

## ST THOMAS AQUINAS AND MOTHER JULIAN ON CHARITY

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**I**F we consider the ideas of St Thomas and Dame Julian on divine charity we find that there are similarities and differences. As might be expected, St Thomas is more analytical; however, Dame Julian has some ideas the sources of which may perhaps be found in her contemporary European mystics. Whereas St Thomas works out his ideas from his theology and on a developed plan, Dame Julian's thoughts are the result of her visions and come in the order of their occurrence.

St Thomas writes: 'God's love as a divine gift is eternal and immutable, yet as regards the effect it imprints upon us it may at times be interrupted in so far as we at times fall away from him and again return to him. Now the effect of the divine love in us—which is taken away by sin—is grace whereby a man becomes worthy of eternal life; from this, however, sin shuts him out.' (I-II, 113.)

In Dame Julian's *Revelations of Divine Love* we have: 'Our Lord anent himself may not forgive, for he may not be wroth: it were impossible. For this was shewed: . . . we are endlessly oned to him in love, it is the most impossible that may be, that God should be wroth. For wrath and friendship be two contraries.' And later: 'For I saw that God began never to love mankind: for right the same that mankind shall be in endless bliss, fulfilling the joy of God as anent his works, right so the same mankind hath been in the foresight of God, known and loved from without beginning in his rightful intent. . . . For ere that he made us he loved us, and when we were made we loved him.'

When pondering on divine charity St Thomas begins in the *Secunda Secundae* with the nature of charity and, basing his conclusions on the words of Christ quoted in the fifteenth chapter of St John's Gospel, he decides that charity is a kind of friendship between God and man, and that man is called unto the fellowship of the Son of God. God communicates to man a share in his own divine life, in his happiness, and

man is made able to respond, he is lifted up to a higher level of living, a supernatural level. 'The divine Essence itself is charity, even as it is wisdom and goodness' (Q. 23).

The English mystic stresses God's wooing of the human soul. She describes a more intimate life shared by God and man than is actually stated in the *Summa*. 'It is the most wisdom for a creature to do after the will and counsel of his highest 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 . . .'. Also: 'My darling, I am glad thou art come to me; in all thy woe I have ever been with thee; and now seest thou my loving and we be oned in bliss'. How strongly akin to the words quoted by Lucie Christine in her *Spiritual Journal*, and in which we see the changelessness of God down the centuries: 'Are we not *two* in thy difficulties and perplexities? . . . Thou art precious to me. . . . Thou desirest me; I desire thee.' (p. 184.)

We are shown in the *Summa* that divine charity springs from the Holy Ghost himself dwelling in the soul; man has to have some extra power added to his natural ones if he is to attain to the love of God. 'The divine Essence itself is charity, even as it is wisdom, and goodness. Wherefore just as we are said to be good with the goodness which is God (since the goodness whereby we are formally good is a participation of divine goodness) . . . , so, too, the charity whereby formally we love our neighbour is a participation of divine charity.' Again: 'Charity works formally . . . because it produces an infinite effect, since, by justifying the soul, it unites it to God, this proves the infinity of the divine power, which is the author of charity'. (23, a 2.) Summing up, we have: 'Charity is something created in the soul': it is the Holy Ghost himself working in the soul (23, a 2). Fr Reginald Buckler in the *Perfection of Man by Charity* writes about this: 'The Divine Spirit, therefore, as the Increased Charity, lives and works within the soul, by means of his own created charity; making thus the virtue of charity the bond of our union with God, and the proximate principle of our spiritual life, action, and merit.

'This divine principle, from being at first as a germ within

us, energises, strengthens, and expands, by the nourishment and exercise it receives in prayer, mortification, and the works of life, until its virtue passes to the powers of the soul, and even the senses and members of the body, leavening them all with its divine influence, governing their movements, and ordering and regulating their operations; thus bringing to our nature its full measure of accidental perfection.'

Turning to the teaching in the *Revelations of Divine Love*, we discover that the gracious work of the Holy Ghost in the soul is mentioned several times. We read of the 'sweet, gracious, inward light of the Holy Ghost'; and 'we graciously accord to him (i.e., Christ) through the gifts and virtues of the Holy Ghost'. She describes how the Holy Ghost moves the soul: 'But our good Lord the Holy Ghost, which is endless life dwelling in our soul full securely, keepeth us, and worketh therein a peace and bringeth it to ease by grace, and accordeth it to God, and maketh it buxom.' Later on occurs: 'The Holy Ghost graciously inspireth into us gifts leading to endless life'.

Charmingly she reminds us that 'Of which great things he willeth that we have knowing here as it were in an ABC, that is to say, that we have a little knowing; whereof we shall have fullness in heaven'.

In considering the subject of charity St Thomas discusses if charity can be lost, and if so, is it lost by one mortal sin; can it be perfect in this life; the degrees of this virtue, whether it increases, and allied matters. He returns to the principle of charity 'being the infusion of the Holy Ghost, who is the love of the Father and the Son, and the participation of whom in us is created charity'.

He concludes that for perfect charity man must love as much as he can; in this life he must make an earnest endeavour to give his time to God and divine things, and that a man must give his whole heart to God continually. In teaching about venial sins he states that these are a hindrance to the life of charity although they do not destroy it. 'God does not turn away from man, more than man turns away from him.'

Dame Julian is in accord with the Angelic Doctor on these points. She, too, is much concerned with sin and she agrees

that a man's time and energies should be dedicated to God.

In common with many great Christian thinkers she conceives sin to be no deed of the 'Godly will that never assented to sin, nor never shall'. Is she referring to venial sins from which no one in this life is entirely free? Or is she weighing St Paul's idea of the two laws working in man but against the human will? (See Epistle to the Romans). Or has she something else in mind? It is difficult to know with certainty.

Of how to deal with personal sin she writes: 'And if we . . . any time fall, yet we readily rise, knowing the sweet touching of grace, . . . and go we forthwith to God in love; and neither, on the one side, fall over low, inclining to despair, nor, on the other side, be over reckless, as if we made no matter of it, but nakedly acknowledging our feebleness, [we] wit that we may not stand a twinkling of an eye but by keeping of grace, and reverently cleave to God, on him only trusting.' Towards the end of her book she returns to the subject: 'Sin is in sooth viler and painfuller than hell . . . ; for it is contrary to our fair kind. For as soothly as sin is unclean, so soothly is it unkind, and thus an horrible thing to see.' She sees how sin is deadly for a short time in the blessed creature of endless life. Original in her thought is the idea that 'what time we fall into sin and leave the mind of him and the keeping of our own soul, then keepeth Christ alone all the charge; and thus standeth he sorrowfully and moaning'.

'Then belongeth it to us for reverence and kindness to turn us hastily to our Lord and leave him not alone . . . and what time I am strange to him by sin, despair or sloth, then I let my Lord stand alone, in as much as it is in me'. (235.)

Concerning the sins of others she tells us: 'For he (Christ) willeth that we be like him in wholeness of endless love to ourself and to our even-Christians; but [that we] nakedly hate the sin and endlessly love the soul, as God loveth it. Then shall we hate sin as God hateth it. . . .' Further: 'The beholding of other men's sins maketh as it were a thick mist afore the eyes of the soul, and we may not, for the time, see the fairness of God, unless we may behold them with contrition with him. . . .'.

How in harmony this is with the thought in the *Summa*, namely, that because sin does not destroy nature, we should love sinners out of charity. We have to hate the sinner's guilt and to love his capacity, which is exactly the same as our own, for happiness, the image of God in his soul: this is perfect hatred. It is shown also that the public good is to be preferred to that of the individual: this clarifies the justice of condemning criminals, who are a menace to the common good, to punishment.

The love of the neighbour is treated minutely in six articles in the *Summa*. Basing his doctrine on St John's words, 'This is the divine command that has been given to us; the man who loves God must be one who loves his brother as well'. St Thomas makes his chief point that love of God and of our neighbour are one and the same love, not two separate loves. 'The charity whereby formally we love our neighbour is a participation of divine charity' (23, a 2). And: 'The aspect under which our neighbour is to be loved is God, since what we ought to love in our neighbour is that he may be in God. Hence it is specifically the same act whereby we love God, and whereby we love our neighbour. . . .' The analogy of seeing light and colour under the aspect of the light is used to make this clear. It is stressed that love of God is more meritorious. It is on the basis of a fellowship in happiness that our love for others rests. We have to see, judge, and love as God sees, judges, and loves; nothing less is sufficient for the Christian life.

Although Dame Julian does not analyse our relationship with others and their respective claims upon us, she is much concerned with love for others. She asserts: 'God loveth all that he hath made; and he that loveth generally all his even-Christians for God, he loveth all that is. . . . For in man is God, and God is in all.' And later: 'I saw that each kind compassion that man hath on his even-Christians, it is Christ in him'. Also: 'For he willeth that we be like him in wholeness of endless love to ourself and to our even-Christians, no more than his love be broken to us for our sin, no more willeth he that our love be broken to ourself and to our even-Christians. . . .' She is full of the idea that we have to love others with God and as he does.

In desire for God and the deliberate choice of him, his true lovers are of one mind. Her theme is: 'Thee needeth nought but him'. She mentions 'The blissful sight' which shall be the 'end of all manner of pain to the loving soul, and the fulfilling of all manner of joy and bliss. And that shewed he in the high marvellous words: I it am that is highest; I it am that is lowest; I it am that is all.' Again: 'The more the soul seeth of God, the more it desireth him by his grace'.

St Thomas makes clear that the source of all happiness is God. For 'At the sight of God the mind cannot but delight'; and: 'By loving God a man glows to gaze on his beauty'. He realises that even by nature man loves God more than himself, and tends towards God. 'God will be to each the entire reason for his love, for God is man's entire good'. Furthermore: 'The gift of charity is bestowed by God on each one, namely, that he may first of all direct his mind to God'. Implicitly St Thomas deals with desire for and the choice of God, but without becoming personal or passionate.

The fruits of charity, namely, joy, peace, rest, and mercy are treated by each writer in accordance with individual outlook and temperament and the purpose in view: nevertheless some of these ideas are remarkably similar. Dame Julian has moving thoughts about peace. 'Thus saw I that God is our very peace, and he is our sure Keeper when we are ourselves in unpeace, and he continually worketh to bring us into endless peace . . . suddenly is the soul oned to God when it is truly peaced in itself. . . .' From St Thomas we learn that concord is a part of peace; that the chief movement of the soul finds rest in God and that real peace can be only about good things; that it is the union of the appetites and inclinations; finally that it is a beatitude and a fruit. 'We are commanded to keep peace because it is an act of charity; and for this reason too it is a meritorious act. Hence it is placed among the beatitudes. . . . It is also numbered among the fruits, in so far as it is a final good having spiritual sweetness.' (29, a. 4.)

The use of the reason, sloth, and wisdom, might, and goodness of God are dealt with by each writer.

The lyrical, passionate writing of Julian, which is so different from the impersonal, remote style of St Thomas, can enchant the reader. One of her most attractive and helpful ideas, which is repeated some four times in her *Revelations*, is: 'We be his bliss, we be his meed, we be his worship, we be his crown—and this was a singular marvel and a full delectable beholding that we be his crown.' (58; also 61, 77-8, 147.) Fr Vincent McNabb in *God's Way of Mercy* suggests a kindred idea: 'We are of great value to him, even if of little value to ourselves' (p. 104).

It may be remembered that when, at the end of St Thomas's life, Christ from the crucifix asked him what reward he would have for his writing about himself, St Thomas answered: 'None other than thyself, Lord'. Dame Julian, too, pleaded for God only as her entire good. And we have the exquisite words of Christ to the anchoress: 'I love thee, and thou lovest me, and our love shall not be departed in two, and for thy profit I suffer [these things to come]'. (f. 56, Slo. 2499. p. 238, Orchard edition.)

Margery Kempe of Lynn tells us of the words of Christ to her: 'Doughter yf thou knewe how swete thy loue is to me, thou woldest neuer do other thyne but loue me with all thy herte. . . .' (E.E.T.S. ed.) In these words we find an echo of both St Thomas and Dame Julian. And also in the words of Christ recorded by Lucie Christine in her *Journal*: 'I am all things to Thee. Never seek anything outside Me'. (p. 216.)

Both these lovers of God were united in wilfully choosing him, to be lovers 'lastingly without end', realising clearly that God was their good and their all.

NOTE: The translators of Paul Claudel's letter to Gabriel Frizeau which was published in the November, 1952, *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT*, were Mdlle A. Chalufour and E. Pullen.