

at all. Therefore the immature personality cannot even become a beginner for he has so far never reached anything like his *natural capacity*. For such people the sufferings of life may even have a traumatic effect and produce a further psychic crippling rather than any real growth.

These thoughts now allow us to deal with the question of self-inflicted sufferings such as come under the head of mortification, e.g., fasting, hair shirts, disciplines, spiked chains, and suchlike penances. For the person whose natural psychic functioning is in complete disorder no amount of use of such things will produce any spiritual benefit or have the effect of righting the sick psyche. They will do further harm, as all these things will be used merely to increase the already existing disorder owing to the natural myopia. Yet these will be the very people who will tend to misjudge the whole matter owing to their own interior disorder. They will tend to take all the advice on such matters that they meet in spiritual books as though it was primarily meant for people in their disordered condition, when in fact only those whose natural capacity is in good order will be able to make profitable use of such advice and give a positive note to the mortifications that the disintegrated man cannot but take in a negative manner.

Suffering has always been a chief note of the Christian life. So our Lord tells us that unless we take up our cross daily we cannot be his disciples.



## THE GOAL

BY

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**R**ENEWED interest in the problem of God's vocation has recently been awakened by the autobiographical sketch of a woman who lived as a nun but 'without a vocation' for twenty-eight years before metaphorically 'leaping over the wall' to return to the world<sup>1</sup>. Many individuals have experienced the problem for themselves in trying to find out what it is that God wants them to do. 'What is my vocation?' a young man or woman will ask, and he will spend many months investigating avenues which may be according to the divine plan which is so very difficult to discern. The difficulty is often based on a false interpretation of a true doctrine. God created every individual soul and creates

<sup>1</sup> *I Leap Over the Wall*. By Monica Baldwin.

it in its entirety with its special destiny; each one is fashioned according to the mind of God who makes all *in Verbo*. An individual can imagine himself as not fitting into that plan, as not following the type of life God has eternally destined for him. In point of fact, however, the only thing that falls, as it were, 'outside' this idea of God is sin, and no one would say, to take the case in point, that a person living in a cloister was living in sin merely because his temperament was not particularly suited to it! What we have to remember is that God's mind for the individual person is revealed at every instant through the daily circumstances and necessities of life: here the true vocation, whatever it may be, is discernible, for it is *here* and *now* that the individual is in touch with the one single instant of God's eternity. The future does not as yet exist for me and my vocation in the future is made by my own plans and determination—with the help of God's grace—to carry them out. If I plan something sinful then it cannot be considered God's 'vocation'. Otherwise it is largely left to me to determine in my own sphere what my life shall be, though evidently my own capacities given me by God or the lack of them qualify enormously the range of possible 'lives' before me. My own limitations, of course, reveal God's 'vocation' too, just as all my other circumstances and necessities. As a matter of fact it is nearly always a limitation in character which determines the decision: 'I have no vocation' for married state or for religious life. The greater one's capacities the wider is the range of 'vocations' possible, any of which would be chosen and carried through without infringing the will or choice of God.

All this is from the human point of view, but it is necessary to state it from this angle and avoid the constant tending towards illuminism which looks to God for special signs and indications with a more or less miraculous flavour to instruct a man on his next step. It is necessary to state it here because of the need of understanding the relation between the eternal, changeless decree of God and the constant change and choice of the Christian with his free will set in the midst of a kaleidoscopic variety. We have seen how Mother Julian distinguishes between the general 'deed' of the Trinity which is the fulfilment of the eternal decree of the whole world and the particular 'deed' for each individual which is the fulfilment of the decree for each man born on earth. The individual decree is fulfilled as soon as the predestined reaches heaven.

This special deed shall be done sooner (and that time shall be as we come to Heaven) and to whom our Lord giveth it, it may be known here in part. (c. 36, p. 75.)

This heavenly vocation is the one central and fixed thing in the life of the Christian so that every other happening in life only has a 'vocational' aspect in relation to that. But once this deed is recognised every incidental occurrence will be seen to have a meaning in relation to this decree. Thus it is a man's 'vocation' in this sense to get up on Monday, wash, shave and have his breakfast and go off to work. It is also his vocation that he meets Mr Smith on his way to work. Similarly a young man who has chosen to try the Cistercian life places himself in a position in which God's deed is accomplished in him by the bell at 2 a.m., the hours in church, the cultivating of God's earth. Should temperament, or other circumstances, compel him to leave then his vocation goes with him into new ways of life and when he comes to look back he will see that the months spent in the abbey were all parts of God's special 'deed' for him. All these events, including his own free acts of choice and the changing of his mind are forming and fashioning him for heaven. Of course, when solemn or perpetual profession has intervened, by this single act the whole future is engaged, and it would seem that then the acceptance of the Church makes it certain that this was God's call for the soul in question.

It is therefore rather inaccurate to consider that God's decree for a man is a kind of abstract ideal of one special life or another without respect to the minute by minute concrete happenings—all these are included from the first moment of the man's entry into this world are part of this one single deed of God's in saving the soul and bringing it to heavenly union.

The usual error in the idea of 'vocation' is this abstract way of treating God as though he were some important 'Boss' detailing men off to take certain jobs, the duties of each of which he has worked out in his own head. God on the contrary feeds us every moment of the day with a morsel of his will manifested in every event and dipped in the sweet honey of heavenly destiny. He combines in himself all the qualities of a parent, both paternal and maternal. God is our Mother as well as our Father. This very unusual and striking feature of Mother Julian's doctrine has been dealt with in earlier issues of *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT* (cf. *Blackfriars*, May 1945) and more recently a contributor to *La Revue Ascétique et de Mystique* has shown how it appears also elsewhere and originally came from St Bernard (cf. below: p. 430). Here therefore we need not go into the question deeply, but we have to see the motherhood of God in relation to the particular decree of God, willing the daily life of grace of the individual.

The prerogative of Motherhood is one which God has shared in

a very special way with the Virgin Mother of Jesus. Because Christ took our nature we are all joined to him—'enclosed in him'—so that

Our Lady is our Mother in whom we are all enclosed and of her born, in Christ.

But there is a special sense in which this self-giving quality of maternity remains within the Trinity—

and our Saviour is our very Mother in whom we be endlessly borne, and never shall come out of him. (c. 57., pp. 139-40.)

This motherhood is appropriated to the Second person of the blessed Trinity because he is the Word in which all things are made; he is thus the womb constantly bearing us, constantly nourishing us. The Word gives us our substance as a mother gives substance to her child; and therefore merely in the order of Nature the Word bears us as our mother. In the order of Mercy and Grace far more so because he took our nature, died for us in mercy and restored us to the life of grace. Again all grace is his grace, the grace of the God-man, so that we are enclosed in the gracious womb of the Word made flesh by grace. This is the work of the Trinity begetting each individual in being and in grace, but the Son is the Mother in whom we are given life<sup>2</sup>. Without going into the doctrine more deeply we may see from this how God's eternal decree can be seen as a maternal conceiving, nurturing, rearing of each individual, for it is the Mother who has that individual, concrete, possessive interest in the child where the father is more objective and abstract in his attitude. Some of the qualities of maternal care are brought out very clearly by Mother Julian.

The Mother's service is nearest, readiest and surest: nearest for it is most of nature; readiest for it is most of love; and surest for it is most of truth. This office none might, nor could, nor even should, do to the full but He alone. . . . The mother may give her child to suck of her milk, but our precious Mother, Jesus, He may feed us with Himself, and doeth it, full courteously and full tenderly, with the Blessed Sacrament. . . . The mother may lay the child tenderly to her breast, but our tender Mother, Jesus, He may homely lead us into His blessed breast, by His sweet open side, and shew therein part of the Godhead and the joys of heaven. . . . (c. 66, pp. 149-50.)

The parallel is drawn out with great beauty throughout this chapter, but enough has been quoted to show how this unusual doctrine develops the full meaning of the personal perfection of the individual.

<sup>2</sup> All this is enlarged upon very subtly by Mother Julian and the reader may refer in particular to chapters 57-60. It is of interest to note her conclusion from this that Wisdom is a maternal quality.

his heavenly vocation, as being the direct and immediate nurturing of God. God suckles us with his will which is 'our sanctification', the heavenly bliss of union with God. It shows too how authentic and traditional is the teaching about spiritual childhood which we have seen suggested by the Ancren Riwle and brought to perfect expression in St Teresa of Lisieux. This childhood insisted upon originally in the Gospel itself by our Lord is part of the authentic note of sanctity—it is the Christian vocation par excellence which embraces all the moment to moment details of life. If God is not only Father but Mother to us, then our childlike approach to God is whole and complete; he is our perfect parent. We have said above that sin is the only thing that falls outside our daily vocation by the call of God's decree. But even this needs modification, for that decree may also be seen to include the permissive will of God who as Mother allows the over confident and proud child to fall. It is only after a serious fall which will teach us our dependence, that we are still being nurtured by our Mother from whom we cannot be weaned.

The mother may suffer the child to fall sometime and to be hurt in diverse manner for its own profit, but she may never suffer that any manner of peril come to the child, for love. . . . He willeth then that we use the condition of a child. . . . And He willeth then that we use the property of a child, that ever more of nature trusteth to the love of the mother in weal and in woe. (c. 61, p. 154—cf: c. 63, pp. 158-9.)

And Mother Julian concludes this treatment of Spiritual Childhood with the bold claim:

And I understood none higher stature in this life than Childhood (c. 63, p. 159).

This is then the hallmark of the highest states of prayer and the greatest fulfilment of God's vocation to holiness, the simplicity of the child receiving its sustenance every instant from the enclosing presence of the divine womb in which it finds itself.

The goal, therefore, of every individual human being is that perfect union with God which is described so mysteriously by the greatest spiritual writers, and which is the nearest approach possible on this earth to the eternal union of heaven. This is the true and substantial vocation common to all. But it is often misinterpreted as being some sort of isolated, individualistic experience of the soul embraced by God. What is so refreshing in the English Mystics and in Mother Julian in particular is the way in which they take for granted the whole of that ecclesiastical system we call the Church as part and parcel of the highest forms of prayer and union. Here we find the Spiritual Childhood, the nourishment of the

Eucharist, the Motherhood of God and that of the Church as all of one piece. The Church with all her accoutrements is not another thing from our Lord the Sweet Spouse, and our Lord the Mother. Being 'oned' to our Holy Mother the Church is being 'oned' to Jesus, and this is the essence of the highest mystical graces. The transforming union of spiritual betrothal and marriage is essentially the same as the union of the mystical body of Christ (cf: c. 61, pp. 154-5). It is fed by the Sacrament of Love and enclosed in 'the whole Body of Holy Church'. This doctrine appears in the very first revelation of Mother Julian—'in this oneness (of charity in the Church) standeth the life of all mankind that shall be saved' (p. 20)—and is the underlying doctrine of the whole book. The final destiny of each is to be 'fully whole in Him' in heaven and to approach as closely as possible to that union on this earth (p. 63); our Lord is 'the Ground of our whole life in love', the ground too of the teaching and preaching of the Church (cf: pp. 69, 80, 135 etc.).

In all this we are reminded of the fundamental teaching of St Thomas on the Mystical Body and the Eucharistic Body of Christ. Having explained that the Eucharist is the sacrament of unity, that its effect is the union of the mystical Body, he goes on to show that this is identical with the union of actual love of God in the soul. 'When the sacrament itself is received, grace is increased, and the spiritual life perfected . . . so that man may stand perfect in himself by union with God' (III 79, 1 ad 1). The perfect union of the soul with God in Christ is the reality of the sacrament—this is the Real Presence and this is the Church. No wonder, then, that St Thomas turns to some of the great mystical writers to declare the truths herein contained. St Augustine, he reminds us, heard Christ speaking to him 'Nor shalt thou change me into thyself, as food of thy flesh, but thou shalt be changed into me' (*Confessions* 7: III, 73, 2 ad 2). And again it is Dionysius who said that the Eucharist was the end and consummation of all the sacraments (*Eccl. Hier.* 3, III, 63, 6). The Eucharist is necessary for the consummation of the spiritual life (III, 73,2) and that indeed is the goal.

The Church, the Eucharist, the transforming union of love, these realities cannot be 'disparted' for the soul. In a previous article we have already seen how this union is achieved in the perfection of faith. But the union is of such a nature that it does in fact unite the whole being—the Common Man, who is the whole Church of Christ with all her sacraments and ceremonies, the individual man body and soul, in faith, in hope and in love. Even in the natural order man is the head of creation and therefore in him the whole of

nature is united, if he be united. God makes the whole of nature in terms of man; he then gives man the divine nature of grace through the hypostatic union, so that at once in nature and in grace there exists all the elements of a perfect union between God, man and nature. It depends on the cooperation of man under the influence of God's grace that the whole is made wholly perfect. It is the movement of the love of God that comes down and links these two elements—nature and grace—and brings them back 'to the blessed point from whence it came'.

Thus are nature and grace of one accord: for grace is God, as nature is God: he is two in manner of working and one in love; and neither of these works without the other: they be not disparted. (c. 63, p. 167.)

And this union is found in man, i.e. in Christ, i.e. in the Church. In this way is the whole of creation brought back full circle to the point whence it started, but now sanctified and engraced throughout. All intermediaries, even the angels themselves, are only secondary and do not enter into essential union of creation in God, who is 'nearest and meekest, highest and lowest, and doeth all' (p. 194).

In this life it is therefore the great saint, called by God's loving choice into the inner chamber of the divine nuptials who binds all the things that God has made both natural in the world and supernatural in the Church in the loving embrace of God. It is for this reason that the Church has always granted pride of place to her contemplatives for they have the greatest opportunities for this redeeming the world within their own most private and indescribable communion with God.

It is time now to consider the individual in whom the whole universe is linked with God in love. We begin to think of this union with a misapprehension about union; for as a rule we think of two things being either disjointed or united; the idea of degrees in union is not easily assimilated. But in fact the world offers a thousand examples of growing or diminishing union, the most pertinent example in the present discussion being that of man and wife: they begin with an emotional union in which their minds have not had an opportunity to participate; then they get to *know* each other, sharing the same ideas and desires, after that they promise in external form with assistance of the Church's blessing to live two in one flesh, and eventually after physical union and prolonged experience and often much suffering they come to be fully one in a true love which is born of a prolonged experience of one another and a continuous sacrifice of each to the other's good and happiness.

This may stand as a type of the progress in the union of love with God. From the moment of the infusion of God's love into the soul the *communion* of friendship is begun. 'Since there is a communication between man and God in as much as he communicates his happiness to us, some kind of friendship must needs be based on this same communication' (II-II, 23, 1). God imparts a share in his own love—Mother Julian is often referring to the increate Love of God which binds the whole creation together, and the created love it produces in us—but at first the soul receives this communication very halfheartedly and fitfully, leaving a great deal of life and action untouched by the grace of charity. At first, as we have seen, a great deal of active cooperation on the part of the individual is required to exterminate the vices and selfcentredness which make it impossible for God's charity to work. But as time goes on it is this increate Love which takes more and more control of the whole of the individual, and it is with this degree of union that we are most concerned here. The sacrificial love of the bride is wholly given to the heavenly bridegroom, and this unique love which has him alone for its end and which is based on the fellowship of eternal happiness turns everything concerning the individual into an aspect of heaven.

The most wisdom is for a creature to do after the will and counsel of his heighest sovereign Friend. This blessed friend is Jesus, and it is his will and his counsel that we hold us with him and fasten us to him homely—evermore, in what state soever that we be; for whether-so that we be foul or clean, we are all one in his loving. For weal nor woe he willeth never we flee from him. (c. 76, p. 188.)

Elsewhere we are told that so long as man remains on this earth his union with God must be 'evermore to live in sweet prayer and lovely longing with our Lord Jesus' (p. 82). In this way the soul adheres to God and becomes like to him by a likeness of conformity, and is so satisfied by his presence that she no longer considers how she may progress, how she may struggle towards him. 'Even the perfect make progress in charity', says St Thomas, 'yet this is not their chief care; for their aim is principally directed towards union with God.' (II-II, 24, 9 ad 3.) It is quite evident that when anyone has reached to a very high degree of union with God in the embrace of his love he can no longer concern himself very effectively about doing the penances he so ardently adopted in his youth; he cannot be so interested in his 'predominant fault' and its eradication; he cannot be bothering as to whether he is 'getting on' in the spiritual life as so many bother; he cannot be over enthusiastic about all kinds of special virtues or special devotions which may help him



more quickly to heaven. For he no longer looks to heaven as though at a distant horizon. He knows by experience that heaven is the essence of his union, for it is that in which he communicates with God. He has found Love and he can look no further, only desiring that love may more and more drench his being. He is thus transformed into God, who touches the very centre of the soul. Once the good Christian has reached to this embrace of love, enticed into the tender embrace of God he is naturally disinclined to trouble about earthly things. He sees them with wonder and joy as things made by the beloved, but he is not drawn to become once again immersed in them. He admires the shining path of the sun of God's love cast across the sea of creation but he knows that if he dives back into that sea the light, the path is shattered.

The light is charity and the meaning of this light is done to us profitably by the wisdom of God. For neither is the light so large that we may see our blissful Day, nor is it shut from us; but it is such a light in which we may live meedfully, with travail deserving the endless worship of God. . . . Thus Charity keepeth us in Faith and Hope, and Hope leadeth us in Charity. And in the end all shall be Charity. (c. 84, p. 200.)

Wisdom bears the soul by love to the uttermost heights, so that all things are seen in the one light of God who is love.

And so for Mother Julian and her like the Blessed Trinity who is God and who makes the world in love is discovered at every turn. For if Wisdom through love teaches the soul to see everything in its highest cause it teaches it to see all in the Trinity. In the very first revelation she begins: 'In the same shewing suddenly the Trinity fulfilled my heart most of joy' (c. 4). And even when she beholds the red blood trickling down the bruised face of Christ she knows by love that she is beholding the threefold Godhead—'for where Jesu appeareth, the blessed Trinity is understood, as to my sight' (id). And the latter part of her musings on what she had seen is continually interwoven with the presence of the Trinity. The threefold Godhead is indeed the pattern of all she sees. The soul is the 'made-trinity' and it has to be oned to the Maker, the Trinity itself by the love of the Second Person who welded body and soul together in the Godhead in himself and in his work (c. 55). Union by the perfection of charity is union with the Trinity. No longer does the soul consider herself and the world merely as a creature in relation to the single power of the Creator; but always, although Father, Son and Holy Ghost *are* the Creator, the three persons appear as the object of love. The creature does not love the Creator with a love of friendship, but the love-enfolded soul knows and loves Persons not powers, and these three Persons pervade her whole

life as she walks in the Garden conversing so constantly with this beloved Person.

Here then we may discern the goal; here is the true revelation of what is meant by God's 'vocation'. It is a call to heavenly converse in this life, a converse which is not merely an occasional 'meditation' on prayer but a way of life, a habit of mind and will which is continually bursting forth in actions. It is a way of becoming 'acclimatised' to God so that the soul gathers all her life into the one point. This is the will of God—our sanctification, the holiness of full love.

It is God's will that I see myself as much bound to him in love as if he had done for *me* all that he hath done; and thus should every soul think inwardly of its Lover. That is to say, the Charity of God maketh in us such a unity that, unless it is truly seen, no man can part himself from other. (c. 65, p. 163.)

And as God's will of love unfolds itself in the life of every Christian given to his friendship gradually is the eternal decree fulfilled in the world, the decree which brought Christ to the cross through love, the decree which brings each individual through all the trials of purification, the dark nights of suffering and desolation, until they are brought to the fulfilment of the light of heaven—'when the Doom is given and we be all brought up above' (c. 85, p. 201).

Then shall none of us be stirred to say in any wise: 'Lord, if it had been thus, then had it been full well'; but we shall say all with one voice: 'Lord blessed mayst thou be, for it is thus: it is well; and now see we verily that all-thing is done as it was then ordained before that anything was made.' (id.)

All is enclosed in the decree of God, a decree which is not merely the expression of an indomitable will pursuing its course with a high, remote yet intense purpose. The decree, conceived in the mind of God with the Word, is fulfilled by the power of love. For God is love and God's power is love. Mother Julian concludes all she has seen and all her considerations thereon with this one simple conviction: 'Thus was I learned that Love was our Lord's meaning'