But yet the image of ages would not be falsified or frustrated. The eagle would build a new nest, and beget a new brood; and he would be to them all that the hallowed metaphor prophesied. All, only how infinitely more, and in how ineffably a sublimer way! He would carry them on his wings indeed, over the abyss, when He would stretch out wide his arms on the Cross. He would be like a mother-eagle indeed, but one that gave her life in defence of her young. And he would feed them, too, but rather as the pelican of the fable did—with the blood of his own breast.

Pie Pelicane, Jesu Domine!

The 'complaint' that Moses made in the wilderness of Pharan would indeed be wrung from the true Moses in the anguish of Gethsemane: 'Why hast thou afflicted thy servant? . . . Why hast thou laid the weight of all this people upon me? . . .' (Numbers 11). But it was only a complaint, only a cry of anguish which he could not suppress, only the protest of his lower faculties. He did not refuse, but obeyed and 'unto death, and such a death, death on a Cross'. He carried us indeed in 'his bosom' as the nurse is wont to carry the little infant', carried us in his Sacred Heart up the hill of Calvary, and continues to carry us thus in the Eucharist, the Sacrament of his Passion. Where also he answers for ever our cry for flesh by giving us his own.

O loving Pelican! O Jesus Lord!

THE SOUL OF A MYSTIC

BY

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IT is now time to consider certain charges of unorthodoxy which have been levelled against Mother Julian of Norwich. In the question of sin and the salvation of the elect both David Knowles and Roger Hudleston accuse her of unorthodoxy[1]. They do not of course suggest that her doctrine in general is suspect, but rather that she has fallen briefly and inconsistently into an unorthodox view. The point arises out of her solution of her 'great difficulty' (p. 127) that all can be well and yet men can sin and send themselves to hell. She appears to restrict her understanding of this intuition of all being well simply to the elect, to the predestined who are to be fully graced in the end.

1 *Revelations of Divine Love* . . . Edited by Dom Roger Hudleston, O.S.B. (Orchard Series) p. xxxiii of Introduction; *The English Mystics* by Dom David Knowles, pp. 144 et seq.

In them she distinguishes

> A Godly will that never assented to sin, nor ever shall . . . (and) a beastly will in the lower part that may will no good (c. 37, p. 76; cf. c. 53, p. 127).

In those whom God has chosen for the beatific vision Mother Julian seems to see a point that is sinless even while lower nature may be committing sin. The reason for this conviction lies in the changelessness of God's love; for the predestined, in Mother Julian's eyes, seem to be constantly held by this love.

> For our Lord is so good, so gentle, and so courteous, that he may never assign default in those in whom he shall ever be blessed and praised (c. 53, p. 127).

It has been suggested that she was perhaps wrongly applying a text of St Paul's about the blessed 'to whom the Lord hath not imputed sin' (Rom. 4, 8).

In order to reconcile her vision of the immutable love of God she introduces the scholastic distinction of the higher and the lower part of the soul, a very useful distinction for medieval mystical writers and one which Mother Julian must have learned from the Eckhart traditions of the time reaching her from Germany and the Netherlands. Or it may be that she had it directly from Walter Hilton, who distinguishes between the 'parts' of the soul—sensuality and reason—and the inferior (nether part) and superior (over part) reason (cf. *Scale of Perfection*, ii, 13) and elsewhere seems to suggest that really generous religious never fall into grievous sin but are preserved because their will is fixed in God (id. i, 60 & 72). It was not unusual at that time to speak of the highest point of the soul as somehow held always by the love of God, the divine spark in the soul which was always in touch with divinity. Meister Eckhart, who is often claimed as the parent of this emphasis on the divine spark, has a sermon on the subject in which he divides the higher part, the intellect, which looks always to God and is masculine in character, from the lower feminine part which looks outwardly to creatures[2]. He goes on to speak of this higher part of the soul as *synderesis* and implies very much the same doctrine as we have already seen in Mother Julian. Eckhart says: 'The intellect is like the good angels, drinking God in his eternal savour. . . . She is sent away from God and is a light that returns: the reflection of the divine nature which the soul has cast into her. The masters call it synderesis, which is as much as to say something suspended

[2] Compare Hilton, *Scale* ii, 13 (p. 216) where he makes the very distinctions between the man of the 'over-part' and the woman of the 'nether-part'. It is likely that he was influenced by Eckhart.

from God all the time and which never does wrong.'[3] We find an echo of this doctrine in Tauler where he speaks of the depths of the soul being the place of the Nativity; and the doctrine is later set out in its relation to the spiritual life by Blosius, who owed a great deal to the earlier German mystics: 'The rational soul, which is in itself indivisible, is divided by holy writers into three parts. The lowest retains the name "soul", the middle part is called "spirit", the highest is usually termed the "mind" or "the apex or highest point of the spirit". . . that is, the highest summit of the spirit—the simple and God-like basis or groundwork of the soul—that is, the simple essence of the soul sealed with the image of God.'[4] But such later writers have dropped what must inevitably be regarded as a dangerous doctrine regarding the indefectibility of this point of the soul. Yet as we shall see there is a sense in which Mother Julian's remarks in this respect are orthodox and important, and the unravelling of the doctrine is itself of great help to the understanding of the higher forms of prayer and union as regards the structure of the soul.

We must first return to St Thomas to acquire perspective by seeing the principles involved. These distinctions originally came from St Augustine, which is one of the reasons why they have played a large part in mystical analysis. But St Thomas has set them out, as usual, with clarity and precision. The '*mens*' or mind, then, is the highest point of the soul, to be identified with its very essence. But it is the essence of the soul in so far as it gives rise, so to say, to the understanding. It is here, in the central point, the understanding essence of the soul, that the image of the Trinity is properly to be found. It is here too that the life of the Trinity itself is first shared by the soul; for although the whole composite being which makes up the single individual man receives graces, yet grace itself being simple and absolutely spiritual can be received only by what is itself simple and spiritual. Thus we recognise that grace itself is received in the substance or essence of the soul and flows out into the whole composition by means of the infused virtues which master and control all the powers of man. The spring of grace rises in this central point of the soul. Certainly, as St Thomas points out, the '*mens*' or spirit, the divine spark, is itself strictly speaking a faculty of the soul rather than its essence. But it is impossible to consider the pure essence of the human soul without referring to its most intimate and immediate faculty, the intellect, mind or *mens*.

3 *Meister Eckhart*. Trans. by C. de B. Evans (London 1924). Vol. I, pp. 89-92.

4 Blosius. *Spiritual Instruction* (written in 1551), trans. by Wilberforce, O.P. (London, 1925) pp. 2-3.

The special presence of the Trinity in the soul is such that the three Persons come as the object of the *mind* and will, to be *known* and loved. And finally, the perfection of all human existence culminates in the *Vision* of God in which the mind itself, no longer considering God as other than itself, is united to the Word itself, and all human mental words cease and the highest point of union has been reached.

All this will show how important this teaching is in relation to the way of prayer. Mother Julian's difficulty, regarding the one central spot which never ceases to shine as the divine spark, reveals a wide background of teaching which refers to the attitude of the soul to God and to creatures, a difference so profound as to give the impression of almost distinct (though obviously not separate) parts of the soul. The mind or intellect in so far as it is inspired from its first moments with the principles of the divine law and is attuned to the final object of all understanding has to be considered separately from the understanding in so far as it is concerned with the daily mundane affairs of this transitory life. This is why the great theologians, following St Augustine, have continued from the thought of the apex, the *scintilla* or high point of the soul to the distinction between the superior and the inferior reasoning—the *ratio superior* and the *ratio inferior*. This does not really mean that there are two distinct 'reasons' in man, but only that when the human understanding with the assistance of divine grace is contemplating the blessed Trinity and the eternal verities which surround the Trinity it is exercising a very different function from that in which it is engaged in the consideration of temporal affairs. In the first case it is a matter for the Holy Spirit's gift of Wisdom, which predominates in the state of union when the soul is living the life of St Mary Magdalen at our Lord's feet. The lower reason is inspired in its highest activity by the gift of Knowledge which helps the understanding to penetrate beneath the surface of the daily happenings of temporal affairs and reach their purpose and meaning[5]. Martha was preoccupied with the cares of the *ratio inferior*.

In view of Mother Julian's difficulty it is worth while noting that St Thomas in his *De Veritate* after having discussed in what sense there can be said to be 'two reasons', showing that the *mens* is a faculty of the soul which itself may look in the two directions, considers shortly afterwards whether sin is to be found in the higher

[5] Cf. I, 79, 9. For an excellent historical discussion of this cf. M.-D. Chenn, O.P. *Ratio Superior et Inferior* (Revue Sciences Phil. et Theol., Jan., 1940, pp. 84-9), translated into English in *Downside Review*, Oct., 1946. Also see *La Structure de l'Ame* by Père A. Gardeil, particularly in the first volume.

and the lower reason. One of the objections declares on the authority of St Augustine that since the higher reason is concerned with eternal things it cannot be held responsible for lapses in bodily affairs. There may have been a faulty interpretation of St Augustine on this matter among mystical writers, and Mother Julian could well have picked up a false scent among her Augustinian friends and advisers. But St Thomas anyway had already attempted to dispel such illusions. He did not, apparently, even accept the view of his master St Albert, who tended to identify the higher reason with *synderesis* or the immediate grasp of first principles of good living which appeared to so many as the divine spark in the soul. He considers the highest peak of the soul rather as regards the view seen from the summit than the light or way in which it is seen. *Ratio* or reason suggests judgment, and if a man is judging about eternal verities or judging present actions in the light of eternal verities he may judge falsely. The more clearly he sees the end of all good living in the depth of the Godhead the more sinful will be the action whereby he judges and chooses to proceed in an opposite direction. Not that every sin in the higher reason is a mortal sin as though it were the same as that of the evil angels who looking at God chose themselves; but certainly where this higher judgment about the right and the wrong is involved the more serious is a deflection likely to be. Moreover St Thomas goes on to point out that *synderesis*, or the divine spark of Eckhart, is not a faculty of the soul, it is not *ratio* itself, but it is the *habit* of first principles of action. In other words he goes on to discuss the light or way in which a man looks at the distant horizons from this high peak of his soul. He declares that this intuitive *Knowledge* of first principles of action may be considered as the faculty (the superior reason) itself in so far as this faculty receives its very first act from that intellectual share in the divine law which is called *synderesis*. But properly speaking it is the instinctive habit itself. The thomist analysis would seem to be sorted out in this way: the soul, which is the very essence itself of man, possesses two faculties, the mind and the will; where these two are most intricately bound up together, namely in human activity, the mind is from the first practical thought possessed of a habit derived immediately from the divine law directing it to do good and avoid evil; leaping up from this base the mind may consider these actions in terms of the eternal truths of God (assisted by the Holy Spirit this is Wisdom) or it may spread itself in its own domain (assisted by the Holy Spirit this is Understanding)—and these are spoken of respectively as the higher and the lower reason. Consequently,

although the mind may err and sin in this higher part by refusing to equate the divine things it considers with the purpose or end of the man's actions, yet the habit of the universal notions of good and evil (*synderesis*) can never itself be responsible for sin and error. By the very definition of this initial habit of mind it cannot be evil—in practice a man can never begin with the general principle that good is to be avoided and evil to be sought[6].

Here then we find a partial answer to Mother Julian's supposed heresy and the doctrine of the mystics regarding the divine spark. The higher part of the soul in so far as it immediately accepts the first general principles of human action from the divine law cannot, by very definition, fall into sin itself. And however smothered it may be by false applications and hasty conclusions it still remains beneath all the debris of human whims and passion. For the mind is made for the truth not only in academically speculative things, but also for the truth of human righteousness in the things that man does. A certain inclination to good remains even in the damned.

This last sentence, taken from St Thomas, reveals however that we have not yet reached the depths of Mother Julian's teaching on this point. For she is regarding the whole series of visions granted to her in terms almost exclusively of those who are to reach heaven —the predestined—and not of the reprobates, the damned. In the first revelation she says,

> I speak of them that shall be saved, for in this time God showed me none other (c. 9, p. 20).

And again when she is turning over in her mind her refrain 'All shall be well' she says,

> These words were said full tenderly, showing no manner of blame to me nor to any that shall be saved (c. 27, p. 57)[7].

She goes on to show how these predestined souls need to be purified, to break them of their vicious pride and the like. For this purpose pain and evil have their uses and sin also plays its part; God allows his chosen ones to fall so that at length they may realise their helplessness and misery and turn in the full dependence of humility to him who holds them ever in his sight giving them their salvation.

For he saith: '1 shall wholly break you of your vain affections and

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[6] All this is set out at length in the *De Veritate* qq. 15 and 16. It would be unavailing to give any more precise reference as the whole of this section demands close study. Compare especially the Godly will which never sins (c. 53, p. 127) with the unfailing element of synderesis (*De Verit.*, 16, 3).

[7] She is, in fact, only concerned with the well-disposed, who 'for God's love hate sin' (c. 73, p. 178). And the Lord showed her 'no souls but those that dread him' (c. 76, p. 185).

your vicious pride; and after that I shall gather you, and make you mild and meek. clean and holy, by oneing to me (c. 28, p. 59).

Such souls as these therefore not only retain the divine spark of a desire for good of some kind, even at sin, but in some sense there is a part of them, call it the superior reason if you will, which never sins even while the soul itself has temporarily fallen into deadly sin. The explanation of this however is not to be sought simply in the analysis of the soul in its relation to God, but rather in God's relation to the soul. We must remember how very objective is Mother Julian's approach to all these problems. She is so intent upon our Lord and his Father that she sees things from their eternal point of view rather than from her own successive, temporal existence. Hers is the way of Wisdom in which the *mens*, the apex of the soul, is made captive by the Holy Spirit himself.

Thus she says that *'in the sight of God'* the predestined soul is 'never dead nor ever shall be', despite its immediate iniquities—'we be often dead as to man's doom in earth' (c. 50, p. 105). For her own part she has none of the complacency of the one assured by some inner and probably deluded certainty of his own salvation. For a short space she is granted an inner sureness and peace but it 'lasted but a while' and she was soon back again in the weariness of life and irksomeness of herself so that she alternated frequently between security and a great sense of evil and peril (c. 15, pp. 34-5). Sin itself teaches her 'unsureness' of herself and preserves her from presumption (c. 79, pp. 192-3). But in the eyes of God all this appears differently. In the first place predestination is not in man at all, and cannot be used as a plank to support himself individually in the midst of the storms of sin. Predestination is eternally in God. 'Predestination', says St Thomas, 'is a kind of type of the ordering of some persons towards eternal salvation, existing in the divine mind.' It is an immanent action which does not put anything in the predestined (I, 23, 2, c and ad 1). Moreover God knows each one of us by a 'proper' idea of us which is not distinct from his essence so that 'although creatures have not existed from all eternity . . . yet because they have been in him from eternity God has known them eternally in their proper natures, and for that reason has loved them' (I, 18, 4 ad 1 and 20, 2 ad 2).

It is certainly not for the individual man to know this particular idea of himself in his own proper nature existing in the eternity of God. It is useless and endlessly confusing to pretend to grasp this idea in God when no one can know himself sufficiently even in his own state in time. But forgetting oneself, as does Mother Julian, and thinking only of the divine mind and will it is possible to begin

to glimpse the new mode of being in which the soul of the predestined never fails. It is God's 'doom' or judgment which is of such great importance.

> God deemeth us [looking] upon our Nature-Substance, which is ever kept one in him (c. 45, p. 94).

And this is surely a fact in the predestined, since God is eternal and changeless, that in the divine mind the soul is known in eternity as it is throughout the whole of its existence. In other words, according to our own temporal judgments God knows it as it will be —all things shall be well. But we are here concerned with the now of eternity—'Julian's vision of the ground of the soul as outside the time series in the eternal Now of God', as E. I. Watkin puts it in *The English Way*[8].

All this may seem remote from the usual needs and experience of the Christian striving towards an ever deeper union with God. But the distinctions here raised are of great value not only in revealing more clearly in what 'point' of the soul the union is taking place, but also practically in the understanding it brings regarding such trials as the distractions which often besiege one who is embraced by the prayer of union. Thus the union itself is to be found 'substantially', as Mother Julian would phrase it, in the apex of the soul. It is built up from the habit of good-loving and good-doing which is in a certain sense remaining in the soul of the sinner. It is not a truly gracious union until that habit is fully realised in the 'higher reason', and as that is more and more perfected the mind is led by the divine mind more submissively, the gift of wisdom colouring the good man's judgments and teaching him the 'doom' of God, God's own judgment which is never separate from his love. From this point it spreads out more extensively into the totality, but never perfectly or integrally during this temporal life. Thus it often happens that a torrent of distractions will flood the imagination, leading the servant of God to feel that he is not praying at all. All is turmoil without, while in this point of the soul, in the inner chamber, peace reigns in the loving presence of the Beloved. The union is unmoved and undisturbed by these external weaknesses of the sensible man. At other times however the union pervades the senses too, sometimes bringing a temporary incapacity to deal with the things of temporal existence (the lower reason is more or less suspended from its activity at this time), sometimes leading to a wonderful unification of all human powers and activi-

[8] p. 142. The author interprets Mother Julian from this angle and is rightly unwilling to condemn her for any serious error, though he indicates some of the confusions into which her mind, untrained in theological precisions, might understandably have fallen.

ties so that all is performed consciously in that Presence and under its influence.

Again the realisation of the nature of predestination and of the way it cannot make any difference to the man as he is in the passing temporal moment when he must be striving always with greater desire for this union should bring a more contemplative calm to those who allow their spiritual lives to be disturbed by thoughts of what God has in store for them. God himself has nothing in store, nothing 'up his sleeve' because it is all one and actual in his presence. All is one and whole in his eternal now. It is of no avail to be perturbed about the morrow, for that Now of God is constructed, held together, in its unpassing, unsuccessive amassing of all perfection, all being, by the changeless love of God. We can grasp at this only at our own now, when we *are* at one with him. So living in unity, we live in contact with, though not yet in possession of, eternity. Beyond that the soul in this life cannot go, nor does it desire to do so if it has reached this union. Those who try to drag down predestination, and still more harmfully ultimate reprobation, into their own mode of being and way of thinking are led into endless complexities and quagmires out of which all the King's Jesuits and all the King's Dominicans could not drag them. The practical answer to all such difficulties is the abandonment to divine Providence, that abandonment which all the saints have had enforced on them in order to perfect that union which is wrought on Calvary and fulfilled in the resurrection[9]. One is tempted to challenge the ways of God and his destiny when reflecting on his plans and on how these plans take sin and pain into account. At such times God is asking the mind and will to submit as he asked Mother Julian to submit. We must not try to anticipate the full knowledge of heaven when we shall ourselves be in eternity, in the same order as the divine mind. Therefore when the Doom is given and we be all brought up above, then shall we clearly see in God the secret things which be now hid to us. Then shall none of us be stirred to say in any wise: 'Lord if it had been thus, then it had 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 (c. 85, p. 201).

9 Cf. *La Providence* by Père R. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., particularly III, 5 and IV, 1.