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Review Of "Julian of Norwich: Mystic And Theologian", New Ed. By G. Jantzen

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Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian, new ed. By Grace Jantzen. Paulist Press, 2000. 230 pages. \$16.95 paper.

“What does it mean to be an anchoress in postmodernity?” With this sentence, Grace Jantzen begins the introduction to her new edition of *Julian of Norwich*. The body of the book, first published in 1987, offers the reader a thorough spiritual investigation on writings of the English medieval anchoress and mystic Julian of Norwich. The new introductory section, written for this edition, expands the meanings of Julian’s theology, and makes it accessible and relevant to the “postmodern” seeker of spirituality in the twenty-first century.

The book is divided into several parts. In the first section, Jantzen combines the few biographical details known about Julian with a general discussion of the life of an anchoress in the second half of the fourteenth century. Almost all information known about Julian comes from her own writings, *The Showings of the Love of God*.

In the central core of the book, Jantzen examines Julian’s set of visions experienced during severe illness. Her subsequent decades-long exploration of these visions and the meaning they had, informed Julian’s spirituality throughout her life. From these visions, and the subsequent spiritual inquiry into the meaning of divine love, comes Julian’s sophisticated theology.

In the last section, Jantzen guides the reader in utilizing Julian’s theology of divine love into a system for spiritual guidance and growth. In her new introduction, Jantzen emphasizes this last point. She reiterates that Julian wrote for all people and all time. Throughout her text, Jantzen enthusiastically recommends that her readers embrace Julian’s guidance and reliance on divine comfort as a prescription for healing. She believes that these writings can be a guidepost for the “anchoress in postmodernity” showing ways to turn towards “new life” and away from the “death-dealing structures and practices of modernity” (p. xxii). It is Julian’s theological interpretations of her visions in which she sees Christ as maternal, nurturing, and giving birth to humanity, that Jantzen believes speak most powerfully to the modern reader of these texts. Jantzen reminds us that Julian’s *Showings* was the first book written in English by a woman. She asserts that Julian’s use of maternal imagery in describing characteristics of Christ connects the lives of ordinary women to the divine. In the subtitle of the book, Jantzen identifies Julian as a theologian, thus giving her an authoritative role in an arena dominated by male voices.

The book is densely packed with insights and interpretations of the text, full of applicable quotations from the various versions of *The Showings of the Love of God*. With this volume, Jantzen attempts to meet the needs of both a scholarly and a more general audience in search of sophisticated spiritual guidance. Although the book targets “anyone

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drawn to Christian mysticism,” as the back cover copy indicates, it might have more appeal to the scholar of medieval mysticism and theology.

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