

No Blame, No Shame, No Wrath
An Exploration of the Problem of Sin in Julian of Norwich's Showings
by
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Introduction

For Christians, past and present, who have been targets of preaching that aggravates their sense of shame and guilt, the writing of Julian of Norwich, a 14th century Christian mystic, seems hardly believable. At the end of her longer work describing sixteen revelations she received during a nearly fatal illness, she recalls her recurring desire to know the Lord's meaning in the revelations. More than fifteen years later, she understands this answer:

What, do you wish to know your Lord's meaning in this thing? Know it well, love was his meaning. Who reveals it to you? Love. What did he reveal to you? Love. Why does he reveal it to you? For love. Remain in this, and you will know more of the same. But you will never know different, without end. (86:342)¹

We speak easily, or hopefully, of the love of God, but rarely as poignantly as Julian. We recite the words, "God is love" and "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son," but often they remain theoretical, "barren and dry" (cf. 41:248; 66:310). When Julian writes, however, the words moisten, drip, and gush in a thirst-slaking torrent, and we begin to comprehend, with Jantzen, that "Julian's central message is her echo of Jesus' manifestation on his path to the cross that the most important thing we can say about God is that he loves."²

The reasons for the power of Julian's writing are manifold and complex, but one substantial factor is her radical assertion that, in his love, God does not blame us for our sin.

¹ Julian, *Showings*, trans. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 127. In-text citations designate, first, the chapter number and, after the colon, the page numbers in this edition. Occasionally, the Middle English term will be inserted from the corresponding text in Julian, Edmund Colledge, and James Walsh, *A Book of Showings to the anchoress Julian of Norwich*, 2 vols. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978). To reduce in-text citations, a citation will be inserted at the initial reference to a particular page and will be repeated for subsequent references in the same paragraph only if there are intervening citations to other pages.

² Grace Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian*, New ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 168.

Against our deep shame for failing to live up to the good we know and our dark dread of being sinners in the hands of an angry God, Julian asserts that God “does not blame me for sin” (27:226), that “sin will be no shame” (38:242), and that “our Lord was never angry, and never will be” (46:259) (hereinafter, “assertions”). These assertions so challenge our culture of recrimination that they arrest our attention and stir our longing. We yearn to believe and appropriate them for ourselves. Yet, we wonder at their meaning and their implications. In this yearning and wondering, we follow Julian herself. If we sentimentalize these assertions, however, we go another way, for Julian rigorously probes their meaning and, though perceiving a conflict between the assertions and the teaching of the Church, refuses to conclude that either must be false.

The assertions comprise one aspect of Julian’s treatment of the problem of sin. Typically, the problem of sin or evil presents a question of theodicy, challenging the theistic understanding of God as both omnipotent and good, given the fact of sin or evil.³ If, however, Julian ever doubts the goodness or the omnipotence of God, she does not say so. She seeks to understand, not how God can permit sin and remain both good and omnipotent, but why God permits sin, how God’s goodness will prevail over the harm of sin, and how Christians should regard their sin. Though her treatment of the problem of sin overlaps a typical theodicy, her concern is not philosophical or apologetic, but pastoral.

This essay examines the assertions in the framework of Julian’s theodicy, which progresses through these questions: (1) What is sin? (2) Why did God not prevent sin? (3) Given the harm of sin, how can all be well? (4) Given the eternal damnation of some, how can all be well? (5) Given our blameworthiness, how can God not blame us for our sin?

³ See, e.g., Van A. Harvey, *A Handbook of Theological Terms* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 236-39.

Thesis

As she interleaves these questions with the revelations, it becomes clear that God is not going to provide information that resolves the contradictions behind the questions. The Lord's responses always ensue from a different perspective than the questions and incite Julian to trust God, not intellectual solutions to philosophical issues. This pattern continues in the Lord's response to the final question, which the no-blame, no-shame, and no-wrath assertions provoke, but with a significant new element. Heretofore, her treatment of the difference in the divine and the human perspectives has been abstract. The response to the final question, however, takes the form of an example of a lord and a servant, a story that richly illustrates not only the different perspectives of God and humanity, but also the intersection of those perspectives in the Passion of Christ. The example enables her to understand that God and humanity see sin from infinitely different perspectives, which intersect only at God's gracious doing in the Passion. Humans see sin from a blind spot. God sees sin from eternity, from the perspective of his beginning-less and endless love for all his creatures, humans included. In the Passion, God enables us to see ourselves and our sin as God does. The love of God, as portrayed in the example, unstitches all the questions of her theodicy, including the final one.

I. Julian's Theodicy

Julian's theodicy is a struggle to reconcile human sinning with the goodness and omnipotence of God.⁴ The ground from which this struggle sprouts is not evil in the abstract or even the activity of the fiend, but Julian's concrete experience of being a sinner.⁵ Underlying the entire work is her consciousness of being "a sinful creature living in this wretched flesh" (4:181). As the revelations progress, her consciousness of sin and its effects seems magnified. She recognizes that nothing but sin hinders her longing for Christ (27:224), that sin itself is the most

⁴ See Julia Gatta, *A Pastoral Art: Spiritual Guidance in the English Mystics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1986), 57.

⁵ See *ibid.*

painful punishment for sinning, “the sharpest scourge with which any chosen soul can be struck” (39:244), and that “the greatest pain that the soul can have is at any time to turn from God through sin” (77:328). The prominence of sin in her consciousness gives rise to her first question.

A. What is sin?

Like a typical theodicy, Julian begins with a question of God’s responsibility for sin. In the Third Revelation, she sees “God in an instant of time [*a poynte*]” and recognizes, to use classical terms, the divine attributes of omnipresence (“he is present in all things”), omnipotence (“he does everything which is done”), and omniscience (“nothing is done by chance, but all by God’s prescient wisdom”) (11:197). Her contemplation of these attributes provokes her first question: “What is sin?” Unlike a typical theodicy, she does not ask how God can really be omnipotent and good, for her vision leaves her confident of God’s omnipotence and his goodness (“everything which is done is well done”; “he does no sin”; “for in all this sin was not shown to me”) (11:197-98). This confidence leads her to the conclusion “that sin is no deed.” Following Augustine’s account of sin and evil,⁶ she concludes, as she puts it later, that sin “has no kind of substance, no share in being ...” (27:225). Though God “does everything which is done” (11:197), God is not responsible for sin because sin is no thing.

Most of Julian’s discourse on this question is not, however, about the non-being of sin. It is about “the rightfulness of God’s dealing” (11:198) and leads to a discussion of the difference between the human and divine perspectives on what happens in life. Humans, she says, tend to attribute sudden and unexpected events to chance, but “in our Lord’s sight there is no chance (11:197). Humans tend to regard “some deeds as well done and some as evil,” but “our Lord

⁶ See Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), G.R. Evans, “Evil,” in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), Ralph W. Mathisen, “Sin,” in *ibid.*

does not regard them so, for everything which exists in nature is of God's creation, so that everything which ~~has~~ is done has the property of being God's doing" (11:198). All deeds are God's deeds and are both "right" and "full;" "they lack no operation of mercy or of grace, for ... nothing whatever is lacking in them." God "has made everything totally good," and "the blessed Trinity is always wholly pleased with all its works ..." (11:199). Furthermore, all things occur unerringly in accordance with God's eternal purpose: (1) "there was nothing unknown to him in his just ordinance before time began, and ... all things were set in order, before anything was made ..."; (2) God has "never changed his purpose in any kind of thing ..." and never removes his hand from his works (11: 198-99).

This insistence on God's absolute sovereignty in foreordaining and executing all deeds, and on their consequent goodness, challenges the adequacy of the human perspective on good and evil. Moreover, since it leaves no room for anything to occur outside of God's will, it undermines any philosophical consolation that her portrayal of sin as no deed has afforded. If God never removes his hand from any of his works, can God avoid complicity in sin's effects? Her questioning soon resumes.

B. Why did God not prevent sin?

That "sin is no deed" does not negate the reality of Julian's experience of sin. When she recognizes that nothing but sin hinders her longing for Christ (27:224), the inadequacy of a philosophical solution surfaces. The solution to the problem of sin does not lie in comprehending the nature of sin, nor is the deep truth of God's goodness and power to be found in the metaphysics of sin. She must look elsewhere. If God, being wholly good, created us and desires us to be pure like he is and, being all knowing, knew that we would sin, she asks, why did God, being all powerful, not prevent the "beginning of sin"?

Jesus answers: “Sin is necessary [*behouely*], but all will be well, and all will be well, and every kind of thing will be well” (27:224-25). Some observations are in order:

1. This answer ignores the philosophical problem and asserts a different perspective, one from which sin is useful, profitable, needful, or necessary.⁷ The pain of sin “purges [us of our mortal flesh and our inward passions] and makes us know ourselves and ask for mercy” It turns us to the “the Passion of our Lord” for comfort (27:225). This usefulness of sin cannot, however, be regarded as God’s reason for not preventing sin. The circularity of such a rationale is unavoidable, for without the advent of sin, there presumably would be no blindness in our self-knowledge and no need for purging, for mercy, or for comfort from the pain of sin.
2. The Lord acknowledges the problem: “It is true that sin is the cause of all this pain, but all will be well, and every kind of thing will be well” (27:225). Rather than denying the fact of sin, this answer provides an expansive understanding of sin: “In this naked word ‘sin’, our Lord brought generally to my mind all which is not good, and the shameful contempt and the direst tribulation which he endured for us in this life, and his death and all his pains, and the passions, spiritual and bodily, of all his creatures” (27:225). Sin encompasses all suffering, including Christ’s Passion, which is “the greatest and surpassing pain.” Thus, the Trinity, which is understood “where Jesus appears,” is intimately acquainted with our grief (4:181). This answer reveals a point at which the divine perspective and the human perspective intersect both recognize that sin causes the pain that God and humanity share. This intersection depends, however, on God’s doing, not on humanity’s philosophical achievement.

⁷ *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary: Complete Text Reproduced Micrographically*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University, 1971), 195.

3. God does not reveal “why he allowed sin to come” (27:226). Instead, Julian sees “hidden in God an exalted and wonderful mystery.” Whatever the explanation for God’s allowing the beginning of sin, God turns its pain to his good purpose, vindicating his omnipotence and goodness in the end.

Paradoxically, this solution to the problem of sin, which presumably indicts the omnipotence and goodness of God, is to trust the omnipotent and good God, believing that he “will make plain and we shall know in heaven ... why he allowed sin to come ...” (27:226). Logically, this is no answer. It merely restates the problem. For Julian, however, faith (*i.e.*, surrender to God’s perspective) interrupts the tautology. This faith is engendered by contemplation of the Passion of Christ, which connects God to our pain, not by knowledge of God’s reason for allowing sin. The revelation of the copiously bleeding Jesus tolerates no possibility that God’s not preventing sin will ultimately harm humanity. In some hidden way, the God who made us, who loves us, and who preserves us (5:183) finally turns sin and its pain into everlasting joy.

C. Given the great harm of sin, how can all things be well?

Julian’s faith does not curtail her questioning. Though she sees that the Lord uses the pain of sin to “break down” our “empty affections” and “vicious pride” and to make us “meek and mild, pure and holy through union with” him (28:226-27), she cannot forget “the great harm which has come through sin” to God’s creatures (29:227). The darkness and mournfulness of this contemplation issues in an apprehensive complaint: “Ah, good Lord, how could all things be well ...?” She looks for “some plainer explanation” to put her at ease.

The Lord’s answer comes in two parts. The first acknowledges the magnitude of the harm done by the beginning of sin: “Adam’s sin was the greatest harm ever done or ever to be done until the end of the world” (29:228). The second draws her attention from the harm of sin to “the

glorious atonement,” which “is more pleasing to the blessed divinity and more honourable for man’s salvation, without comparison, than ever Adam’s sin was harmful.” The atonement obliterates the harm of Adam’s sin. (As the example will show, the atonement marks the intersection of the human and divine perspectives.)

Given this powerful manifestation of “our blessed Lord’s intention,” we can confidently expect God to make all well: “For since I have set right the greatest of harms, then it is my will that you should know through this that I shall set right everything which is less” (29:228). We should judge by what we can see, *viz.*, “our saviour and our salvation,” that we can rejoice in God and should refrain from seeking to know what God is keeping in his “privy counsel,” *viz.*, how God will make all well (30:228-29).

Once more Julian learns that the solution is not to be found in knowledge of God’s hidden intentions (or, we might say, in perfect alignment of the divine and human perspectives in this life through parity of knowledge), but in trusting God based on his “open, clear, fair and bright and plentiful” work in the Passion of Christ, which is the corrective lens for the human perspective. Julian takes comfort as she hears the Lord give one answer to all her “questions and doubts”: “I may make all things well, and I can make all things well, and I shall make all things well, and I will make all things well; and you will see yourself that every kind of thing will be well” (31:229). She understands that the Lord is telling her, “Accept it now in faith and trust, and in the very end you will see truly, in fulness of joy” (32:232). Sin’s harm will not endure.

D. Given eternal damnation, how can all things be well?

Still, Julian is not finished with her questioning. She moves from sin to judgment. If faith calls upon us to trust what God has said and to believe that all will be well in the end, what shall we do with God’s other words, which include an article of faith holding “that many creatures will be damned, such as the angels who fell out of heaven because of pride, who now are devils,

and many men upon earth who die out of the faith of Holy Church ... and so die out of God's love" (32:233)? If some will be eternally condemned, is it not "impossible that every kind of thing should be well"? How can God's word hold true in both cases? Is not eternal damnation an instance of the endurance of the harm of sin throughout eternity? Does not this teaching of the Church validate the human perspective?

The Lord's answer is brief:

What is impossible to you is not impossible to me. I shall preserve my word in everything, and I shall make everything well. (32:233)

This answer returns Julian to the only answer she has ever received: "And in this I was taught by the grace of God that I ought to keep myself steadfastly in the faith [*i.e.*, the teachings of the Church], as I had understood before, and that I should stand firm and believe firmly that every kind of thing will be well"

To hold these apparent contradictions, she foresees a great "deed which the blessed Trinity will perform on the last day," in which "he will preserve his word in everything" and "will make well all which is not well" "[W]hat the deed will be and how it will be performed is unknown to every creature who is inferior to Christ, and it will be until the deed is done" (32:232-33; see also 36:240). The very divine attributes with which her dialectic has been concerned prompt God to keep the great deed hidden: "The goodness and the love of our Lord God want us to know that this will be, and his power and wisdom, through the same love, want to conceal it and hide it from us, what it will be and how it will be done" (32:232). The answer remains: trust God.

The contradiction in these words of God (*i.e.*, her visions and the teaching of the Church) requires acquiescence in the divine perspective. Humans inhabit a world of limitations. We experience many impossibilities, and thus our perspective is limited. God knows no limitations,

no impossibilities, no boxed canyons. So powerful and wise is God that not even his sure faithfulness to his word constrains the operation of his goodness.

One question remains, that to which the assertions give rise, *viz.*, how can God not blame us for our sin? Before looking at how Julian addresses that question, we look at the assertions.

II. The Assertions

There are three basic forms of the assertions, which we may paraphrase as follows: in God, there is no blame, no shame, and no wrath for our sins. These three assertions are three expressions of a single message. It is not that our sin does not harm us. She sees very clearly that it does. The message is that our sin does not harm God. Our sin, in no way whatsoever, diminishes God's love for us, nor does it interfere with God's good intention for us. "[O]ur falling does not hinder him in loving us" (39:245).

A. No blame

The first assertion occurs in two forms: "God assigns no blame for sin" and "God does not blame for sin." It does not appear that Julian intends any difference between the two, though the rhetorical force of the latter is greater than that of the former. This first form reflects biblical language and, in terms of the tradition, is unremarkable.⁸ Rhetorically, the use of "assigns" makes the assertion seem remote, juridical, and impersonal. The second form is a remarkable and cogent rephrasing of the biblical tradition.

The assertion occurs first with respect to a specific failing, in Julian's reflection on the Eighth Revelation. God grants her desire for "recollection of the Passion," that, in her words, "I might have seen with my own eyes the Passion which our Lord suffered for me, so that I might have suffered with him as others did who loved him" (2:177-78). When she actually feels Christ's pains, she regrets having asked for that revelation (17:209), but finding that she is secure

⁸ See Rom 4:7-8.

and safe while she contemplates the cross, she refuses to turn away from the vision (19:211). Nevertheless, for her regret, she regards herself a wretch (17:209; 19:212). She refrains from self-recrimination, however, because she understands that her regret has arisen from “the reluctance and domination of the flesh, to which my soul did not assent, and to which God imputes [*assignyth*] no blame” (19:212).⁹

She later applies the no-blame assertion to sin generally. In Thirteenth Revelation, Jesus’ acknowledgment that sin is the cause of all pain and his assurance that nonetheless all will be well shows “no kind of blame to me or to anyone who will be saved” (27:225). In the Fourteenth Revelation, she sees, to her astonishment, that God shows “no more blame to us than if we were as pure and as holy as the angels in heaven” (50:266).¹⁰

This assertion is, of course, contrary to the human perspective, which both from our own feeling and from the teaching of the Church, is “that the blame of our sins continually hangs upon us ...” (50:266) Indeed, we must accede to the judgment of the Church and see ourselves as sinners who “sometimes deserve blame and wrath ...” (45:257). This opposition of perspectives will lead Julian to her last question.

B. No shame

In the Thirteenth Revelation, God reveals that Julian and everyone will sin (37:241). For one who finds sin the sole hindrance and “sharpest scourge,” this revelation demands some consolation. It comes as “assurance of protection” for Julian and all her “fellow Christians” (37:241) and as a showing “that sin will be no shame, but honour to man ...” (38:242). Interestingly, this assertion does not seem to cause Julian the cognitive dissonance of the no-blame assertion. Perhaps the reason is that she pays little attention to this revelation until she

⁹ This realization prompts an excursus on the simultaneous experience of “reluctance [to suffer pain] and deliberate choice [to suffer with Christ]” reminiscent of Romans 7 (see also 39:245).

¹⁰ For other occurrences of this assertion, see 27:226, 39:245, 45:257, 51:268, 275, 80:336, 82:338.

begins to receive the consolations (37:241), which include many examples of sinners whose sin God has turned to honor (38:242-43).

Nonetheless, what she says elsewhere shows that this assertion contradicts her perspective on the shame of sin. Sin “breaks a man and purges him in his own sight so much that at times he thinks himself that he is not fit for anything but ... to sink into hell ...” (39:244). Even when the Holy Spirit has turned him to “hope of God’s mercy,” shame remains, for in confession he reveals “his sins, nakedly and truthfully, with great sorrow and great shame that he has so befouled God’s fair image.” Later, she says, “Our failing is dreadful, our falling is shameful, and our dying is sorrowful” (48:262). She never concludes that our view of our sin should be otherwise. We need to see our sin, she says, “and by the sight we should be made ashamed of ourselves ...” (78:332).

C. No wrath

Though she understands that it is necessary “to see and to know that we are sinners” and that “we deserve pain, blame and wrath” (46:259), she sees no wrath in God (48:262). To the contrary, she sees that “our Lord was never angry, and never will be” (46:259), because it is contrary to God’s nature to be angry:

Because he is God, he is good, he is truth, he is love, he is peace; and his power, his wisdom, his charity and his unity do not allow him to be angry. For I saw truly that it is against the property of his power to be angry, and against the property of his wisdom and against the property of his goodness. God is that goodness which cannot be angry, for God is nothing but goodness.

God’s is not a distant goodness but is nearer to us than our own soul (cf. 6:186; 56:288; 72:320).

No alien property like wrath can come between God and our soul:

Our soul is united to him who is unchangeable goodness. And between God and our soul there is neither wrath nor forgiveness in his sight. For our soul is so wholly united to God, through his own goodness, that between God and our soul nothing can interpose. (46:259)

What we see as anger in God is a projection of ourselves onto God. The anger is in us:

For I saw no wrath except on man's side, and he forgives that in us, for wrath is nothing else but a perversity and an opposition to peace and to love. And it comes from a lack of power or a lack of wisdom or a lack of goodness, and this lack is not in God, but it is on our side. For we through sin and wretchedness have in us a wrath and a constant opposition to peace and to love (48:262)

Though “our Lord God cannot in his own judgment forgive, because he cannot be angry—that would be impossible” (49:263), Julian still speaks of God’s forgiveness and of his wrath and its remission (see 47:260). In doing so, she brightly marks the divide between the human and the divine perspectives.

III. How can God not blame us for sin?

In spite of the assertions, Julian cannot avoid the common language of blame, shame, and wrath. It is embedded in the teaching of the Church and mirrors her own feelings, from which she knows that “the blame of our sins continually hangs upon us, from the first man until the time we come up into heaven” (50:266). She cannot forget “that we sin grievously all day and are very blameworthy.” As she ponders the conflict between the teaching of the Church and the revelations, she understands that they represent two different perspectives on the human situation. Sometimes, she perceives these as two different judgments and, at other times, as two kinds of contemplation.

She introduces the notion of a divergence between human and divine judgment in the Third Revelation. Human judgments are blind. God’s judgments are “lovely and sweet” (11:198). God’s judgment proceeds “from his own great endless love” (45:257). The other is that of the Church and of “men on earth” (50:265). By the judgment of the Church, she understands that she must regard herself a sinner and “that sinners sometimes deserve blame and wrath ...” (45:257). By “the judgment of men on earth,” “we often are dead” “through the temptations and

the sorrow into which ... we fall ..." (50:265). In God's judgment, he assigns "to us no kind of blame" (45:257), and "the soul which will be saved was never dead, and never will be" (50:265).

In her perception of two kinds of contemplation (46:258), she sees one as lower and the other as higher (82:339). The lower "keeps us in fear and makes us ashamed of ourselves." The higher "keeps us in spiritual joy and true delight in God" It is "endless continuing love, with certainty of protection and blessed salvation" (46:258). It is the subject of "all the revelation." The other is "the common teaching of Holy Church," in which it is "necessary to see and to know that we are sinners and commit many evil deeds which we ought to forsake, and leave many good deeds undone which we ought to do, so that we deserve pain, blame and wrath" (46:258-59). The lower represents the human perspective, the higher the divine. They seem at loggerheads, but both are valid: "For we do not fall in the sight of God, and we do not stand in our own sight; and both these are true, as I see it, but the contemplating of our Lord God is the higher truth" (82:339). Consequently, the higher contemplation does not lead her away from the lower. Rather, she submits herself to her mother, the Church, "as a simple child should" (46:258-59).

These opposing views leave her in a quandary: how can the two judgments be reconciled (45:257)? Her longing to understand prompts the final question in her theodicy. "And if it be true that we are sinners and blameworthy, good Lord, how can it be that I cannot see this truth in you ..." (50:266)? This turns out to be the most perplexing of the questions, for it is not a matter of how sin began or how God will make all things well in the end. It is a matter of how she is to regard sin in the present and is thus a matter of "the right way" for her (45:257), of how "to tell good from evil" (50:266).

She courageously asks for an answer (50:266-67) and receives only “a wonderful example of a lord and a servant” (45:257). This example does not offer a philosophical answer to her questions. Rather, it enfleshes the two judgments or contemplations. It provides an example that encompasses both the goodness and omnipotence of God and the reality of the human experience of sin. It validates both judgments, but also confirms her understanding that one is higher, the other lower, one divine, the other human.

It pictures a lord and a servant, who are committed to each other in love. The lord sends the servant out on a mission, and the servant not only goes, “but he dashes off and runs and great speed, loving to do his lord’s will” (51:267). On the way, the servant falls into a “boggy dell and takes a very great hurt.”¹¹ There, “he groans and moans and tosses about and writhes, but he cannot rise or help himself in any way.” He suffers many hurts, but the greatest is that he cannot “turn his face to look on his loving lord” His lord sees all that has happened and has full sight of the servant trapped in the dell. Though we might tend to blame the servant for his fall, Julian sees that the lord imputes to the servant no “kind of blame,” but regards the only cause of his falling to be “his good will and his great desire” (51:268). In his tender regard for the servant, the lord determines to “reward him for his fright and his fear, his hurt and his injuries and all his woe.”

After almost twenty years of reflection on the example, Julian understands that the lord is God and the servant is Adam, who represents all of humanity:

[O]ne man was shown at that time and his fall, so as to make it understood how God regards all men and their falling. For in the sight of God all men are one man, and one man is all men. (51:270)

¹¹ As translated by Skinner. Julian, *Revelation of Love*, trans. John Skinner, 1st U.S.A. ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 100.

At this point, the example portrays what Julian has already seen in the earlier revelations, *viz.*, that in God there is no blaming or shaming or wrath at our sin, but we have suffered great harm. If the example stopped here, we might conclude that God does not blame us for our sin because our falling entailed no willful disobedience to God, the account in *Genesis* to the contrary notwithstanding. Julian's enterprise is not, however, to acquit us of our disobedience or of Adam's (see 50:266). As the interpretation of the example unfolds, however, it becomes clear that the reason that God does not blame us lies, not in us, but in God.

As she contemplates the details of the vision, she understands that "in this servant there is a double significance, one outward, the other inward" (51:272). By his skimpy, threadbare attire, it seems that the servant "had been a constant labourer and a hard traveller for a long time" (51:273). This outward view contradicts her "inward perception," by which "it seemed that he was newly appointed, that is to say just beginning to labour, and that this servant had never been sent out before." Julian's attention to this discrepancy finally leads her to the deep meaning of this "double significance": "In the servant is comprehended the second person of the Trinity, and in the servant is comprehended Adam, that is to say all men" (51:274). She understands the full implication of her prior insight that God regards all humans as one human. This oneness encompasses not only Adam and his sinful progeny, but also "Christ's humanity, which is the true Adam." The oneness of humanity is so complete that

[w]hen Adam fell, God's Son fell; because of the true union which was made in heaven, God's Son could not be separated from Adam, for by Adam I understand all mankind. Adam fell from life to death, into the valley of this wretched world, and after that into hell. God's Son fell with Adam, into the valley of the womb of the maiden who was the fairest daughter of Adam, and that was to excuse Adam from blame in heaven and on earth; and powerfully he brought him out of hell. (51:274-75)

This oneness is the predicate of the intersection of the human and divine perspectives in the Passion of Christ.

For humans, the consequence of this oneness of humanity is twofold. It engenders in us “a marvellous mixture of both well-being and woe” (52:279). In our oneness with Adam, we experience “weakness and blindness” (51:275). In our oneness with Jesus Christ, we experience strength and goodness, and we partake of the Father’s regard for the Son: “And so has our good Lord Jesus taken upon him all our blame; and therefore our Father may not, does not wish to assign more blame to us than to his own beloved Son Jesus Christ.”

Though the consequence of this oneness is twofold, our oneness with Christ trumps our oneness with Adam. This priority is implicit in Julian’s Trinitarian view of Jesus. It is explicit in her understanding (1) of God’s beginning-less love for humanity and (2) of the place of the Son in the creation of humanity. First, she sees “that God never began to love mankind ...,” but, in his prescience, has known and loved mankind “from without beginning” (53:283). “[B]efore he made us he loved us” Second, she understands that the Trinity first prepared human nature for the Son (58:293) in fulfillment of the mediator’s desire “to be the foundation and the head of this fair [human] nature ...” (53:283). Thus, all of humanity, including Adam, have come out of the Son, are enclosed in the Son, and shall go to the Son. Man’s soul is “made by God, and in the same moment joined to God” (53:284). Our soul is “preciously knitted to [Christ] in its making, by a knot so subtle and so mighty that it is united in God.” Consequently, “there may and will be nothing at all between God and man’s soul.” This unity with God does not make our redemption unnecessary or unprofitable (53:283), but it does assure us that, in the end, all will be well. Our well-being is eternal; our woe is transitory.

Through the example and her interpretation of it, Julian portrays the divine perspective on humanity and our sin. She also confirms the human perspective as far as it intersects with the divine perspective Christ's Passion. Her answer to the question of how God can not blame us or shame us or be angry with us for our sin is that we must see humanity as God does – from the perspective of the Trinity's beginning-less and endless love for "the noblest thing which he ever made," which has been "treasured and hidden in God, known and loved from without beginning" (53:284).

IV. Scope and Pastoral Purpose of the Assertions

While she often speaks of what the revelations mean to her, Julian writes for an audience and understands the revelations to apply only to that audience. She understands that the Lord intends for the revelations "to apply to all my fellow Christians" and means them for "the comfort of us all" (8:191). "I speak," she says, "of those who will be saved, for at this time God showed me no one else" (9:192; see also 4:182). When the sight of the Lord scorning the devil makes her laugh, she is comforted and wishes that "all my fellow Christians had seen what I saw" (13:202). When the Lord reveals to her that she will sin, he teaches her to "apply it to all my fellow Christians, to all in general and not to any in particular" (37:241; see also 68:315).

When she speaks of her "fellow Christians," she does not seem to include nominal Christians. She acknowledges the Church's teaching that "many who have received baptism and who live unchristian lives and die out of God's love ... will be eternally condemned ..." (32:233). She equates her "fellow Christians," those who will be saved, and those who love God and wish to love him better (see, *e.g.*, 9:191-92).

Julian identifies with this audience and assumes that they, like she, both love God and continue to sin (see, *e.g.*, 49:264). The result is "tribulation, distress and woe, as we fall victims

to our blindness and our evil propensities” We do not sin willingly, but we do sin (see 37:241).

In the present, we have two opposing wills in our souls: “For in every soul which will be saved there is a godly will which never assents to sin and never will” (37:241-42). There is also “an animal will in the lower part which cannot will any good” The result is that we experience opposition or contrariness within ourselves, as with one will we seek to love God and with the other we sin (see 19:212; 47:261; 48:262; 49:264). We have the godly will from our creating, in which God “joined and united us to himself, and through this union we are kept as pure and as noble as we were created” (58:293). The animal will (*i.e.*, “our weakness and blindness”), we inherit from the falling of Adam (51:275).

This contrariness poses a subtle danger for those who “for the love of God hate sin and dispose themselves to do God’s will” (73:322). We “hate sin and [try] to amend ourselves according to the laws of Holy Church ...” (73:323), but we fail. We perceive our wretchedness, and this perception “makes us so woebegone and so depressed that we can scarcely see any consolation.” In our blindness and weakness, we mistake our depression for humility. Because we lack “true judgment,” we fail to “despise it like any other sin” In this depression, we lose sight of God’s love, for we cannot see his loving gaze from the “boggy dell.” Our weakness and blindness persist in this life, causing the lower contemplation to obscure the higher. In this state, we need to hear Julian’s message: God “does not blame me for sin,” that “sin will be no shame,” and that “our Lord was never angry, and never will be.” She writes to relieve the blindness of God’s lovers to God’s love:

And it is about this knowledge that we are most blind, for some of us believe that God is almighty and may do everything, and that he is all wisdom and can do everything, but that he is all love and wishes to do everything, there we fail. (73:323)

Conclusion

By the example of the lord and the servant, Julian confirms the human perspective, while reconciling it with the divine perspective. At the same time, she illustrates how utterly divergent the human and divine perspectives are, except as they intersect in the Passion of Christ. The uncorrected human perspective cannot by philosophical techniques reconcile sin and evil with God's omnipotence and goodness. Only in contemplation of the atonement does God retrain our vision to see ourselves as God sees us and to love ourselves - and our neighbors - as God loves us (see 6:187; 8:190). Only by contemplation of the atonement can we see beyond the dark spot in which we contemplate only our sin.

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