

The Julian Lecture 2012

A Love Too Great to Bear?

Julian's Gauntlet to Humanity



Lay Canon Professor Brian Thorne

[1] A love too great to bear? Julian's gauntlet to humanity

Lay Canon Professor Brian Thorne

Brian Thorne is Emeritus Professor of Counselling at the University of East Anglia, Co-founder of the Norwich Centre for Personal, Professional and Spiritual Development and a Fellow of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. He is also the outgoing Chairman of the Trustees of the Friends of Julian of Norwich.

Brian is the author of 15 books which cover the fields of Psychotherapy, education and spirituality. He was a friend and colleague of the late Dr. Carl Rogers, the distinguished American psychologist and psychotherapist, and is the author of a popular study of Rogers' life and work. He is also the author of 'Behold the Man' (DLT 1991 and 2006) which attempts to view the Passion and Crucifixion of Christ through the eyes of a person-centred therapist. Throughout his long career Brian has sought to integrate his psychotherapeutic and spiritual understanding of reality and this has been central to his work both as a therapist and as a trainer/educator.

In this lecture Brian seeks to explore the profound implications of Julian's understanding of the nature of God and of the human person. The challenge which Julian's vision presents is so radical that it demands nothing less than a revolution in theological and psychological thinking and a revisioning of the nature and purpose of the Church. Not to take up this gauntlet, however, may be to abort humanity's evolution.

[2] **A love too great to bear? Julian's gauntlet to humanity**

First, a prologue to this lecture. Its relevance will, I hope, be clear by the end. It was William Blake who observed in the *Songs of Innocence* that humanity's task is 'to bear the beams of love'. (Blake, 1789) On the face of it, this could seem a rather pleasurable activity. It might conjure up a sense of luxuriating in a hot bath of affection. Such a vision, however, would altogether miss the significance of the words 'bear' and 'beams'. To bear something suggests that this will be no easy undertaking; it will require effort and endurance and perhaps it might be best to avoid it altogether. Beams, too, point to a certain unremittingness, a relentless illumination from which there can be no hiding. Caught in the beams of a car's headlights, for example, we are both ruthlessly exposed and frighteningly transfixed. Bearing these beams, then, it becomes apparent, will demand courage, determination and a willingness to overcome fear. What seemed like a warm invitation has become a daunting challenge.

During last Advent there seemed little to be happily expectant about. The financial crisis in Europe deepened and in Brussels the British Prime Minister petulantly boxed himself into a minority of one during the desperate negotiations to save the euro. In Liège, a crazed assassin killed six people, horribly wounded more than a hundred others, including children during their pre-Christmas shopping in the market-place and then committed suicide. In Britain, the number of unemployed young people passed the million mark and the household name of Thomas Cook declared numerous redundancies with the closure of many of its trading outlets. Positive news from Durban promising a new international agreement on tackling climate change was offset by vituperation from so-called climate sceptics whose selfish commercial interests overrode any concern for saving the planet. In the period in which we were bidden to rejoice at the

coming birth of the Saviour of the World, an ever-deepening gloom descended and the evidence proliferated that the world was incurably insane and that the chances of planetary survival were diminishing by the day.

[3] In the prevailing despondency a light appeared in the most unexpected of places and, by chance, I witnessed its appearance. On the eve of Gaudete Sunday, I was relaxing in front of the television watching a popular soap which features the frenetic activities of the staff and patients of a large NHS hospital. This particular episode of *Casualty*, however, contained a remarkable sequence. The main story line was in keeping with the mood of general disaster for it revolved around a massive fire which was to destroy the whole hospital. The conflagration was superbly portrayed and the viewer was caught up in the terrifying spectacle of leaping flames and billowing smoke with the accompanying noise of splintering glass and falling masonry. This was terrestrial Armageddon or the jaws of hell depending on your perspective and theological stance.

In the midst of the horror and destruction, however, something else was going on and here was to be found the hope beyond despair. In the face of potential death two doctors, Ruth Winters and Jay Faldren, were trapped in the fire and caught up in an existential battle of cosmic proportions. Ruth suffers from bi-polar disorder and has previously attempted to kill herself. She had already aborted a child and is now once more pregnant by Jay. In Ruth is portrayed the deep self-loathing and self-denigration which is endemic in our society and which characterises so many people who find their way to the psychotherapist's door. Jay loves Ruth and he loves her with an intensity and an absolute unconditionality which I suggest has seldom been portrayed on our television screens. Ruth rejects his love and urges him to save his own life. She cannot look at him and

her self-hate pours out over him as she scorns his love for her and denies any feeling in her for him. But Jay will not leave her. He repeats his undying and enduring love for her and for her alone and it becomes clear that, for him, that love is more important than saving his own life. Once more Ruth denies the reality of the love between them and, in a moment of startling power, Jay commands her to look at him and repeat her denial. With agonising difficulty Ruth begins to turn her head and as their eyes fleetingly meet she is transformed. She surrenders to Jay's love and as she does so her self-loathing evaporates and she experiences both her belovedness and her ability to love. Unconditional love has broken through the barrier of life-long ^[4]self-loathing and Ruth is restored to humanness. In the context of the secular drama, there will clearly be many difficulties ahead and Ruth will probably continue to need her lithium. But something fundamental has changed and as the couple are rescued and later leave for their 'two-up, two-down' at the seaside, there is a sense that they have entered paradise.

The astonishing growth in the popularity of Julian of Norwich in recent times has given rise to many explanations. There are those who see striking similarities between Julian's era and our own insofar as both periods are characterised by continual conflicts, disintegrating social and economic structures and global epidemics. There are those, like Sheila Upjohn, however, who see her attraction to lie in precisely the fact that her cosmic view and that of her contemporaries was so unlike our own. (Upjohn, 1997) There is fairly general agreement, despite these differences, that Julian's time has come because her visions afforded her an insight into the nature of God and of the human person which is highly congenial to the twenty-first century and its longings. The proliferation of books which look to Julian as a source of spiritual nourishment and as an aid to meditation and devotion also indicates that she has become a

beacon for those who crave spiritual encouragement but are largely disenchanted by institutional religion and formal theology. In this lecture I wish to advance a view which owes something to a number of these various explanations but is, I believe, fired by a different motivation. Like many therapists before me when they cease to practise my focus has shifted from a primary concern for the growth and well-being of individuals to a pre-occupation, with the health of the wider society and the state of the global community. And so it is that in the past Julian has been for me an ideal spiritual companion who has shown me what it might mean to allow myself to be loved by a God who loves me passionately and to see my fellow human-beings as sharing in the nature of God whether they know it or not. Now, however, a much greater urgency triggered by my own advancing years and by my perception of a disintegrating world poses new questions. Why, I ask myself, might Julian matter to a world on the edge of catastrophe? And what have two fictitious characters in a television soap opera to do with such portentous questions?

[5] In the face of the world's seemingly intractable problems, it is almost commonplace for social commentators to reflect on the lack of moral stature which characterises contemporary humankind. They point to the astonishing advances in scientific and technological achievement, to the quasi miracles of the internet age, to the discoveries of medical science which are resulting in a marked increase in centenarians - and then comes the lament that, alongside these remarkable advances, there is no corresponding progress in humankind's ability to discern the good, to refrain from conflict and violence, to foster an understanding of the human psyche so that men and women can live peaceably with each other in a world where justice prevails. It is as if a moral vacuum threatens to render null and void the amazing achievements of humanity's intelligence and

creativity and even to pervert them so that our annihilation as a species is the more speedily brought about. Confronted by such a dire analysis two responses are perhaps predictable. The first is impotent despair which for the individual results in depression and in the worst cases, self-destruction. The second is an impatient refusal to face the facts and a frenetic immersion in activity which is, strangely, a mark of emotional cowardice and mental laziness masquerading under the appearance of feverish industriousness.

It is perhaps fanciful to imagine that Julian, too, feared that the end of the world was nigh but she would certainly have had plenty of reasons to doubt humanity's ability to survive. Conflicts and disintegrating structures formed the context of much of her life and the Black Death destroyed countless lives on different occasions to the extent that the population of Norwich was reduced by almost a half. It is also of central significance that Julian herself had faced her own death and that her visions could be deemed a near death experience. Indeed, as a girl she had actually prayed for a sickness which would threaten her life so that, as she later realized, she might more readily identify with the suffering of Jesus in his passion. It is almost as if, for Julian, the facing of the reality of death and suffering was an essential element in her struggle to understand the ultimate meaning of the Cross and Resurrection and to make sense of the place of sin in the divine dispensation.

In short, Julian is not content to deal with partial ^[6]evidence. She wishes to confront the totality of the human story and the full extent of human perversity. It is for this reason that she is a trustworthy witness. We may be sure that whatever wisdom we find in Julian is the outcome of what we might term a full-scale enquiry into the human condition and the divine intention. Her fidelity to her visions and her commitment to their understanding are symbolised by her

embracing the life of an anchoress and by twenty years of profound reflection. She has written her book - itself a colossal undertaking - because she feels compelled to do so. She has a message for the world and much of her life has been devoted to ensuring that it is as truthful and as complete as her highly disciplined mind can permit. Our task is to take her with the utmost seriousness in the awesome awareness that it is perhaps only now in our own century that the full import of her insights can be grasped. As well as seeing Julian as an inspiration for those who seek to come close to God and to dwell in his presence - which she assuredly is - I wish to advance the thesis that Julian in her fourteenth-century anchorhold was fashioning a view of humanity and of its destiny which could yet speak to a blind and deaf twenty-first century world. Much depends, of course, not only on the credibility of such a claim but also on whether or not the blindness and deafness now constitute so grave an impairment that the time for seeing and hearing is past.

Julian herself seems to have been conscious of the dangers of blindness and deafness from an early age. The prayers which she prayed as a child or an adolescent can be seen as her way of attempting to ensure that she did not lose hold on her quest for truth as the inevitable demands of adult life closed in on her. The visions which she received at the very time when it seemed that she would die not only granted her the moments of union with God for which she yearned but also confronted her with a life-time's task of understanding. Another way of looking at Julian's extraordinary accomplishment is to say that she was granted experiences of immense power in which she came as close to God as is possible for any mortal being and then devoted herself to the fullest possible comprehension of those experiences. What is more, she felt that she had no option. In the same way that St Paul after his Damascus-road experience had his life turned upside down and felt compelled to tell

[7] others of the truth he had uncovered, so Julian felt a similar compulsion to understand her experience and then to communicate it to others. Both Paul and Julian are granted experiential knowledge which changes the course of their lives and demands to be understood and to be communicated. For Paul this meant a life of furious activity during which he was also able to write; for Julian it meant a withdrawal from the world so that she could reflect deeply and then write. Paul's legacy undoubtedly changed the history of the world and his Epistles continue to influence the thinking and the behaviour of many. My contention is that if we were to take Julian seriously and unravelled at least some of the implications of her deep encounter with God we might put in train an intervention in the history of the world which would be as great if not greater than that of St Paul.

Let us start where Julian ends or, at least, where the Revelations as we have them end. At this point, incidentally, it is worth reminding ourselves that two years ago our Julian lecturer, Professor Barry Windeatt, insisted that the *Revelations* were a work in progress and that we should not be reticent in taking forward the work which Julian had begun. Here, then, is where Julian ends:

And from the time that it was revealed, I desired many times to know in what was our Lord's meaning. And fifteen years after and more, I was answered in spiritual understanding, and it was said: What do you wish to know your Lord's meaning in this thing? Know it well, love was his meaning. Who reveals it to you? Love. What did he reveal to you? Love. Why does he reveal it to you? For love. Remain in this, and you will know more of the same. But you will never know different, without end. (Chapter 86, Colledge and Walsh, 1978)

This compelling summary of Julian's experiencing, thinking, reflecting, writing and praying could be even more pithily expressed as: 'It's all about love. That, we might infer, is the end of the matter and no further explanation is required. But we would be wrong to draw such a conclusion and Julian does not intend us to do so. 'Remain in this,' she says, 'and you will know more of the same'. In the second half of this lecture I intend to heed Julian's discreet and almost hidden instruction. I want first of all to spell out as clearly as I can what it ^[8]means to *remain* firmly embedded in the convictions to which Julian's life and work have led her and then secondly, to suggest the further knowledge which begins to emerge together with the daunting implications for the evolution of humanity.

Before listening to Julian's own voice a further issue warrants attention. There is a tendency to regard Julian simply as a mystic whose writings have significance for those called to a life of prayer, meditation and contemplation. For others there is the fascination of a woman operating in an essentially male world and of a female perspective on the nature of God and of spiritual experience. Such approaches, while having their own validity, do little justice to Julian's marked ability as a theologian. Encouraged by Thomas Merton's assessment of Julian as deserving a place among the ranks of the greatest theologians, such later writers as Grace Jantzen (Jantzen, 2000) and, most recently, Denys Turner (Turner, 2011) have shown how Julian has systematically tackled some of the most perplexing theological questions and revealed herself as an original thinker who can legitimately claim a place among the most celebrated medieval theologians. Julian's reflections on her visions reveal, it would seem, a mind which is fully alive to the biblical and theological scholarship of her day. In our own times she would be placed, I suspect, among those highly respected members of religious orders who are known both for the holiness of their lives and for their contribution to the

work of theology departments in prestigious universities. This, then, is the woman who informed by her experience, her committed life of prayer and devotion, her deep reflectiveness, her response to fellow Christians in distress and by her theological study and intellectual wrestling has arrived at a number of conclusions about the nature of God and of her fellow human-beings. If we listen attentively to what she has to say we may be startled afresh by the apparent outrageousness of her insights.

Julian's reflections on the nature of God are legion and they all tell the same story. God is all-loving, creator, protector, preserver, totally unaffected in his loving by our offences, longing always for our love. In the forty-ninth chapter of the *Long Text* there appears one of the most ^[9]powerful statements and yet it is representative of countless other passages:

For it was a great marvel, constantly shown to the soul in all the revelations, and the soul was contemplating with great diligence that our Lord God cannot in his own judgement forgive, because he cannot be angry that would be impossible,. For this was revealed, that our life is all founded and rooted in love, and without love we cannot live: And therefore to the soul which by God's special grace sees so much of his great and wonderful goodness as that we are endlessly united to him in love, it is the most impossible thing which could be that God might be angry, for anger and friendship are two contraries. (Chapter 49, Colledge and Walsh, 1978)

Julian's reflections on the nature of humankind are almost as numerous. There is no sentimentality for Julian is only too conscious of our ability to behave atrociously and to give way to all manner of

perversity. And yet this, she maintains constantly, is to miss entirely the true quality of the human person. In the sixty-eighth chapter she spells this out with absolute clarity as she dares to see humanity through the eyes of God:

And what can make us to rejoice more in God than to see in him that in us, of all his greatest works, he has joy? For I saw in the same revelation that if the blessed Trinity could have created man's soul any better, any fairer, any nobler than it was created, the Trinity would not have been fully pleased with the creation of man's soul. But because it made man's soul as beautiful, as good, as precious a creature as it could make, therefore the blessed Trinity is fully pleased without end in the creation of man's soul. And it wants our hearts to be powerfully lifted above the depths of the earth and all empty sorrows, and to rejoice in it. (Chapter 68, Colledge and Walsh, 1978)

The understanding of the nature of God and of the true stature of humankind contained in these two quotations and in the countless other passages in Julian's writings tells us something of fundamental importance about what it might signify to *remain* in Julian's conviction that Love is the meaning of all that she has experienced in her visions and in the years of reflection, praying and writing which have passed ^[10] since those astounding days in 1373. The release from blindness and deafness depends upon the capacity of her readers not only to grasp what she is saying with their intellects but much more importantly to internalise the truth of her perceptions and to allow it to permeate the very fibre of their beings. Here, of course, comes the challenge which so far humanity has been unable to meet. The task which William Blake so elegantly expressed in the prologue to this lecture remains for the most part unaccomplished.

As a species, it seems, we cannot bear the beams of love. We cannot accept that God loves us with a passionate intensity which exceeds anything we can dimly imagine and we cannot believe that we are ourselves glorious creatures in the core of our beings and are capable of loving with a similar intensity. The challenge is even more profound, for Julian holds firmly to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and sees God not only as infinitely loving but also as infinitely lovable - that is capable of giving and receiving love in equal measure. The challenge, then, to us human-beings is not only to love but also to allow ourselves to be loved. Julian goes further by showing us that we need not doubt our capacity to embrace our true destiny because there is part of us which has never been separated from God and never can be. We have, as it were, all the necessary endowment to enable us to love and to be loved and to share in the life of the Holy Trinity. Nor need we wait for heaven - we are bidden to initiate the Kingdom of Love on earth as we blithely proclaim every time we say the Lord's Prayer. Here is Julian assuring us of our human and intrinsically divine resourcefulness:

Greatly ought we to rejoice that God dwells in our soul; and more greatly ought we to rejoice that our soul dwells in God... It is a great understanding to see and know inwardly that God, who is our Creator, dwells in our soul, and it is a far greater understanding to see and know inwardly that our soul, which is created, dwells in God in substance, of which substance, through God, we are what we are. And I saw no difference between God and our substance, but, as it were, all God.
(Chapter 54, Colledge and Walsh, 1978)

Why is it, then, that as individuals and as a species we seem, for the most part, to be incapable of 'remaining' in Julian's proclamation of the primacy of Love? Why is it that we cannot believe in a God who

[11]all love and we cannot live in the conviction of our own loveableness and desirability let alone in our own capacity to love with intensity? To answer those questions with anything like the fullness they deserve would require another lecture or even two but a salient pointer or two are in order. Julian's response would certainly include our utter failure to recognise the meaning of the Cross. The supreme act of love - the willingness to die for the beloved because the beloved is more precious than life itself - has been mistaken as a sacrificial act carried out to placate an angry God who is displeased with his children rather than as a triumphant demonstration of God's infinite love for his creation and of humanity's potential to love as God loves. As a species and as individuals we have so often inflicted upon ourselves and upon each other powerful adverse judgements which tell us of our inadequacy, our stupidity and our malevolence that we have become conditioned to accept our essential uselessness and corruption. Guilt, depression, anxiety and self-recrimination keep GPS and therapists in business and the drug companies grow fat on the proceeds of their multi-million pound medication industry.

It is in this context that Drs Winters and Faldren of *Casualty* become such beacons of hope. As Ruth Winters dares to turn and look Jay in the eye I am reminded of Julian's servant in the vision of the Lord and the Servant who as he lies in the ditch cannot turn his face to look on his loving Lord who nonetheless continues to regard him with infinite compassion and tenderness. But Ruth does turn and the extraordinary moment of transformation between her and Jay is the result of her daring to 'bear the beams of love.' Just as remarkable is the capacity of Jay to direct such a beam upon her. She cannot hide from its light and her fear is transformed into the joy of experiencing her belovedness. It is as if in this extraordinary sequence from a television soap we get a glimpse of a world where humanity reveals its true glory and where self-loathing and self-denigration give way

to a love and an acceptance of love which banishes even the fear of death. The surrounding flames suggest that hell does its worst in vain and simply becomes part of the scenario for love's triumph.

When I wrote to Sally Abbott, the script writer of *Casualty*, she told me that the episode between Ruth and Jay was drawn 'mainly from ^[12]research from friends and from my own life'. She wrote: 'I felt strongly that what underpinned Ruth's take on life was that she didn't "deserve to be loved" which was, of course, because she didn't love herself.' Later in her communication she stated with disarming directness: 'I wrote what felt truthful and what moved me.' (Abbott 2011) These observations told me something more about Julian and about her relevance to our contemporary world. Could it be, I wondered, that Julian's insistence that God is to be found enthroned within us and that his meaning and ours is Love and nothing else and nothing more finds a powerful resonance within those who no longer have a conscious belief in God at all but are increasingly aware of their own capacity to love beyond all reasonable bounds? Could it even be that God has been so badly served by some of his ambassadors that his caricature as a judgemental dictator has actually stunted humanity's ability to discover the divine energy within themselves? The invisible and unnamed God within is perhaps, in our generation, more able to banish fear and to set free the necessary boldness required if we are to 'remain' in the Love which Julian spent her life discovering and making known.

Before I am accused of attempting to turn a medieval mystic and theologian into a secular existentialist for the twenty-first century let me hasten to add that I am fully aware that Julian's writings are replete with all the reference points we would expect of a fourteenth century Christian. Most significantly we encounter many saints and frequent allusions to Scripture and to the singular importance of

Holy Church and her teachings. In the sixty-first chapter the Church is compared to Jesus as the loving Mother who will never let us go. In a most moving passage she writes:

Our dear Lord wants us to commit ourselves fervently to the faith of Holy Church, and find there our beloved Mother in consolation and true understanding, with all the company of the blessed. For one single person may often be broken, as it seems to him, but the entire body of Holy Church was never broken, nor ever will be without end. And therefore it is a certain thing, and good and gracious to will, meekly and fervently, to be fastened and united to our mother, Holy Church, who is Christ Jesus. (Chapter 61, Colledge and Walsh, 1978)

[13] Much debate has taken place about the tension between Julian's visions and their meaning and the teachings of the medieval Church. Some have suggested that Julian's frequent professions of allegiance to the Church and her teachings are nothing more than a conscious act of self-preservation in the face of possible heretic hunters. According to this point of view, Julian knew full well that her visions revealed to her a truth about God and about humanity which was at variance with Church doctrine but it would have been more than her life was worth openly to acknowledge this. The evidence does not warrant such a conclusion. There is nothing to suggest that Julian was anything other than sincere in her devotion and fidelity to the Church. Her originality and integrity lie in her willingness to accept paradox as the key to greater truth. Instead of rejecting Church teaching, on, for example, the damnation of sinners she simply notes that her visions do not record this. She is unwilling to grant greater authority to her visions or to the Church. Instead she is prepared to wrestle with the apparent contradictions and to hold the tension.

There are mysteries which will not be solved this side of death and Julian, only after much agony of mind and spirit, is finally content to accept the mystery.

What we do not know is how the Church authorities of her day would have regarded Julian's even-handed holding of the tension. Could they have accepted a position which says 'I am right and you are right and that is how it is.'? Could they have affirmed that the search for truth requires a rejection of an 'either-or' mentality and a willingness to embrace 'both-and' in the patient waiting for the mystery to be revealed?

What is beyond all doubt is Julian's cherishing of the Church as the place of community for God's love as the Body of Christ. The precious food of the Blessed Sacrament is the nourishment which all souls require and, for Julian, it is unthinkable for a human person to grow in spiritual stature outside the embrace of Holy Church. This, it seems, was Julian's conviction and yet she knew only too well that the Church of her day was in an unholy mess. Corruption was rife, the religious orders were awash with irregularities and immorality, the papacy itself was in complete disarray with at one point in Julian's life no fewer than ^[14]three men claiming to be Pope. Bishop Despenser of Norwich to whom Julian owed allegiance was a ruthless man who put down the Peasants' Revolt with unmitigated brutality. It is clear then that the Holy Church which Julian depicts as the consoling and understanding Mother was scarcely discernible behind the façade of the all too fallible and power-mongering reality of her day. Again, we see the holding of a paradox. For Julian the Church was both an unholy shambles ruled by warring men and the consoling, understanding Mother who longs to hold her children in her warm and nourishing embrace. Unlike some of the doctrinal issues, however, this was not a paradox awaiting resolution beyond the

grave. The tension between the actual and the potential could find release through the pursuit of a community which bore the marks of Julian's idealised concept of Holy Mother Church where all would be welcome and all would find nourishment.

I have attempted in this lecture to remain for a space, however brief, in the Love which Julian proclaims to be the sole meaning of God's revelations to her and I ask now whether I - and hopefully you - as a result know more of the same. I believe that we do. The additional insights are of course, not truly new but simply more starkly revealed. They can be summarized briefly and their brevity could be in danger of concealing their incendiary implications:

1. God is all-loving, never angry, passionately in love with us, his creation.
2. Human-beings are inherently glorious, God dwells within them and has never been separated from the core of their beings. They have within them the capacity to give and to receive love in all its abundance.
3. Holy Church has within her the seeds of an indestructible community. She is the mystical consoler, nourisher and welcoming Mother of all humankind.

Can we bear to face the implications of these truths which Love's meaning reveals to Julian and for which she has battled with heart, mind and soul? They are not the outpourings of an emotional, ^[15]hysterical woman as some have suggested but the mature reflections of a contemplative and diligent theologian who has examined all the evidence available to her and not shirked the task of holding paradoxes.

Can we bear to face an all-loving God? Can we bear to face our own inherent glory? Can we bear to face the task of transforming the Church into the community whose life is eternal because it already emulates heaven? Julian's challenge, the gauntlet she has thrown down, demands that at what may be humanity's eleventh hour we rise to our full stature as lovers capable of taking our place in the life of the Holy Trinity. It will mean trusting the God within us so that we honour ourselves and each other as temples of the divine. It will mean a revolution in much psychological and theological thought. It will mean an end to inter-denominational squabbling and inter-faith conflict. It could even mean a preparedness to breathe the name of God silently so that he can speak for himself in the hearts and minds of those who like two lost doctors in a television soap discover their glory in the face of death.

This remarkable woman who lived six hundred years ago on this very spot speaks today, with an urgency which demands response. 'All shall be well' she wrote but by that she did not mean us to relax into indolence or a complacent resignation. To be perfectly like our Lord is our true salvation and our greatest bliss' (Chapter 77) are perhaps the words which most completely sum up the immensity of her challenge. (Colledge and Walsh, 1978) No wonder the Love which was revealed to her as the meaning of the universe can seem so daunting. The temptation - prompted by despair or sloth, the only two sins which Julian identifies in her book, is, to remain blind and deaf to her challenge. To succumb to that temptation and to fail to pick up the gauntlet would perhaps be to write the final chapter of this stage of humanity's evolutionary journey.

Brian Thorne

References

Abbott, S. (2011). Personal communication.

Blake, W. (2001). *The Complete Illustrated Books*. London: Thames and Hudson. Original publication: (1789) *Songs of Innocence (The Little Black Boy)*.

Colledge, E. and Walsh, J. (editors) (1978). *Julian of Norwich: Showings*. New York: Paulist Press.

Jantzen, G. (2000). *Julian of Norwich* (new edition). London: S.P.C.K.

Turner, D. (2011). *Julian of Norwich, Theologian*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Upjohn, S. (1997). *Why Julian Now? A Voyage of Discovery*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd.