 배우기 시작했으며, 마지막 16번째의 비전은 다음날 밤에 보았다. 이 16개의 계시들이 이 책의 근간을 이루고 있다. Julian은 자기가 본 16개의 비전들이 하나님으로부터 온 것이라는 확신을 가졌으며, 이 모든 현현의 중심에는 예수 그리스도가 자리하고 있었다. 하나님의 구속적인 사랑이 이 책의 중심 주제인 것이다. 하나님의 사랑을 획득하기 위해서는 죄가 전혀 없어야 한다고 Julian은 이 책에서 주장하고 있다. 본 논문에서는 위와 같은 기본 사상에 바탕을 두고 이 작품에 나타난 16개의 현현들을 통해 죄(sin)와 사랑(love)이

어떻게 묘사되고 어떻게 해석되고 있는지를 분석하고 있다.

Julian은 3가지 종류의 영적인 경험들을 언급하고 있는데 첫 번째는 육체적인 현현 (bodily sight)이며, 두 번째는 이해가운데 형성된 말 (word)이며, 세 번째는 영적인 현현 (ghostly sight)이다. Julian에게 있어서 영적 (spiritual)이라는 말은, 눈에 보이는 가시적인 것이나 정신적인 기능과는 다른 비물질적인 실체에 대한 인식을 말한다. Julian의 현현들에 있어서 육체적인 현현과 말, 그리고 정신적인 현현의 3가지는 서로 뒤섞여 작용하고 있으며, Julian은 어느 하나에 다른 것보다 더 큰 가치를 부여하고 있지 않다. 이 모든 16개의 현현들에 바탕이 되는 비전은 예수 그리스도의 고난에 대한 인식이다. 물론 예수 그리스도의 육체적 고난이 이 현현들에 있어서 가장 중요한 요인은 결코 아니다. 이것은 다만 인간을 향한 하나님의 사랑의 미스터리에 대한 외적인 표현일 뿐이다. 하나님의 사랑에 대한 최고의 표현은 십자가이다. 따라서, Julian의 현현은 십자가의 비전으로부터 시작해서 예수님의 고난에 대한 비전들로 계속된다.

결론적으로, 사랑의 현현에서 강한 고난의 실체와 죄에 대한 정확한 의식은, 하나님의 사랑에 대한 Julian의 확고한 신념과 아주 밀접하게 연결되어 있다. Julian은 말하기를 자기의 비전들을 통해서 하나님은 모든 인류를 향한 그의 사랑을 나타내셨으며, 이러한 사실은 그녀에게 커다란 평화와 기쁨을 주었다. 보다 한차원높은 형태의 명상은 보는 것 (sight)이다. (그렇지만 얼굴과 얼굴을 맞대고 보는 것은 아니다.) 이러한 현현은 임시적인 것으로 이것들은 곧 사라지고, 영혼은 믿음으로 사는 그 본래의 상태로 돌아온다. 그러나 이 믿음은 이제 이전보다 더욱 강하다. 왜냐하면, 순간적으로 영혼의 눈이 떠져 계몽되었기 때문이며, 이 믿음은 이제 더욱 열성적으로 사랑할 수 있도록 하는 경험들에 의해 더욱 풍부해진다. Julian에게는 이러한 현현들을 보는 것이 지식의 근본이 된다. 따라서, 그녀에게는 “보는 것과 아는 것” 그리고 “보는 것과 이해하는 것”은 동일하다.

혼란스럽던 당시의 시대를 향한 Julian의 메시지는 평화와 확신 그리고 기쁨이었다. Julian은 모든 것이 다 잘될 것이며, 이러한 행복한 결말은 예수그리스도의 위대한 사역의 결과라고 그녀는 반복해서 말하고 있다.