

choice of presenting the fruit of his reflection as theses seems to disrupt or even undermine his dialogical and critical methodology. The reader is left with the impression that the conversation on what constitutes flourishing shies away from holding on to the complexity and tensions of considering human health, disease, illness, and disability in favor of clear-cut and compact assertions. The phenomenological, existential, and relational space for vulnerability, frailty, and uncertainty that characterize how human beings think about health, disease, illness, and disability—and how they live them—seems to suffer from articulating conclusive theses.

M. is aware of some of the limitations of his ambitious project (xvii). He acknowledges that, despite his interdisciplinary methodology, “some interdisciplinary perspectives are underrepresented” (xvii)—notably the sociology of health. In a spirit of constructive collegiality, I would also add that references to Catholic theological ethics and to the growing theological literature on disability could further enrich the volume. Moreover, interdisciplinary interactions demand ongoing reflection on the epistemological status of each discipline to clarify the relevance of each disciplinary contribution (105). I praise the author for his ambitious and needed contribution, and for provoking his readers to further articulate their theological reflection on flourishing in health, sickness, and disability.

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Julian's Gospel: Illuminating the Life and Revelations of Julian of Norwich. By Veronica Mary Rolf. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2013 Pp. ix + 660 \$29.85.

We know very little about the life of Julian of Norwich, the great English mystic. She was born around 1348 and was still alive in 1416 when her writings became more widely known. She underwent a death-threatening experience around age 30 (her mother was there). During that near death, Julian had a profound revelation of Jesus in a surround of utter darkness, except for the dazzling image of the cross. She asked then for three wounds: true contrition, kind compassion, and a profound longing for God. Over the course of two days she received 16 visions. Julian is the first woman to write a book in English.

We are not even sure of Julian's real name. We know she wrote two treatises about her revelations. The first, called *The Showings*, relate to her first mystical experiences when dying. A second, longer text, *The Revelations*, was written later, after she became an anchorite attached to the church of Saint Julian. A least one citation from *The Showings* was circulated during her life. None from *The Revelations* circulated. This longer version was not widely read or even edited until 1911. Margery Kempe came to visit Julian around 1414 and speaks of her as an expert who gave good counsel.

There is so little autobiography in Julian's texts that many speculate about whether she was a nun (probably not) before becoming an anchorite. The genius of R.'s profound study is that it takes advantage of the fact that we know a great deal

about life in Norwich in the late 14th century. The bubonic plague killed 25 to 35 percent of the population. Based on a textual allusion, R. speculates that Julian lost a child to the plague. She writes of motherhood and child-rearing with intimacy and personal knowledge. She was likely a wife and mother. Norwich in Julian's time knew the Hundred Years War, a peasants' revolt, the rise of Wycliffe and the Lollards, and the papal schism.

Julian shows a profound knowledge of fabrics, which suggests to R. that Julian was the wife of a weaver. She evokes a clothing image when she asserts that Jesus "is our clothing that for love wraps us and winds us, embraces us and totally encloses us, hanging about us for tender love" (272). Although many contemporary texts on preaching emphasized God's wrath, Julian's texts are more about love and forgiveness. In her vision of Jesus dying, his face is blissful, and he says to her, "Where is now any point of thy pain or thy grief? . . . It is a joy, a bliss and endless delight to me that ever I suffered my passion for thee and if I might suffer more, I would suffer more" (362). Contemplating Christ on the cross, Julian never hears him attaching any blame for sin.

In places, Julian's language is quite original for her time. She asserts that Jesus is our loving mother, ever-compassionate and forgiving toward his children. Christ always views us in the best possible light, no matter what we may think of ourselves. Julian's famous line (quoted in a poem by T. S. Elliot) reads, "Alle shalle be wele, and alle shalle be wele and alle manner of thing shalle be wele" (383). Nowhere does Julian see any vision of hell or even sin. Jesus says to her when she asks about sinners, "That which is impossible to thee is not impossible to me" (406).

R. describes well how Julian learned to read and write and shows how some of her language reflects the language of the Norwich Corpus Christi plays, especially a text about Veronica's veil. Perhaps, R. speculates, Julian's confessor urged her not to publish her longer revelations lest she be suspected of the Lollard heresy. R. is also adept at exegeting the texts of Julian's revelations. Julian minimized, even broke with, many of the common teachings of late medieval theology. She insists that there is no wrath in God, no disobedience in Adam, and no need for satisfaction to God for sin. As to mysticism, she offers no account of a multistage spiritual journey or ascent, no program of devout practices or penances (except for prayer), and none of the emotional affectivity found in other late medieval mystics. R. helps us see Julian's theology as quite original, perhaps even radical in the truest sense.

R.'s lovely meditation on Julian's mystical revelations has already garnered a series of prizes: First place from the Catholic Book Awards for a book by a first-time writer; the 2014 excellence award for religion/nonfiction from the National Independent Publishers; and the Nautilus Gold award for spirituality/Western traditions. R. helps us see in Julian a rich resource for our own experience of God's love shown forth on the cross by Christ.

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