

Sin Is a Form of Love: Julian atte Norwich (James W. Lillie)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



In continuation of the article by Professor Ilias Voulgarakis on *Sin and Love*, it might be worth looking at what the English mystic and recluse “Julian atte Norwich” (ca. 8 November 1342 – ca. 1416) had to say on much the same subject in the *Revelations of Divine Love*:

“A constantly recurring feature of all the revelations which filled my soul with wonder as I diligently observed it, was that our Lord God, as far as he himself is concerned, does not have to forgive, because it is impossible for him to be angry. It was shown that the whole of life is grounded and rooted in love, and that without love we cannot live. So to the soul, privileged by grace to see deeply into the marvellous goodness of God, and to see that we are eternally united to him in love, it is absolutely impossible that God should be angry. Anger and friendship are mutually opposed. And he who mitigates and eliminates our anger and makes us humble and gentle, must surely need himself to be loving, humble, and gentle. And that is the opposite of anger.



It is quite clear that where our Lord is, peace reigns and anger has no place. I could see no sort of anger in God, however long I looked. Indeed, if God were to be angry but for a moment we could not live, endure, or be! Just as we owe our existence to God's everlasting might, wisdom, and goodness, so by these same qualities are we kept in being. And though we wretches know from our own experience the meaning of discord and tension, we are still surrounded in every conceivable way by God's gentleness and humility, his kindness and graciousness. I saw quite clearly that our eternal friendship, our continuing life and existence is in God.

The same eternal goodness that keeps us from perishing when we sin keeps on giving a peace which offsets our own anger and wrong-headed falling. It makes us realize with a genuine dread what is our real need; it urges us strongly to seek God and his forgiveness; by God's grace it makes us want salvation. We cannot be safe and happy until we know real love and peace: that is what salvation is. Even if we, through our own anger and wrong-headedness, do have to go through hardship and discomfort and trouble, which are the outcome of our blind weakness, we are still kept safe and sound by the mercy of God, so that we do not perish. But there will be no joyful salvation or eternal happiness until we are completely at peace and in love. In other words, until we are wholly content with God, his actions, and decisions; until we are in love and at peace with ourselves, our fellow Christians, and with all that God loves. Love is like that. And it is God's goodness that effects this in us.

Thus I saw God to be our true peace, who keeps us safe when we are anything but peaceful, and who always works to bring us to everlasting peace. So when, by the action of his merciful grace, we are made humble and gentle, we are indeed safe. The soul, when it is really at peace with itself, is at once united to God. No anger is found in God. And I realized that when we are in complete and loving peace there is no opposition to God, or any sort of resistance such as we put up now. Indeed the goodness of our Lord turns all this to our profit. The troubles and sorrows, caused by our perversity, the Lord Jesus takes, and lifts up to heaven where they are transformed to things of delight and pleasure greater than our heart can think or tongue can tell. And when we get there ourselves we shall find them waiting for us changed into things of beautiful and eternal worth. God is our sure foundation. And he is going to be our fullest bliss, and even as he himself is in heaven so will he make us- unchangeable!" (Trans. Clifton Wolters).

Julian obviously has much in common with the position proposed by Professor Voulgarakis, but would differ from him on the matter of the restoration. Her view, as a result of the revelations of the Lord which she experienced, was that "All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well". Voulgarakis identifies this as a heresy, perhaps because of the way it was formulated by Origen, whose manner of expression was, indeed, condemned as heresy. It is difficult to say the same, however, of the writings of Saint Gregory of Nyssa.

Unless one indulges in theological gymnastics, it is clear that Saint Gregory argued in favour of a restoration. Saint Mark of Ephesus, who defended the Orthodox version of the purifying fire at the ill-fated Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438-9), regarded Saint Gregory as "wonderful". It is often argued, as here by Professor Voulgarakis, that Orthodoxy accepts a restoration, but not a participation of all in communion with God. There are other Orthodox theologians, however, who argue in favour of a full restoration for all who are capable of being cleansed, provided there is the slightest recognition on their part of their unworthiness.

It is certainly true that Christ gave us the parable of the "Sheep and the Goats", but He also gave us the "Pharisee and the Publican". It was the Pharisee who came from the class of scholars who claimed to be able to parse and dissect the will of God, whereas the Publican simply said: "God be merciful to me, a sinner". According to the Lord, it was the latter who "went down to his home justified".