

in us. For it is this that would finally and inevitably give us peace, because it would give us stillness and serenity; it would annihilate anxiety; and so the futility and the fear would finally be driven out.

It would give us serenity; but not the inhuman serenity of the man untouched by human tragedy. It would give us the serenity of Christ when his prayer was over and he stepped forward to meet his betrayer and his Cross. Not the false serenity which blinds itself to the fact of evil; but the living and loving faith which knows that evil is not ultimate, that to live in God's will is to live in God's love and care, and that therefore whatever comes to us by his order is good and we need not worry but only try to bless his name; and that even though the threat of some approaching pain or sorrow fills us with terror as Christ's heart was filled with terror; still we can hope to find courage for it and achievement through it, if we pray as he prayed, Thy will be done.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread: give us the stillness of heart that will enable us to know thee, the courage and strength to love thy will when thy will is hard for us, the sympathy to watch with thee and share the Cross with thee to the healing of the nations, the love that alone can save us and make us live. Turn our hopelessness into humility, and so, forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Amen.



THE SIMPLE SIGHT OF SIN

BY

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MOTHER JULIAN was able to resolve the conflicting paradoxes involved in the relation between the world and God because she had attained to that concrete touch by which the Spirit of God brings all into one. By the 'touch' of divinity the Spirit draws all the experience and ideas of a life-time into the immediate orbit of the single and simple reality of his being.

And what might this noble Lord do of more worship and joy to me than to shew me that am so simple this marvellous homeliness? (c. 7, p. 16.)

The holy woman had progressed from the simplicity of mere creatureliness which a man shares with material creation, in which

there exist the least variety and no paradox save that of being itself; and she had progressed to a human simplicity in which ideas are gathered from experience and formed into a more or less single synthesis. She had formed this synthesis, as so many simple Christians before and after her, with the guidance of faith but still within the orbit of human experience. Now she is presented with the simplicity of God in whom all perfections are found in absolute unity. Inevitably a conflict arises at first between the human simplicity of an ideal synthesis and that of the concrete, divine simplicity. In the end the power of the Spirit induces a simple gaze which does not require a rationalised and argued unity because mind and will with the 'substance' of the soul have been drawn beyond to the plane where all passed experiences are found to have their source in the eternal act of God. Yet the contrast between the human and the divine mode will inevitably arouse a struggle before the privileged soul attains to that simplicity which is to be found in every saint whether of great or small human intelligence. For Mother Julian this struggle centres round the fundamental problem of God's attitude to evil in view of the all-embracing nature of the love of God. The resolution of her problem, arising as it does from the contrast of her former human experience with the impact of this touch of the divinity in the substance of her soul, we must follow in some detail.

The first puzzle comes as soon as she begins to revert to the fact of sin. Directly she has been shown 'God in a point' she begins to reflect with the help of the gift of fear—'with a soft dread'—on the nature of sin: *What is sin?* (3rd revelation, c. 11, p. 26.)

For I saw truly that God doeth all thing, be it never so little. . . .

Wherefore me behoveth needs to grant that all-thing that is done, it is well done: for our Lord God doeth all. (c. 11, p. 27.)

In view of God's omnipotence, co-operating in every aspect of reality, Mother Julian is forced to conclude that 'sin is no deed'. Looking at the source of all reality and of all deeds, she cannot see sin. God does *all* things well so that nothing can be amiss (p. 28). This very metaphysical aspect of sin, looked at from God's point of view, she admits is only the first shewing of the mystery which is later more humanly discussed, but it is naturally a fundamental idea, and one which many find a difficulty in accepting, that sin is of itself an absence rather than a positive reality. Although it seems to conflict with our daily experience of evil and particularly of our own propensity to sin, any denial of this truth would lead logically to some form of the pestilent manicheism to which many are so prone. Evil is not a positive principle but a disorder, a lack of right

order; and an examination of St Thomas's doctrine concerning sin will show what this means. In his analysis of the Augustinian definition of sin as a word or deed or desire against the eternal law he explains that the positive reality so evident in 'word, deed or desire', which seems to contradict Mother Julian's 'sin is no deed', makes up the material element of a sinful act; but, says he, what belongs to the essence of evil (*ratio mali*), which is like the 'formal element in sin', is contained in the words 'against the eternal law' (I-II, 71, 6). The person who is considering the love of God and how it is the cause of things evidently sees this 'material' of sin insofar as it has reality and being as coming from this eternal and ceaselessly loving will of God. The contrariety does not appear therein. He can see how human love comes forth from God but he does not see that limitation by which a man loves another to the exclusion of God, absorbed by the creature, turning from the Creator—'*Contra legem aeternam*'.¹

The problem of evil in such a vision of divine love reduces itself to the simple matter of sin. Other evils, which people consider as a problem because the evil seems to have God for its cause rather than the will of man turning from God such as pain and death, are quite easily put into perspective by divine love. A vision which reaches the infinite love of God through the appearance of Christ's bitter agony and death, as did Mother Julian's, does not find much incompatibility between such relative evils and the love of God. 'Christ's precious passion' means the overthrow of evil; though the devil continues to work as energetically afterwards as before; and it was the joy caused by seeing how God was never wrath, scorning and setting at naught the malice of the devil, that caused Mother Julian to laugh. She saw in this, the fifth revelation,

that all the woe and tribulation that he (the devil) hath done to them shall be turned to increase of their joy, without end; and all the pain and tribulation that he would have brought them to shall endlessly go with him to hell (p. 32).

Immediately, in the next revelation, our Lord thanks her for the pain she has suffered, and that alone is worth all the suffering conceivable; this is the bliss to which all pain is leading and which brings a true perspective. Yet no escape is offered the soul to look up into heaven and so to numb the senses which are in contact with the immediate turmoil of life. As Mother Julian is plunged back into the heaviness of herself and a weariness of her life, in the seventh revelation, she realises that the interludes of comfort are

¹ Von Hügel shows the Pseudo-Dionysian trait in all this, but emphasises, I think too much, the Neo-platonic element in this mystical approach to evil. He gives further references to St Augustine and St Thomas (*Mystical Elements*, ii, 290, sqq).

not more significant of God's love than the times of weariness, pain and isolation. In this we are reminded of some wise words of Abbot Chapman writing to one of his spiritual children: 'Do not think that the right way to bear a trial—or many trials together—is to love God so much that you can bear the trial with joy, *so that it ceases to be a trial*. On the contrary, it is obvious that the essence of a suffering of any kind is that we suffer from it! We hate it.' (*Letters*, p. 157.) Suffering retains its sting, but one does not revel in the pain nor wallow in it.

And therefore it is not God's will that we follow the feelings of pain in sorrow and mourning for them (p. 36).

All this discussion of pain in Mother Julian's mind is closely related to the hardest and most tortuous suffering of all—that of the point when the soul is being wrested from the body; so that she sees death for those who accept this suffering in the right way as being the sudden passage from utter desolation to the endless joy for which it is all intended. She writes here and elsewhere of the suddenness of the passage through pain into the eternal joy (cf. pp. 36, 80, 104, 160). But she seems to imply a certain parallel to death which is to be found in intense pain which is not mortal

Thus when we, by the working of mercy and grace, be made meek and mild, we are fully safe; suddenly is the soul oned to God when it is truly peaced in itself: for in Him is found no wrath. (c. 49 p. 104.)

Such experiences will require further elucidation, but it is worth noting here that writers on mystical states such as Farge and von Hügel have emphasised the suddenness by which God can transform such states of suffering into a more complete union. Souls often discover a remarkable sense of spiritual health given to them just as they are in the deepest trials.

But we must return to the view of sin in this ultimate context of God's will which allows pain in order to purify from sin. The next five shewings of Mother Julian's lead her to a deeper penetration through the wounded side of Christ into the mystery of God's love until by the thirteenth she reaches her celebrated conclusion that 'Synne is behovabil'—Sin is behovely; it behoved that there should be sin (c. 27, p. 56). Pain is occasioned by sin; but in the final event when God's will is completely worked out in the full cycle of temporal affairs sin and pain will be the occasion of greater good.

It is sooth that sin is cause of all this pain; but all shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well (p. 57). This refrain contains much that is mysterious and for the next thirteen chapters Mother Julian is concerned to elucidate the mystery of sin.

It makes a strange contrast to compare this comforting vision with the horrifying, quite unbearably disgusting, view of sin which has been shown to many a great saint and one that the average Christian would expect to be universal among those who believe that Christ had had to die in this frightful agony of the cross in order to expunge the stain of sin. Tauler, looking at these same sufferings which Mother Julian beheld, could reflect, 'I have become naked, and poor, and wretched, and unclean, and, like the beasts of the stall, I have become rotten in my own dung and filth'. Blessed Angela of Foligno, whose experiences began in a way very similar to that of the recluse of Norwich, St Catherine of Siena and multitudes of others have been plunged into feelings of revulsion at the sight of sin.² Mother Julian herself, when she comes later to contrast sin with grace, is in no doubt of the foulness of the evil:

Sin is in sooth viler and more painful than hell, without likeness: for it is contrary to our fair nature. For as verily as sin is unclean, so verily it is unnatural, and thus an horrible thing to see for the loved soul that would be all fair and shining in the sight of God. (c. 63, pp. 157-8.)

But even here it is the fairness of nature perfected by grace which is really holding her attention. In this we find a close connection with *The Cloud of Unknowing* and its teaching on 'the lump of sin' which should not be specified or allowed to fill the imagination with horrible details lest the soul be distracted from God himself. 'In the naked word *sin*' Mother Julian sees 'all that is not good'—all 'noughting', all pains, all purgations. Yet

all this was shewed in a touch and quickly passed over into comfort: for our good Lord would not that the soul were affeared of this terrible sight (c. 27 p. 56).

If the soul is thus saved the harrowing details which form so considerable a part of sermons and exhortations on sin and hell, she is not left to ignore sin. Indeed swinging apparently to the opposite extreme and recognising that sin 'hath no manner of substance nor no part of being, nor could it be known but by the pain it is cause of' (p. 56), she is assured that God does not blame sin in those who are to be saved. Indeed 'sin shall be no shame to man but worship' (c. 38, p. 77).

Then were it a great unkindness to blame or wonder on God for my sin, since he blameth not me for sin. (p. 57.)

² Cf. Tauler, *Meditations on the Life and Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ* (English trans.: p. 107). Bl. Angela of Foligno in Thorold, *Christian Mysticism* (p. 112-3) and St Catherine's *Dialogue* (*passim*). In view of the latter's vivid descriptions of the evil of sin it must be remembered that she often repeats with Mother Julian, 'Sin is nothing'.

This, as she realises, is a great mystery—'a marvellous high mystery hid in God'—but one which requires the pacifying work of simplification by the Spirit before the soul can accept it without trouble or dismay.³

For there would seem to be a serious conflict between the general teaching of the Church on sin and its punishment and this special shewing of comfort in the endless love of God. Sin has caused much havoc; how can all be well? Mother Julian would like to have 'some more open declaring wherewith I might be eased in this matter' (c. 29, p. 60). Holy Church teaches constantly the eternal punishment of hell for the bad angels and for man dying in sin (pp. 66-7). The common teaching of Holy Church, in which Mother Julian had been well grounded in her training for the religious life, insisted that God was angry, 'wrath', with sinners and that forgiveness meant forgiveness from this wrath which the sinner had incurred. The sinner deserves blame and wrath. Yet apparently against all this common doctrine the vision of the infinite and changeless love of God makes it impossible for him to forgive because he is never angry.

Our Lord God, ament himself, may not forgive, for He may not be wroth . . . it is the most impossible that may be that God should be wroth. (c. 49, p. 103.)⁴

These are two judgments or 'dooms', one higher in the light of God's love, the other lower, based on the first principle of the faith taught by the Church. How can they be reconciled?

In order to find a comprehensive solution to this great puzzle which lies at the base of so much 'mystical' speculation, it will be necessary to gather the threads from the whole book of Mother Julian's revelations since this constitutes one of her main pre-occupations throughout. We may begin by returning to the source of her visions—the crucified figure of Christ held before her in her dying condition by the curate. She views the horrifying spectacle of Christ's sweet face on the verge of his death—the terrible change of colour, the clotted and dried blood forming a garland about his head beneath the garland of thorns. St Thérèse of Lisieux had this sight of the bruised face of the Messiah as a background to the whole of her spirituality; Père Petitot has pointed out how important this is in linking the way of spiritual childhood to the authentic

³ Mother Julian never allows her revelations to draw her away from the faith in which she is most securely grounded. She recognises that there are some mysteries, containing truths beyond our comprehension, which are intelligible in themselves but which will not be shown to us. Other mysteries God does wish us to know about—the Church in particular teaches the latter. (cc. 33-4).

⁴ This paradox is worked out in particular from chapter 45 to chapter 50.

spirit of the Gospels.⁵ This image of the terrible pain of Christ stands not for the threatening anger of the offended majesty of God but for the infinite desire which he had for the salvation of every man. The dryness of the blood and of the skin reminds the soul that Christ had a most bitter physical thirst (c. 17). But this thirst itself stands for the spiritual thirst 'which is desire in him as long as we be in need, drawing us up to his bliss' (c. 31, p. 64). The disfigured face of Christ is therefore a sign of the 'thirst of God' longing to draw man to himself, a longing based not on any lack in himself but on the absence and the emptiness which is in the creature partly because he is a creature but more especially because of the absence and emptiness of sin. (cf: c. 75, p. 183.) Mother Julian sees the pain of our Lord as the hardest possible.

I mean not only more pain than all men might suffer, but also that he suffered more pain than all men of salvation that ever were from the first beginning unto the last day might tell about or fully think. (c. 20, p. 44.)

And the reasons she gives for this suffering are closely parallel to those of St Thomas (compare III, 46, 6). There are however three ways of considering this terrible suffering: either one can simply insist on 'the hard pain that he suffered' (which might be regarded as the *sacramentum tantum* of the Passion), or penetrating this external representation one sees 'the love that made him to suffer' which infinitely surpasses all his pains (the *res et sacramentum*), or finally there appears 'the joy and the bliss that made him to be well-satisfied in it' (the *res tantum*). (cf: cc. 21-23, pp. 45-9.) The love of our Lord represented in this thirst is so intense that he would suffer even more and die all over again if it were possible (p. 47-8), which is the burden of so many revelations to the saints who have been told over and over again that Christ would die in this anguish for every individual sinner. The Precious Blood is another, even more dynamic, symbol of this same 'longing' in God for men's salvation, the blood which was poured out for sin and which is always pleading before the face of the father, the blood which provided a background for the life of St Catherine, whose vision of it is often echoed here.⁶

In contrast with the sight of Christ's countenance suffering for

5 Cf. Henry Petitot, O.P., *Saint Teresa of Lisieux*. (London, Burns Oates; 1927) p. 62. She took 'of the Holy Face' as an addition to her name during her novitiate.

6 Compare Hebrews (the Epistle of the Precious Blood) 7, 25 with Mother Julian c. 12 p. 30. Also an interesting comparison could be made with St Catherine (cf. Mother Julian c. 61 p. 155 and c. 63 p. 158). St Catherine in her death agony, oppressed by the horrible catastrophe of the beginning of the Great Schism, could but breathe this word 'Blood'.

sin is shown later the face of the Father sitting at rest and sending his Servant to do his will.

The colour of his face was fair-brown—with full seemly features; his eyes were black, most fair and seemly, shewing outward full of lovely pity, and shewing within him an high regard, long and broad and full of endless heavens. And the lovely looking wherewith he looked upon his Servant continually . . . methought it might melt our hearts for love and burst them in two for joy. (c. 51, p. 112.)

The whole of this scene is mysterious in its sudden transferences from Christ to all mankind, from the descent of the word into the womb of Mary to Adam's falling into sin. But it offers one of the keys to the paradox of sin; for the face of the Father remains unchangingly fair and piteous, looking upon man either as falling into sin or upon the Son of God becoming man and suffering out of obedience to the will of the Father, falling into the slough of sin without himself being sinful. For, indeed, pain and agony and the tortured face of man cannot signify the wrath of God, since the one who suffered the most of all mankind is his well-beloved son.

When Adam fell, God's son fell: because of the rightful oneing which had been made in heaven God's Son might not be departed from Adam. (For by Adam I understand All-Man.) Adam fell from life to death into the deep of this wretched world, and after that into hell: God's son fell with Adam, into the deep of the Maiden's womb, who was the fairest daughter of Adam; and for this end—to excuse Adam from blame in heaven and in earth; and mightily he fetched him out of hell. (c. 51, p. 116).

This contains the core of the solution of the paradox. We might well expect the paradox of sin and God's love to be resolved in and through the Being who was both God and man, and who died for sin. For it is unthinkable that God should be truly angry with us and we continue to exist ('if God might be wroth for an instant, we should never have life nor place nor being', c. 49, p. 103), for all creatures exist by the will of God and there can be no distinction between the will of God and his love. And when we depart from him towards the noughting of sin his loving, creative gaze follows our every step and even gives it its being.

In all this the sweet eye of pity and love is lifted never off us, nor the working of mercy ceaseth. (c. 48, p. 101.)

In God there is no shadow of change, and nothing happens now of which he was not cognisant from the beginning. He does not have to reorganise his providential plans when a man falls into sin. Nothing 'is done by hap'; there is no chance or accident with God (c. 11, pp. 27-8). Providence, disposing all things sweetly, causes the most infinitesimal part of created being to exist for a purpose,

guiding it towards its end (cf. *Summa* I, 22, 2-4). Thus the unity of God who is Good, Life, Truth, Love, Peace, makes it impossible for him to be here angry and there forgiving and loving (c. 46, p. 97). His love is endless and unchangeable and this is symbolised for Mother Julian in the fact that though she laughed for the comfort of the vision, the Holy Face remained ever the same though the pains were overpowering the devil.

When I saw him scorn his (the devil's) malice, it was by leading of mine understanding into our Lord, that is to say it was an inward shewing of verity, without changing of look. For, as to my sight, it is a worshipful property of God's that He is ever the same. (c. 13, p. 32.)

At the day of judgment St Catherine saw that the face of the Word would appear to the just a thing for reverence with great joy, to the damned a thing of terror; 'not that his face changes, because he is unchangeable' (*Dial*: c. 39).

God himself is the end of all this activity of creation; his love changeless and infinite goes out to things and brings them back to himself in this wonderful unity. He cannot disapprove of what he is doing.

Right as he ordained unto the best, right so he worketh continually, and leadeth it to the same end; and he is ever full-pleased with himself and with all his works. (c. 35, p. 71.)

All this shows, as it were, God looking out steadfastly in unflinching and unstinting affection for all he is making. If there is any change, then, it must be sought among contingent beings, among the creatures whom God loves. These creatures cannot see all the being and love of God in its wholeness and therefore they seek out aspects of God's love. Thus the one indivisible will of God is a 'permissive will' in so far as he allows us to be wayward ('by his sufferance we fall'); it is the will of love and wisdom in so far as he is creating us even as we walk from him into sin ('in his blissful love with his might and his wisdom we are kept'); and it is mercy when he raises us from the slough of sin ('by mercy and grace we are raised'—c. 35, p. 72). Mercy itself ceases in heaven, not again that God changes, but the objects of his constant love are no longer to be raised from sin—they are already raised to the bliss of the full share in his love.⁷

In other words, the wrath of God, so insisted upon by preachers of all eras, is indeed a reality, but a reality in man not in God.

⁷ The whole of this very important doctrine which runs right through the *Revelations of Divine Love* should be compared with St Thomas. In the 1st book of the *Contra Gentiles*, c. 91, where he deals with God's love, he shows how all the different attributes—Justice, Anger, Mercy, Repenting, etc.—are simply different aspects, according to the effects, of that self-same, changeless love.

God always loves, and loves to the intensity of suffering the pains of the Crucifixion even for the sin of one man, but man may for his part turn that ever faithful, infinitely intense and ceaselessly creative love into wrath, calling down God's anger upon himself. The spring gives forth clear and helpful water, the poison is in the mouth of the man who drinks to his damnation.

I saw no wrath but on man's part; and that forgiveth he (God) in us. For wrath is not else but a frowardness and a contrariness to peace and love; and either it cometh of failing of might, or of failing of wisdom, or of failing of goodness: which failing is not in God, but is on our part. For we by sin and wretchedness have in us a wretched and continuant contrariness to peace and to love. (c. 48, p. 101.)

If a man allows the pain and suffering that are sent by the loving mercy of God for his purification to draw him into despair he is in fact condemning himself. This is of course the common teaching of the Church that man sends himself to hell; and in that we may recognise that God is not wroth but that so long as men are in travail and temptation his love appears as overflowing mercy.

This then is the simple sight of sin which the Church herself entertains as she contemplates the Crucifix during Holy Week. Wondering at the pains of the Son of God, the deacon sings on Holy Saturday morning '*O Felix Culpa*'. God has never changed but foreseeing, and even permitting this most foul evil called sin, he had no other object than the greater expansion of love and mercy.

Thus we have now matter of mourning: for our sin is cause of Christ's pains; and we have lasting matter of joy; for endless love made him to suffer. (c. 52, p. 124.)

For it needeth us to fall. . . . The mother may suffer the child to fall sometimes, and to be hurt in diverse manners for its own profit, but she may never suffer that any manner of peril come to the child, for love. (c. 61, p. 153.)

Mother Julian's reason suggests to her that she should look up to heaven and away from the holy and tortured face of Christ and so escape the horrors of sin and its consequent anguish. But her faith kept her gaze on that sacred face and would have done so in sorrow to the end of the world rather than come to heaven by any other way. She chooses Jesus for her heaven, and Jesus on the Cross (c. 19, p. 42). And in the tenth revelation she sees all this mystery in terms of the Sacred Heart, that symbol of love, a love cleft in two by pain that it might pour sorrow out over the creature and bring it back to unity. Looking to his Side she beheld a delectable and fair place large enough for all to rest in peace and love.

And with the sweet beholding he shewed his blessed heart cloven in two. (c. 24, p. 51.)