JULIAN OF NORWICH

Revelations of Divine Love
(Short Text and Long Text)

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With an Introduction and Notes by A.C. SPEARING

PENGUIN BOOKS
A description of the chapters.

This first chapter lists the series of revelations one by one.

This is a revelation of love that Jesus Christ, our unending joy, gave in sixteen showings or special revelations. The first is of his precious crowning with thorns, and by this was understood and specified the Trinity with the Incarnation and unity between God and the soul of man, with many fair workings of unending wisdom and teaching of love, on which all the workings that follow are founded and in which they are all united. The second is the discolouring of his fair face as a sign of his dear Passion. The third is that our Lord God, allmighty wisdom, all love, just as truly as he has made everything that is, so truly he does and brings about all that is done. The fourth is the scourging of his tender body with plentiful shedding of his blood. The fifth is that the Fiend is defeated by the precious Passion of Christ. The sixth is the noble gratitude of our Lord God with which he rewards his blessed servants in heaven. The seventh is frequent experience of joy and sorrow (the feeling of joy is God kindly touching and cheering us, giving us true certainty of everlasting happiness; the feeling of sorrow is temptation caused by the depression and irritations of our bodily lives), all with the spiritual understanding that we are securely protected through love, in joy and sorrow, by the goodness of God. The eighth is Christ's last sufferings and his cruel dying. The ninth is the pleasure taken by the Holy Trinity in the hard agony of Christ and his pitiable dying; in which joy and pleasure he wants us to be comforted and gladdened with him until we come to the fullness of pleasure in heaven. The tenth is our Lord Jesus Christ, lovingly showing his blessed heart, rejoicing
even as it is split in two. The eleventh is a high spiritual showing of his dear Mother. The twelfth is that our Lord is Being in its most noble form. The thirteenth is that our Lord wishes us to consider carefully and admire the splendour of all that he has done in making all things, and of the excellence of man's making, which surpasses all his works, and of the precious atonement he made for our sin, turning all our blame into everlasting glory. And here our Lord says, 'Behold and see, for by the same mighty wisdom and goodness I shall make well all that is not well and you shall see it.' And in this he wants us to trust in the faith and promise of Holy Church, not wanting to know his secret mysteries now, except for what rightly concerns us in this life. The fourteenth is that our Lord is the foundation of our prayers. In this we see two properties: one of them is true prayer, the other is sure trust, and he wants both to be abundant; thus our prayers will please him and in his goodness he will answer them. The fifteenth is that we shall be immediately taken from all our suffering and from all our sorrow and, through his goodness, we shall come up above where we shall have our Lord Jesus as our reward and be filled full of joy and bliss in heaven. The sixteenth is that the Holy Trinity our Maker lives eternally in our souls in Christ Jesus our Saviour, gloriously ruling and giving all things, strongly and wisely saving and protecting us for love, and we shall not be overcome by our Enemy.

Of the time of these revelations, and how she begged for three things.

These revelations were shown to a simple, uneducated creature in the year of our Lord 1373, on the eighth day of May; she had already asked God for three gifts: the first was vivid perception of his Passion, the second was bodily sickness in youth at thirty years of age, the third was for God to give her three wounds.

As for the first, it seemed to me that I could feel the Passion of Christ to some extent, but yet I longed by God's grace to feel it more strongly. I thought how I wished I had been there at the crucifixion with Mary Magdalene and with others who were Christ's dear friends, and therefore I longed to be shown him in the flesh so that I might have more knowledge of our Saviour's bodily suffering and of our Lady's fellow-suffering and that of all his true friends who then saw his pain; I wanted to be one of them and suffer with him. I never wished for any other sight or showing of God until my soul left my body. I begged for this so that after the showing I would have a truer perception of Christ's Passion.

The second gift came to me with contrition: I longed eagerly to be on my death-bed, so that I might in that sickness receive all the rites of Holy Church, that I might myself believe I was dying and that everyone who saw me might believe the same, for I wanted no hopes of earthly life. I longed to have in this sickness every kind of suffering both of body and soul that I would experience if I died, with all the terror and turmoil of the fiends, except for actually giving up the ghost. And I thought of this because I wished to be purged by the mercy of God and afterwards to live more to God's glory because of that sickness; and that I should die more quickly, for I longed to be soon with my God. I longed for these two things — the Passion and the sickness — with one reservation, saying, 'Lord, you know what I would have, if it is your will that I should have it; and if it is not your will, good Lord, do not be displeased, for I only want what you want.'

As for the third gift, by the grace of God and the teaching of Holy Church, I conceived a great longing to receive three wounds in my life: that is to say, the wound of true contrition, the wound of kind compassion and the wound of an earnest longing for God. And this last petition was with no reservation.

The first two of the longings just mentioned passed from my mind, and the third stayed with me continually.
Of the sickness obtained from God by petition.

And 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 believe that I would live until morning. And after this I lingered on for two days and two nights. And on the third night I often thought that I was dying, and so did those who were with me. And I thought it was a great pity to die while still young; but this was not because there was anything on earth that I wanted to live for, nor because I feared any suffering, for I trusted God's mercy. I wanted to live so as to love God better and for longer, and therefore know and love him better in the bliss of heaven. For it seemed to me that all the short time I had lived here was as nothing compared with that heavenly bliss. So I thought, 'Good Lord, may my ceasing to live be to your glory!' And I understood, both with my reason and by the bodily pains I felt, that I was dying. And I fully accepted the will of God with all the will of my heart. Thus I endured till day, and by then my body was dead to all sensation from the waist down. Then I felt I wanted to be supported in a sitting position, so that my heart could be more freely at God's disposition, and so that I could think of God while I was still alive.

My parish priest was sent for to be present at my death, and by the time he came my eyes were fixed and I could not speak. He set the cross before my face and said, 'I have brought you the image of your Maker and Saviour. Look upon it and be comforted.' It seemed to me that I was well as I was, for my eyes were looking fixedly upwards into heaven, where I trusted that I was going with God's mercy. But nevertheless I consented to fix my eyes on the face of the crucifix if I could, and so I did, because I thought that I might be able to bear looking straight ahead for longer than I could manage to look upwards. After this my sight began to fail and the room was dark all around me as though it had been night, except for the image of the cross, in which I saw an ordinary, household light — I could not understand how. Everything except the cross was ugly to me, as if crowded with fiends. After this the upper part of my body began to die to such an extent that I had almost no feeling and was short of breath. And then I truly believed that I had died. And at this moment, all my suffering was suddenly taken from me, and I seemed to be as well, especially in the upper part of my body, as ever I was before. I marvelled at this sudden change, for it seemed to me a mysterious work of God, not a natural one. And yet, although I felt comfortable, I still did not expect to live, nor did feeling more comfortable comfort me entirely, for I felt that I would rather have been released from this world.

Then it suddenly occurred to me that I should entreat our Lord graciously to give me the second wound, so that my whole body should be filled with remembrance and feeling of his blessed Passion; for I wanted his pains to be my pains, with compassion, and then longing for God. Yet in this I never asked for a bodily sight or showing of God, but for fellow-suffering, such as a naturally kind soul might feel for our Lord Jesus; he was willing to become a mortal man for love, so I wanted to suffer with him.

Here begins the first revelation of the precious crowning of Christ, as listed in the first chapter; and how God fills the heart with the greatest joy; and of his great meekness; and how the sight of Christ's Passion gives sufficient strength against all the temptations of the fiends; and of the great excellency and meekness of the blessed Virgin Mary.

Then I suddenly saw the red blood trickling down from under the crown of thorns, hot and fresh and very plentiful, as though it were the moment of his Passion when the crown of thorns was thrust on to his blessed head, he who was both God and man, the same who suffered for me like that. I believed truly and strongly that it was he himself who showed me this, without any intermediary. And as part
of the same showing the Trinity suddenly filled my heart with the greatest joy. And I understood that in heaven it will be like that for ever for those who come there. For the Trinity is God, God is the Trinity; the Trinity is our maker and protector, the Trinity is our dear friend for ever, our everlasting joy and bliss, through our Lord Jesus Christ. And this was shown in the first revelation, and in all of them; for it seems to me that where Jesus is spoken of, the Holy Trinity is to be understood. And I said, 'Benedicite domine!' Because I meant this with such deep veneration, I said it in a very loud voice; and I was astounded with wonder and admiration that he who is so holy and awe-inspiring was willing to be so familiar with a sinful being living in wretched flesh. I supposed that the time of my temptation had now come, for I thought that God would allow me to be tempted by fiends before I died. With this sight of the blessed Passion, along with the Godhead that I saw in my mind, I knew that I, yes, and every creature living, could have strength to resist all the fiends of hell and all spiritual temptation.

Then he brought our blessed Lady into my mind. I saw her spiritually in bodily likeness, a meek and simple maid, young – little more than a child, of the same bodily form as when she conceived. God also showed me part of the wisdom and truth of her soul, so that I understood with what reverence she beheld her God and Maker, and how reverently she marvelled that he chose to be born of her, a simple creature of his own making. And this wisdom and faithfulness, knowing as she did the greatness of her Maker and the littleness of her who was made, moved her to say very humbly to Gabriel, 'Behold, the handmaid of the Lord.' With this sight I really understood that she is greater in worthiness and grace than all that God made below her; for, as I see it, nothing that is made is above her, except the blessed Manhood of Christ.

How God is everything that is good to us, tenderly enfolding us; and everything that is made is as nothing compared to almighty God; and how there is no rest for man until he sets himself and everything else at nought for the love of God.

At the same time, our Lord showed me a spiritual vision of his familiar love. I saw that for us he is everything that we find good and comforting. He is our clothing, wrapping us for love, embracing and enclosing us for tender love, so that he can never leave us, being himself everything that is good for us, as I understand it.

In this vision he also showed a little thing, the size of a hazel-nut in the palm of my hand, and it was as round as a ball. I looked at it with my mind’s eye and thought, 'What can this be?' And the answer came to me, 'It is all that is made.' I wondered how it could last, for it was so small I thought it might suddenly have disappeared. And the answer in my mind was, 'It lasts and will last for ever because God loves it; and everything exists in the same way by the love of God.'

In this little thing I saw three properties: the first is that God made it, the second is that God loves it, the third is that God cares for it. But what the maker, the carer and the lover really is to me, I cannot tell; for until I become one substance with him, I can never have complete rest or true happiness; that is to say, until I am so bound to him that there is no created thing between my God and me.

We need to know the littleness of all created beings and to set at nothing everything that is made in order to love and possess God who is unmade. This is the reason why we do not feel complete ease in our hearts and souls: we look here for satisfaction in things which are so trivial, where there is no rest to be found, and do not know our God who is almighty, all wise, all good; he is rest itself. God wishes to be known, and is pleased that we should rest in him; for all that is below him does nothing to satisfy us; and this is why, until all that is made seems as nothing, no soul can be at rest. When a soul sets all at nothing for love, to have him who is everything, then he is able to receive spiritual rest.
REVELATIONS OF DIVINE LOVE

Our Lord God also showed that it gives him very great pleasure when a simple soul comes to him in a bare, plain and familiar way. For, as I understand this showing, it is the natural yearning of the soul touched by the Holy Ghost to say, 'God, of your goodness, give me yourself; you are enough for me, and anything less that I could ask for would not do you full honour. And if I ask anything that is less, I shall always lack something, but in you alone I have everything.' And such words are very dear to the soul and come very close to the will of God and his goodness; for his goodness includes all his creatures and all his blessed works, and surpasses everything endlessly, for he is what has no end. And he has made us only for himself and restored us by his blessed Passion and cares for us with his blessed love. And all this is out of his goodness.

How we should pray; of the great and tender love that our Lord has for man's soul; and how he wants us to devote ourselves to knowing and loving him.

This showing was made to teach our souls to be wise and cling to the goodness of God. And at that point our usual way of praying came into my thoughts; how usually, because we do not understand or know about love, we pray indirectly. Then I saw that it really honours God more, and gives more joy, if we ask him to answer our prayers through his own goodness, and cling to it by his grace, with true understanding and loving steadfastness, than if we approach him through all the intermediaries' that heart can devise. For all these intermediaries are diminishing, we are not giving God full honour; but his own goodness is everything, there is nothing lacking.

And this is what came into my thoughts at that time: we pray to God by his holy flesh and by his precious blood, his holy Passion, his glorious death and wounds; and all the blessed kindness, the unending life that we have from these is from his goodness. And we pray to him by the love of the sweet Mother who bore him, and all the help we have from her is from his goodness. And we pray by the holy cross upon which he died, and all the strength and help we gain from the cross is from his goodness. And in the same way, all the help that is given to us by special saints and by all the blessed company of heaven, the precious love and unending friendship that we receive from them, we receive from his goodness. For in his goodness, God has ordained a great many excellent means to help us, of which the chief and principal one is the blessed Humanity which he took from the Virgin, with all the means which went before and come afterwards which belong to our redemption and our eternal salvation. Therefore it pleases him that we should seek and worship him in these intermediate ways while understanding and knowing that he is the goodness of all; for the goodness of God is the highest object of prayer and it reaches down to our lowest need. It quickens our soul and gives it life, and makes it grow in grace and virtue. It is nearest in nature and readiest in grace; for it is the same grace which the soul seeks and always will seek until we truly know him who has enclosed us in himself; for he does not despise what he has made, nor does he disdain to serve us in the simplest task that belongs by nature to our bodies, through love of the soul which he has made in his own likeness; for as the body is clad in the cloth, and the flesh in the skin, and the bones in the flesh, and the heart in the chest, so are we, soul and body, clad in the goodness of God and enclosed in it; yes, and more inwardly, because all these may waste and wear away, but God's goodness is always strong, and incomparably near to us; for truly our loving God wants our souls to cling to him with all their might, and wants us to cling to his goodness for ever. For of everything the heart could devise, this is what most pleases God and most readily benefits us; for our soul is so specially loved by him that is highest that it surpasses the knowledge of all beings — that is to say that there is no being made that can know how much and how sweetly and how tenderly our Maker loves us.

And therefore with his grace and his help we may stand and gaze at him in the spirit, with unending amazement at this high, surpassing, inestimable love that almighty God has for us in his goodness. And
therefore we may reverently ask our loving friend whatever we wish; for our natural wish is to have God, and God’s good wish is to have us. And we can never stop wishing or longing until we fully and joyfully possess him, and then we shall wish for nothing more; for he wants us to be absorbed in knowing and loving him until the time when we reach fulfillment in heaven.

And that is why this lesson of love was shown, with all that follows, as you will see; for the strength and the foundation of everything was shown in the first vision; for of all else, beholding and loving our Maker makes the soul see itself as most puny, and most fills it with reverent awe and true meekness, with abundance of love for its fellow Christians.

How our Lady, seeing the greatness of her Maker, thought herself the lowest; and of the great drops of blood running from beneath the crown of thorns; and how what is most joyful to man is that God, the highest and the mightiest, is also the holiest and the most generous.

And to teach us this, as I understand it, our Lord God showed our Lady Saint Mary at the same time; that is to say he showed her deep wisdom and faith as she beheld her Maker so great, so high, so strong and so good. Seeing the greatness and the nobility of God filled her with reverent awe, and she saw herself so small and so low, so simple and so poor in comparison with her Lord God, that this reverent awe made her feel very humble. And so this formed the foundation, from this she was filled with grace and every kind of virtue, surpassing any other created being.

And all the time that God was showing in spiritual sight what I have just described, the bodily sight of the plentiful bleeding from Christ’s head remained. The great drops fell down from under the crown of thorns like pills, as though they had come out of the veins; and as they came out they were dark red, for the blood was very thick; and as it spread it was bright red; and when it reached the brows it vanished, and yet the bleeding continued until many things were seen and understood. The beauty and vividness of the blood are like nothing but itself. It is as plentiful as the drops of water which fall from the eaves after a heavy shower of rain, drops which fall so thickly that no human mind can number them. As for the roundness of the drops, they were like herring scales as they spread on the forehead. These three things occurred to me at the time: pills for roundness as the blood came out; herring scales as it spread on the forehead, for roundness; drops from the eaves, for innumerable plenty. This showing was alive and vivid, horrifying and awe-inspiring, sweet and lovely. And what comforted me most in the vision was that our God and Lord, who is so holy and awe-inspiring, is also so familiar and courteous. And this was what gave me most happiness and the strongest sense of spiritual safety. And to make this easier to understand he gave me this clear example: a majestic king or a great lord can show most respect for a poor servant if he treats him in a familiar way, especially if he does so personally, with real sincerity and a cheerful expression, both in private and in public. Then this poor man thinks, ‘Ah! How could this noble lord give me more respect or more pleasure than by treating me, who am so humble, with this marvellous friendliness? In truth, it gives me more joy and pleasure than if he gave me great gifts and behaved in a cold and distant manner.’ This human example was so powerfully shown, that a man’s heart could be ravished and he could be beside himself with joy at this great friendliness. This is the way that our Lord Jesus treats us; for truly, it seems to me that it is the greatest possible joy that he who is highest and mightiest, noblest and worthiest, is also the lowest and humblest, the most kind and friendly. And truly and certainly this marvellous joy will be made known to all of us when we see him. And this is what our Lord wants us to long for and believe, to rejoice and take pleasure in, to receive comfort and support from, as much as we can, until the time when we can see it for ourselves; for it seems to me that the greatest fullness of joy that we shall have is the marvellous courtesy and intimacy of the Father who made us, through our Lord Jesus Christ who is our brother and saviour. But no man can know
this marvellous intimacy during his life here on earth, unless he has a special showing from our Lord, or he is inwardly filled with plentiful grace by the Holy Ghost. But faith and trust with love deserve the reward, and so it is gained through grace; for our life is grounded in faith and hope with love.

The showing, made to whomever God may choose, plainly teaches the same thing as our faith, revealed and explained with many secret details which belong to it and which it is glorious to know. And when the showing, which is given at a moment in time, is hidden and past, then the faith lasts by the grace of the Holy Ghost until our life’s end. And thus what the showing reveals is nothing other than the faith, neither more nor less, as may be seen from the meaning our Lord conveys in it by the time it is completed.

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A recapitulation of what has been said, and how it was shown to her and meant for everybody.

And as long as I could see this sight of the plentiful bleeding from Christ’s head I could never stop saying these words, ‘Benedicite domine!’ From this showing I understood six things: the first is the signs of Christ’s blessed Passion and the plentiful shedding of his precious blood; the second is the Maiden who is his beloved mother; the third is the blessed Godhead that ever was, is and ever shall be, almighty, all wisdom, all love. The fourth is all that he has made; for I know well that heaven and earth and all that is made is vast and wide, fair and good, but it looked so small to me because I saw it in the presence of him that is Maker of all things; to a soul that sees the Maker of all, all that is made seems very small. The fifth thing I understood is that he made everything for love; the same love sustains everything, and shall do so for ever; the sixth is that God is everything that is good, it seems to me, and the goodness that is in everything is God. And all these our Lord showed me in the first vision, with time and space to contemplate it. And when the bodily vision stopped, the spiritual vision remained in my understanding. And I waited with reverent fear, rejoicing in what I saw. And as far as I dared, I longed to see more if it was his will, or else to see the same vision for longer.

In all this I was much moved with love for my fellow Christians, wishing that they might see and know what I was seeing; I wanted it to comfort them, for the vision was shown for everyone. Then I said to those who were around me, ‘For me, today is the Day of Judgement.’ And I said this because I thought I was dying; for on the day that a man dies, he receives his eternal judgement, as I understand it. I said this because I wanted them to love God better, to remind them that life is short, as they might see by my example; for all this time I thought I was dying, and this made me feel wonder – and some sorrow, for I thought this vision was shown for those who were going to live. And what I say of myself, I am saying on behalf of all my fellow Christians, for I was taught in the spiritual showing of our Lord God that this is his purpose; and therefore I beg you all for God’s sake and advise you for your own advantage that you stop paying attention to the poor being to whom this vision was shown, and eagerly, attentively and humbly contemplate God, who in his gracious love and eternal goodness wanted the vision to be generally known to comfort us all; for it is God’s will that you should receive it with joy and pleasure as great as if Jesus had shown it to you all.

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Of the humility of this woman, which always keeps her in the faith of Holy Church; and how he who loves his fellow Christian for the sake of God, loves everything.

I am not good because of the showing unless I love God better; and if you love God better, it is meant more for you than for me. I am not saying this to the wise, for they know it well; but I am saying it
to those of you who are ignorant, to support and comfort you: we all need support. Indeed I was not shown that God loved me better than the lowest soul that is in a state of grace, for I am sure that there are many who never had a showing or vision, but only the normal teaching of Holy Church, and who love God better than I do. For if I look solely at myself, I am really nothing; but as one of mankind in general, I am, I hope, in oneness of love with all my fellow Christians; for upon this oneness depends the life of all who shall be saved; for God is all that is good, as I see it, and God has made all that is made, and God loves all that he has made, and he who loves all his fellow Christians for God’s sake, loves all that is; for in those who shall be saved, all is included: that is to say, all that is made and the Maker of all; for in man is God, and God is in everything. And I hope by the grace of God that he who looks at it in this way will be truly taught and greatly comforted if he needs comfort. I speak of those who will be saved, for at this time God showed me no others.

But I believe everything that Holy Church believes, preaches and teaches; for the faith of Holy Church which I had understood beforehand, and, I hope, by the grace of God, gladly followed and kept in my daily life, was continually before me, and I never wished or intended to receive anything which might be at variance with it. And with this intention I considered the showing as carefully as possible: and I saw it to be as one with the Church’s teaching as God intended.

All this was shown in three ways: that is to say, by bodily sight, and by words formed in my understanding, and by spiritual sight. But I neither can nor may show the spiritual vision as openly or as fully as I would like to. But I trust that our Lord God almighty will out of his own goodness and love for you make you receive it more spiritually and more sweetly than I can or may tell it.

The second revelation is of the discoloring of Christ’s face, of our redemption, and the discoloring of the venomid;⁰° and how God wants us to seek him eagerly, resting in him steadfastly and trusting him greatly.

And after this I saw with my bodily sight in the face of Christ on the crucifix which hung before me, which I was looking at continuously, a part of his Passion: contempt and spitting, dart and blows, and many lingering pains, more than I can tell, and frequent changes of colour. And once I saw how half his face, beginning at the ear, was covered in dry blood until it reached the middle of his face, and after that the other half was covered in the same way, and meanwhile the first part was as before. I saw this bodily, in distress and darkness, and I wished for better bodily sight to see it more clearly. And I was answered in my reason, ’If God wants to show you more, he will be your light. You need no light but him.’ For I saw him and sought him; for we are now so blind and so unwise that we never seek God until out of his goodness he shows himself to us, and if he graciously lets us see something of himself, then we are moved by the same grace to seek with a great longing to see him more fully; and thus I saw him and I sought him, I had him and I wanted him. And it seems to me that this is, or should be, our usual way of proceeding.

At one moment my consciousness was taken down on to the sea bed, and there I saw green hills and valleys, looking as though they were covered in moss, with seaweed and sand.¹¹ Then I understood this: that if a man or a woman were under the wide waters, if he could see God (and God is constantly with us) he would be safe, body and soul, and be unharmed, and furthermore, he would have more joy and comfort than words can say. For God wants us to believe that we can see him constantly, even though we think we see very little of him, and if we believe this he makes us grow in grace continually; for he wants to be seen and he wants to be sought; he wants to be waited for and he wants to be trusted.

This second showing was so humble and so small and so simple