

The Origin of Joy and Bliss

Daniel Mathews

September 8, 2006 (edited December 4, 2006)

Where does this beautiful phrase “joy and bliss” come from? Well I first heard it from my father and his friends. But five minutes of google research reveals that the phrase occurs in several places in literature, none of which I was previously aware of, and I doubt my father and his friends were either! It’s kind of a natural phrase, so I’m not sure how much we can attribute it to these sources.

It appears in “Sixteen Revelations of Divine Love” by Julian of Norwich, a female English mystic who lived from 1342-1413 AD. This work is believed to be the first book written by a woman in English. In the fifteenth revelation, chapter LXIV, p158, we hear words said to her by “our courteous Lord” in her vision:

Suddenly thou shalt be taken from all thy pain, from all thy sickness,
from all thy distress and from all thy woe. And thou shalt come up
above and thou shalt have me to thy meed, and thou shalt be fulfilled
of love and of bliss. And thou shalt never have no manner of pain,
no manner of misliking, no wanting of will; but ever joy and bliss
without end. What should it then aggrieve thee to suffer awhile,
seeing that it is my will and my worship?

The phrase also appears in some poetry in “Blake”, a novel by Martin Delany, a 19th century African-American black separatist and abolitionist (chapter 8).

Oh, when shall my sorrows subside,
And when shall my troubles be ended;
And when to the bosom of Christ be conveyed
To the mansions of joy and bliss;
To the mansions of joy and bliss!

It’s also apparently very common (at least according to Google) among modern-day mystics, such as of the Krishna or Yoga or “Truth Consciousness” or “esoteric philosophy” or whatever other traditions.

I certainly don’t have any connotations of organised religion in mind when I use this phrase. I quite like the link to the abolitionists. Are the mansions of joy and bliss supposed to be actual mansions of landowners, or references to

Christian salvation, or aspirations to bourgeois property rights, or more abstract aspirations to a better world? To me, joy and bliss refers most immediately to a deep personal sense of fulfillment and happiness, and to aspirations for a better world. The phrase just seems to capture an appropriate sentiment, I suppose.

Well then... erm... joy and bliss!