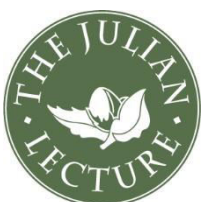


The Julian Lecture 2006

Julian of Norwich: Humane Christianity



Rev. Dr Alan Bartlett



On 13th May, 2006 the Annual Julian Lecture was given by the Revd. Dr. Alan Bartlett in St. Julian's Church, Norwich. He is MA Programme Director and Tutor in Church History, Spirituality and Anglican Studies at Cranmer Hall, St. John's College, University of Durham. He has recently written *Humane Christianity* (DLT 2004) in which he examines how the institutional church, which should be a shining example of God's love in the world, has so often throughout history been the very opposite- corrupt, oppressive, abusive and inhumane. He goes on to show the serious consequences of this inhumanity for Christian witness today. It is in this context that Dr. Bartlett explores the theology of love of Julian of Norwich and points to a more humane Christianity and to a way of loving for Christians that is more attractive, just and compassionate.



[1] I think I need to begin by explaining to you, and to myself, why I am here. I am not an expert on Julian of Norwich. When I read last year's lecture by Canon McLean or looked at the list of your previous speakers, I felt rather intimidated. But of course the reason for the invitation from Professor Thorne, for which I feel very honoured, is a book that I wrote in 1994 entitled *Humane Christianity*.ⁱ In that book I had reflected a little on the importance of Julian for the creation of a more humane version of Christianity; a more life-giving and life-affirming vision of what it is to be a Christian human being than has sometimes been the case in the life of the Church. Therefore this lecture will have perhaps a different flavour to some of its predecessors; less of an exposition of Julian and more of a conversation. I hope to show why her ideas are so crucial for our current urgent task of re-shaping the Church's theology.

I must begin that conversation with some bad news about 'inhumane Christianity'. Let me read you an extract from a recent novel, *Baudolino*, written by the distinguished author and academic, Umberto Eco. It is a fantastical novel set around the time of the Fourth Crusade in 1204.ⁱⁱ At its heart is an account of the sack of Constantinople by the Western Christian crusaders. As you will know, the Crusade was launched by Pope Innocent III to re-capture Jerusalem (again). The crusaders never made it to the Holy Land, having been diverted by the Venetian shipping merchants to whom they were in debt via a burning Byzantine town or two to Constantinople, which was Venice's main trading rival. There were of course two sides to the conflict and, further, the crusaders had been drawn into the attack by one side in a Byzantine power struggle, but even so... The attack culminated in the ransacking of Justinian's cathedral of the Hagia Sophia (Holy Wisdom), the mother church of Greek Orthodoxy. With a little exaggeration, in the words of Steven

Runciman, the great historian of the crusades: 'The sack of Constantinople is unparalleled in history.'ⁱⁱⁱ

As I said, these shameful events have regained literary prominence in the work of one of Europe's leading novelists and 'cultured despisers' (critics) of Christianity, Umberto Eco.^{iv} Listen to his imaginative account of the sack of the cathedral:

[2] But just as he entered, he went white with horror. That vast space was sown with corpses, among which enemy horsemen, foul drunk, were wheeling their mounts. In the distance the rabble was shattering with clubs the silver, gold-edged gate of the tribune. The splendid gate had been bound with ropes to uproot it so it could be dragged off by a team of mules. One drunken band was cursing and prodding the animals, but their hoofs slipped on the polished floor. The soldiers, first with the flat of their swords, then with the tops, incited the poor animals, who in their fear loosed volleys of dung; some mules fell to the ground, breaking their legs, so that the whole area around the pulpit was a gruel of blood and faeces.

Groups of the vanguard of the Antichrist were stubbornly attacking the altars. Niketas saw some of them rip open a tabernacle, seize the chalices, fling to the ground the sacred Hosts, using their daggers to prise loose the gems that adorned the cup, hiding them in their clothes, then throwing the chalice into a general pile, to be melted down. Snickering, some took their saddlebags flasks filled with wine, poured it into the sacred vessel and drank, mimicking the celebrant's actions. Worse still, on the main altar, now stripped, a half-naked prostitute, drunk on liquor, danced with bare feet on the table of the Eucharist, parodying the sacred rites, while the

men laughed and urged her to remove the last of her clothing; she gradually undressed, dancing before the altar the ancient and lewd dance of the cordax, until she finally threw herself, with a weary belch, on the seat of the Patriarch.

While these events were eventually condemned by Pope Innocent III, he did not prevent the imposition of a Latin Church on the Greek Orthodox Empire: church reunion at the point of a sword. There is a terrible sting in the tail of this story. The Greeks regained their independence after about fifty years but the Byzantine Empire never recovered its strength. Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453.^{vi} Justinian's cathedral is now a bare if relatively well-cared for Islamic museum and tourist attraction.

Why do we need to pay attention to this? Precisely because Eco knows what he is doing. He is confronting the institutional church with the ^[3]ugliness of its history, and saying (I caricature): 'And I should believe in this inhumane Faith?'

This is not an obscure academic debate. I need to start this talk by reminding us of the real guilt that the institutional churches, almost all of them, carry from the past, whatever it be: corruption, bitterness, deceit, suppression of the ideas of others, direct persecution of others (which began within only a few years of the ending of pagan persecution), racism, patriarchy, abuse, anti-Semitism. Scarcely a month passes without some scandal from the distant or recent past being aired in the media. It is thought-provoking to note what a huge surge of interest there has been (not entirely unrelated to modern Christian-Moslem tensions) in research into the Crusades. Alongside the expansion of academic studies in the persecution of witches, or the role of the churches under the Nazis, or the work of missionaries in the European colonies, this reminds us that not only

should there be no hiding places for the Church's guilty secrets, there will be no hiding places.

As Church, we have begun to repent of our past, of our 'inhumane Christianity'. Consider, for example, the apologies by Pope John Paul II for past sins of the Roman Catholic Church in respect of Galileo; or the 1995 walk of repentance following the route of the First Crusade; or the apologies by Anglican churches, with others, for the forcible removal, de-culturising and often abuse of the children of the indigenous inhabitants of Canada and Australia; or our shame here in the British Isles at the steady trickle of child sexual abuse cases at the hands of the clergy. But a deep part of the agenda of my book was to remind us that repentance requires self-examination and a change of thinking and attitudes and behaviour, not just sorrow.

Why did all this happen amongst the disciples of Jesus? Were there theological and spiritual reasons for these 'falls' from his values, as well as cultural and historical ones; for this 'inhumane Christianity'? How can we try to ensure that it does not happen again?

And lest we think that this is a theological' matter for internal consumption by the Church, let's remind ourselves that before the last Billy Graham mission, the organisers conducted some public opinion research about the six main reasons why people did not believe in the ^[4]Christian Faith. The 'Church' was one of these six. It is a major problem for us as we attempt to commend faith in Jesus the Christ.

Inside the Church we often, inarticulately, think of ourselves as the 'good guys'. We are committed to love and we do practice care for others. And that is true. One of the intriguing things when the sociologists do some work in the area of volunteering, is to find how

over-represented Christians are in community organisations. But, the way the Church is portrayed by some of the media and some academics is as a reactionary, stupid and oppressive institution that should be helped to fade away. Listen to a quotation from the most recent serious study of the Church in modern Britain:

Many people will be able to identify gains from the decentring of rigid moral codes - such as increased sexual freedom and freedom for diverse sexualities, greater gender equality, and a new tolerance of religious and ethnic difference. One could say, not altogether flippantly, that the decline of Christian certainty in British society since the 1950s has meant that respectability has been supplanted by respect in which moral criticism of difference has been replaced by toleration and greater freedom to live our lives in the way we choose.^{vii}

Now there is much in this with which I disagree but my sadness is that the phrase 'respectability has been supplanted by respect' rings too true of Victorian Christianity.

I do believe that I am part of an institution which has caused huge suffering to many different groups of people. And the deep sadness is that some of these actions have not just been caused by 'ordinary' human greed or lust but have arisen directly out of the Church's own theology.

Let me give you one of the clearest examples. One of the most important books in the history of Western Christianity is *The Rule of St Benedict*. It became the dominant rule for the thousands of monasteries all over Europe and, would have been simply part of the foundations of life for Julian. In many ways it is a spiritual treasure, full of gentle wisdom. But at its heart is a passion to convince the

monks of their utter sinfulness. The longest chapter in the *Rule* is ch.7 on 'humility'. I'll go through it quickly. ^[5]Benedict believed that pride was of the essence of human sinfulness. Self-exaltation was the road to destruction: 'Brothers, divine Scripture calls to us saying: 'Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted'. In saying this, therefore, it shows us that every exaltation is a kind of pride...^{viii} To combat this, Benedict described twelve 'degrees' of humility through which a monk had to pass before reaching a state of liberation in Christ. These start with the essential fear of God and God's punishment: 'The first degree of humility then is that a man keep the fear of God before his eyes...' and 'how hell will burn for their sins those that despise Him...'.^{ix} Progress requires, of course, the rejection of our own will and of our 'evil desires': 'We are indeed forbidden to do our own will by Scripture... We must be on guard, then, against evil desires, for death lies close by the gate of delight...'.^x Degrees 3 and 4 are about obedience within the community: '... a man for the love of God subjects himself to his superior in all obedience... and... that meeting in this obedience with difficulties and contradictions and even injustice, he should with a quiet mind hold fast to patience, and, enduring, neither tire nor run away...'.^{xi}

Degree 5 is confession to the abbot of sinfulness, especially 'secret sins': '... he humbly confess and conceal not from the abbot any evil thoughts that enter his heart, and any secret sins that he has committed'.^{xii} Degree 6 is particularly humiliating and feels, frankly, dishonest and unhelpful: 'The sixth step of humility is that a monk is content with the lowest and most menial treatment, and regards himself as a poor and worthless workman in whatever task he is given...'. Degree 7 requires the monk not just to say that he is the most sinful, but even more to believe it inwardly: '... he should not only in his speech declare himself lower and of less account than all

others, but should in his own inmost heart believe it...'. Degree 8 is about obedience to the rule and to superiors again.

Degree 9 is about silence and Degree 10 is about restricting laughter: '... a monk should do nothing except what is commended...'; 'a monk should restrain his tongue and keep silence, not speaking until he is questioned...'; '... that he be not ready and prompt to laughter...'.^{xv} Benedict seems to have seen laughter as an activity of the fool-citing Ecclesiasticus 21:20. [Why is it that laughter, one of the psychological, physiological and spiritual sources of relief for humankind should be ^[6]forbidden? Why is it that in classic Christian art, of East or West, depictions of the adult Christ smiling are so rare?^{xvi} No wonder we project an inhumane Christ.]

Degree 11 draws 9 and 10 together to produce quietly, seriously and briefly spoken monks: '... a monk, when he speaks, do so gently and without laughter, humbly and seriously, in few and sensible words and without clamour...'.^{xvii} And degree 12 is what I understand to be called 'the courtesy of the eyes': the monk is required to go about when working or in the monastery or out in the world, with 'his head bowed and his eyes downcast, pondering always the guilt of his sins and considering that he is about to be brought before the dread judgement seat of God.'^{xviii} It is difficult to read all this- especially this last instruction - without getting the sense that these disciplines run the risk, in all but the wisest and most psychologically and spiritually balanced of hands, of distorting or even crushing the human spirit. Is there a confusion here between self-exaltation or pride and proper human dignity, responsibility and maturity?

For if we read historical accounts of monastic life, or even some quite modern ones, we will find examples of this sort of discipline and of its destructive consequences. You may have seen Karen Armstrong

on the TV on one of those late-night religious chat-shows. She has become a prolific if rather angry writer on religion. But her views make much more sense when you read her account of her time as a young nun. She is very clear that she is describing a pre-Vatican II experience and she writes of the remarkable changes in her convent after the Council. But the deep structures of obedience remained embedded in the Order. One of her fellow sisters, suffering from chronic anorexia nervosa, quotes the Rule of Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuits:

'Everyone should give himself up into the hands of his superiors', Rebecca quoted St. Ignatius' Rule of Obedience, her eyes steadily boring into mine, 'as a dead body allows itself to be treated in any manner whatever'^{xix}

In reflection Armstrong writes:

Huddled in her mackintosh she was shivering violently, freezing cold on a mild, even warm summer day. Of course she would stay where she was, even if it killed her. A nun was meant to die to ^[7]herself. Rebecca was just taking the idea to its logical conclusion.^{xx}

It is interesting to reflect on Julian's life from this perspective.

We can easily find other examples in the history of the Church of distorted theology producing destructive attitudes to human beings. Most notoriously perhaps are the views of the Protestant Reformers about human sinfulness. Let me read you one of the canons from the Synod of Dort, arguably the most important Reformed gathering in the seventeenth century, and at which the Church of England was officially represented:

Therefore, all people are conceived in sin and are born children of wrath, unfit for any saving good, inclined to evil, dead in their sins, and slaves to sin; without the grace of the regenerating Holy Spirit they are neither willing nor able to return to God, to reform their distorted nature, or even to dispose themselves to such reform.

Let me put this as starkly as I can, at the risk of some simplification: the more sinfulness is conceived as pride, the more the relationship with God, and subsequently with the Church, will be conceived as a conflict which one side has to win. The result can be an oppressive sense of conflict between God and the human being. This is greatly compounded by the extent to which the human being is seen as having been contaminated by sinfulness. If we follow the strict Calvinist line and believe in the 'total depravity' of humankind and of individual human beings, then how can one not want to increase the severity with which human beings should be disciplined for their apparent 'pride'?

But what, then, if 'my' understanding of 'pride' lacks self-awareness; and being in authority over others 'I' do not like what they are doing or saying in criticising 'me' and so 'I' see it as 'pride' to be punished? Here 'I' am on dangerous ground. One man's pride may be another woman's dignity. For if we were to replace the word 'pride' by 'dignity' or 'responsibility' then the problem looks very different.

We need to begin to move to a more positive vision, but before we do I want to summarise what I see as the key ingredients of 'inhumane Christianity'. I think 'inhumane Christianity' has five main component elements that often operate exponentially.

[8] First, there is a denial of the proper goodness of creation, of human created-ness, of all that is good about natural human living as made by God. This has been justified by an interrelated understanding of sin and of perfection. So when the Church has taught about sin, it has done so in such a way that much of human life, and especially human desire, has been understood as essentially concupiscence, or sinfully-driven desire, and often located in the 'flesh' and even more specifically in sexuality. The translation of the Greek word *sarx* into the English word 'flesh', is a topic in itself, but its negative use has filtered through even into modern charismatic choruses. Many of us will have sung the chorus with the line, 'Make my flesh life melt away. As Nigel Forde, a Christian playwright, comments on this song:

God gave me my flesh, and I love it. When I no longer want to hear Bach or birdsong, no longer want to smell wallflowers or bonfires, no longer want to trudge through snow or sit by a blazing fire, drink wine, eat food, soak in a bath, read poetry or write it, then I'll promise I'll sing it. But I don't expect to in this life or expect I'll need to in the next.^{xiv}

Alongside this correlation of sin and embodiment, perfection is often defined as freedom from this world in such a way that it becomes an other - worldly, incorporeal and arguably unnatural account of human living.

This is linked intimately to the second element: the belief that the essential flaw in humanity is pride and that therefore the key spiritual work is to break the human will.^{xxv} Thus both human desire and human will are portrayed in a largely negative light.

The third element is the Church's frequent inability to live in a counter-cultural way, in particular when related to the social,

economic and political hierarchies of human societies. So the Church colludes with the preservation of unjust social orders and justifies this, explicitly or unconsciously, on the basis of the assault on human desire and human pride amongst the disadvantaged.

The fourth element enters the picture when the Church, the visible institutional Church takes to itself inappropriate and unwarranted authority and becomes a master rather than a servant, pretending to be infallible rather than honestly fallible and structurally designed to manage ^[9]the consequences of fallibility. For someone nurtured in the Evangelical tradition, I have to note that this also applies just as much to our handling of the Bible.

The fifth element is an inappropriate, unrealistic and even illusory supernaturalism that fosters belief in systematic miraculous interventions at the cost not only of truthfulness but also of a commitment to enabling people to develop towards mature human responsibility.

So we create a Church that is hostile to human desires and careless about human dignity, indifferent to a full life in this world but also too closely allied to existing unequal human power structures and authoritarian in its attitudes and practices. We see churches that in theory teach Christian poverty and obedience but in practice enforce submission to unjust structures and promise relief only in the next life or perhaps through a miracle in this life, thereby playing on people's deepest desires and longings but without enabling them to strive positively for change. A caricature? Perhaps, but we have already found much hard historical evidence to back up this gloomy view. It is this oppressive and inhumane version of Christianity whose time has been called by modern Western society. Whilst there is much to lament in the end of Christendom, if it forces us to exorcise

the destructive aspects of Western Christianity, so that the life-giving message and work of Jesus of Nazareth can be seen again, then this is ground for hope.

I imagine you can begin to see why, when I was introduced to the writing of Julian, her profound sense of the love of God was such a contrast to this 'inhumane Christianity'. Part of the rationale for the book was to explore people and ideas in the Christian Tradition which provide resources for a different vision of the purpose and nature of Christian faith: that without being unrealistic about the reality of sin, it is clearly and explicitly focused on faith in a God who is always the life-giver. Sin for Christians is like disease for the NHS; it is a symptom to be addressed but addressing it is not our ultimate purpose; that is human flourishing.

Before continuing the conversation with Julian, I want, very briefly, to summarise the key theological ingredients of 'Humane Christianity'.

[10] I believe that many of our problems flow from a distorted theological understanding of the significance of Jesus of Nazareth as God incarnate, not least, ironically, a devaluing of his real humanity. A firm hold on this conviction that Jesus is God's Son in human form, and what that implies for humankind, is the theological engine that is driving my vision of a 'Humane Christianity'. It has an important correlate: that the consequences of faith in the role of the Son in the work of creation are also crucial for 'Humane Christianity'.

The place to start our theology is where the Bible starts - which is with the goodness of creation. Many ancient religions regarded creation, matters, things, flesh, as bad, as something from which spiritual human beings had to escape. But the constant refrain in Genesis 1, 'and God saw that it was good', gives the lie to that and

for all the complexities of the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures celebrate the goodness of creation and of our place as human beings as 'the crown of creation'. And there are three really important things to notice here:

First, that human beings are inescapably physical. God made us to be a mixture of physical and spiritual. It was not a mistake. Bodies are good. Therefore as Christians we can never show contempt for the rest of creation or for our own physicality.

Second, that God is still involved in the work of creation. It is an ongoing project. The world is still developing. And if we read Genesis 1 carefully we catch little theological pointers to the conviction that God so created the world that it continues to develop through mechanisms built into it. This is not an argument about evolution. It is an argument about how we understand God's involvement with His world. We tend to think of God creating the world and then sitting down and resting. The world goes wrong and God leaps up to rescue it. But if the work of creation is still happening as it is, God is involved in the work of creation and redemption at the same time. We can't divide up these two sorts of activities. The world God is creating is the world God is saving. Therefore, we of all people should treat the world and all that it comprises, including human beings, with some reverence. And what the Early Church had learned from the New Testament, from John's Gospel, but which we so often forget, is that the Word made Flesh was also and is always the Word active in creation.

[¹¹]Third: God has confirmed all this by sending His Son, Christ, to take flesh, to become a real flesh and blood human being, not a pretend one. We could spend many hours on this, but here I want to say very simply that when God adopted into Himself human nature

at the Incarnation, in the minds of some of the greatest theologians of the Church, He was adopting into Himself our physical as well as our spiritual natures. To put it very very crudely, there is a Man in heaven now. Again, that has serious and non-negotiable consequences for the respect with which Christians should treat any other human being: made in the image of God and now intended to be united with God for eternity.

One of the greatest of the theologians of the Early Church, Irenaeus, wrote, I think, one of the best summaries of God's purposes ever written:

For the glory of God is a living man, and the life of man consists in beholding God: for if the manifestation of God through the creation affords life to all living on earth, much more does that revelation of the Father which comes through the Word give life to those who see God.^{xxvi}

Or as a more modern translation puts it: 'the glory of God is a human being fully alive'. God's purposes for human beings are life-giving in this world and in the next. How then can we as Christians do anything that counters that?

If these are some of the theological conclusions we might draw from doctrines of creation and redemption, there is one more crucial insight to note before we reach Julian: just as God's purposes are life-giving, so are God's methods. Time does not allow me to develop this, but a distinguished Anglican, Richard Hooker, Elizabeth I's greatest theologian, gives us insights into a God who does not work by just dominating human beings.

Hooker argued that when God saves this world he does so by becoming part of it, including its limitations, and in doing this He maintains respect for the dignity of humanity, not least by what we might call self-limitation. God does not overpower us into loving Him and His world. He is our helper more than our master.

[12] There are two elements to this. First there is the point, so obvious when we look honestly at the world, (and normally included in arguments of theodicy), that God often appears at worst absent and at best hidden. Hooker expressed this elegantly:

If therefore it be demanded, why God having power and ability infinite, the effects notwithstanding of that power are all so limited as we see they are: the reason hereof is the end which he hath proposed, and the law whereby his wisdom hath stinted the effects of his power in such sort, that it doth not work infinitely, but correspondingly unto the end for which it worketh, even 'all things chrestos [well] in most decent and comely sort.'^{xxvii}

Here Hooker is attempting to relate God's purposes and his means. God desires that all shall be well. But one of the conditions of the world 'being well' is that human beings grow into the sorts of persons God hopes we will be. That requires God to step back from constant visible direct intervention. All will be well', but by growth not by divine dictat.

Second, God works co-operatively with human beings, especially with their reason. It is this significance that Hooker gives to humble human reason that makes him, for me, a theologian of human dignity. Rather than lots of quotations, let me give you one of my

favourites. Hooker is discussing the authority of Scripture, which he regarded as infallible, but he comments:

For our belief in the Trinity, the co-eternity of the Son of God with his Father, the proceeding of the Spirit from the Father and the Son, the duty of baptising infants: these with such other principal points, the necessity whereof is by none denied, are notwithstanding in Scripture nowhere to be found by express literal mention, only deduced they are out of Scripture by collection.^{xxviii}

Note here that Hooker is not wanting to undermine the authority of the Bible but he is pointing out how many crucial beliefs of the Church have to be derived from the Bible by a process of reasoned thought and argument, not simply read off the page. If we study the life of the early Church we see what a complex process this reasoned argument was. But is this an accident, or is it sinful? No. Hooker responds to precisely this point:

So I trust that to mention what the Scripture of God leaveth unto the Church's discretion in some things, is not in any thing to ^[13]Scripture's perfection... it is no more disgrace for Scripture to have left a number of other things free to be ordered at the discretion of the Church, than for nature to have left it unto the wit of man to devise his own attire.^{xx}

Here is a marvellous vision of the integrated world that God has created and which is part of his way of redemption. Just as God has left it to human beings to work out how to clothe themselves a metaphor for growing into proper responsibility for our welfare- so even in areas of the truth about God himself and about the Christ-like life and - for Hooker in particular about how the Church is to be

run, God requires us to work at it for ourselves. He does not always give us the answers on a plate. God's own truth is revealed by the process of reasoned human reflection on God's revelation, which itself comes to us in a range of ways. God has made us so that we can, need and ought to discern his purposes: by prayer; study of Scripture; reasoned discussion; listening to the wisdom and traditions of the past, Christian and non-Christian; all working together. This is giving a high value to human responsibility, maturity and dignity. Therefore, we too must treat all human beings, inside and outside the Church, with the same dignity with which God treats them. Whilst Julian's idiom is different, using rather the language of 'courtesy', I believe her sense of collaboration with God is deeply similar to this.

Now, Julian is not an unequivocally positive witness for 'Humane Christianity'. It would be an anachronism to imagine otherwise, but hear her on the imagery of sinfulness. At times she seems to have regarded her body in a deeply negative light. She wrote:

During this time I saw a body lying on the earth. It looked heavy and horrible, shapeless and formless, like a swollen mound of stinking compost. And suddenly out of this body there sprang a most beautiful creature, a little child, perfectly shaped and formed, agile and lively, and whiter than a lily, who at once glided up into heaven. The swollen body stood for the awful wretchedness of our mortal flesh and the smallness of the child for the utter purity of the soul. I thought: 'Nothing of this child's beauty is left behind on this body, and the child is uncontaminated by the body's filth.'^{xxxii}

This runs against so much of what I have been arguing for. It is understandable from one perspective. A diseased or even a decaying ^[14]human body is an ugly sight and there is therefore a strong sense

of longing to be away from it. But there is little acceptance here of the intrinsic goodness of a healthy embodied human life.

And yet, despite her profound sense of sin and mortality, Julian also had a great vision of the splendour of what it is to be a human being. Earlier she writes of God's generous work in nature and in grace:

He has put some sort of nature on all the different creatures, but in man the parts all come together. Man's nature is whole, with all its powers. It is completely beautiful, good, kingly and noble. It is everything that is magnificent, precious and glorious.

For her and this is one of the examples of her remarkable theological breadth the glory of humanity is that Christ was destined to be human and humanity was destined to be drawn into the love and bliss of Christ:

This lovely human nature was made for Christ so that man could be created in glory and beauty, and saved for joy and bliss.^{xxxiv}

This is an immensely positive vision of what it is to be human. This is a celebration of human nature which means that we should with Paul, rejoice where we see:

whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

This provides us with a theological basis for genuine thankfulness and affirmation of the best of human nature. It can free us from a sort of defensiveness in Christian theology about human goodness.

Part of that defensiveness comes from the Augustinian-Protestant theology, which was so anxious about human attempts to win God's approval. The positive side of that theology was the stress on the grace of God which pre-empted and under-girds all human life and response, and a certain realism about the morally and spiritually mixed character of even the best of our actions. But the negative side was the conviction that all human activity was in a very profound sense, morally and spiritually meaningless or even deceptive, because only God alone could save. And that mattered because, as we saw earlier, God's fundamental stance over against humanity was one of judgement. Crudely speaking, our Augustinian-Protestant heritage tells us we are all so ontologically sinful that we all deserve our punishment at God's hands.

[15] It is this nightmare near the heart of Western Christianity that Julian so amazingly subverted, and this is what makes her such good news for 'Humane Christianity'. Julian finished her manuscript with a dialogue with God about the purpose of her visions:

From the time it was first revealed to me, I often longed to know what our Lord meant. More than fifteen years later I was answered. Spiritual enlightenment came with the words, 'Do you want to know what our Lord meant in all this? Learn it well: love was what he meant. Who showed it you? Love. What did he show you? Love. Why did he show it? Out of love... So I was taught that love was what our Lord meant.'

Unerringly Julian in her writing, pinpoints the objection that many people, especially those coming from a more conservative Evangelical background, bring to her ideas. There is not enough 'wrath' here. She wrote:

I could not see any kind of anger in God, neither short-lived not longer-lasting indeed if God were angry even for a moment we could never live, we should simply cease to be.

When we imagine God to be angry with us, it is precisely that, our distorted and sin-corrupted imagination. God loves us even in our sin, in Julian's beautiful phrase, 'with pity not with blame'. This does not mean Julian is blind to or complacent about her own sin. Far from it. But she is absolutely certain that God's love is absolute and certain. It is an entirely different conception from the God who fiercely waits to punish us if we have not dealt with the legacy of original sin in our lives. Sin is an incidental and soluble problem. It should not dominate our Christian theology and spirituality. Julian's is a vision of the Christian life fundamentally driven by love, not by fear. Therefore, it fits well with the vision of trying to live the Christian life in this world for positive and not negative reasons.

If we as a Church were to adopt some of these values and work them through more thoroughly into how we actually live as Church, then we would commend faith in Jesus more effectively in our humanist world but more importantly, we would be closer to being in reality and not just in rhetoric, the disciples of Jesus.

What might this look like? I do not want to and cannot offer a blueprint, but here are a few ideas:

- ^[16]We live the Christian life for positive reasons - we are 'saved for' not 'saved from'. Therefore we do not live out of a spirituality of fear but rather a spirituality of gift and most profoundly, of love.
- We enjoy the good gifts of God's creation, including sensual pleasure. We don't do this naively (about our own propensity to sin) and above all we don't do this selfishly. If we are immersed in love then the needs of others will weigh on us as a debt of love. Therefore there will still be self-discipline and self-sacrifice, but out of a different motive. Justice and compassion will be our core values.
- We reverence God's good gifts to us, especially His creation and human beings within it. We can be at the fore-front of care for the environment and striving for human welfare and human rights. We will treat all human beings, inside and outside the Church, with the same dignity with which God treats them.

But we will not neglect the spiritual aspect of human life. God created and saves us as complete human beings - body, mind and spirit. Our life will be with God for eternity. Therefore however much we throw ourselves into redeeming this world, we will not be tied to this. We will not despair when we fail because God's good purposes and justice will win through. That is what belief in the Cross and Resurrection means. Therefore prayer and worship are not irrelevant luxuries, but part of the essence of what it is to be human. Again, Julian shows us this.

Let me end with some of the closing phrases of *Humane Christianity* and more importantly with one of Julian's most famous sayings: all shall be well'.

We do live in a frightening world. I worry not for my children but for my (potential) grandchildren. What sort of world are we bequeathing them? What sort of environment will they inhabit? Will their world be more just and more compassionate than ours? What will motivate their generation to strive for a good life? Julian reminds us that the Incarnation, Cross and Resurrection show us the future. In Jesus we have God's guarantee that the best of Humanity will be saved for ever. That is why all shall be well'. Julian kept and shared that faith in an England marked by the Black Death. Surely we can keep, share and live it in our difficult age.

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References

- i) Bartlett, A. (1994). *Humane Christianity*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd.
- ii) For a balanced introduction to recent writing on the Crusades, I recommend Riley-Smith, Jonathan (1999). *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Crusades*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, especially chapter 1.
- iii) Runciman, S. (1954). *A History of the Crusades*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, volume 3, 'The Kingdom of Acre', p. 123.
- iv) See his debates with the Cardinal of Milan in Eco, U. & Montini, M. (2001). *Belief or Nonbelief*. New York: Arcadia.
- v) Eco, U. (2002). *Baudolino*. London: Quality Paperbacks Direct edition., p. 16. This is not an exaggeration. See Runcimann, *Kingdom of Acre*, p. 123 for an account that mirrors that of Eco.
- vi) See S. Runciman, S. (1965). *The Fall of Constantinople*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Appendix 2.
- vii) Brown, Callum G. (2001) *The Death of Christian Britain*. London: Routledge. p. 2.
- viii) Rule of St. Benedict, chapter 7. Benedict is quoting Luke 14:11. *The Rule of St. Benedict* (translated by J. McCann) (1976). London: Sheed & Ward. (hereafter RB). Another accessible version with commentary is de Waal, E. (1995) *A Life-Giving Way*. London: Geoffrey Chapman. Benedict is quoting Luke 14:11.
- ix) RB, p. 17.
- x) RB, p. 18.
- xi) RB, p. 19.
- xii) RB, p. 20.
- xiii) de Waal, *Life-Giving Way*, p. 49.

- xiv) RB, p. 20.
- xv) RB, p. 21.
- xvi) In researching the front cover for the book many of us spent much time, fruitlessly, trying to find such a picture.
- xvii) RB, p. 21.
- xviii) RB, p. 21.
- xix) Armstrong, K. (1984). *Beginning the World*. London: Pan. p. 41.
- xx) Ibid, p. 41.
- xxi) Synod of Dort, Article 3.
- xxii) Augustine hugely and tragically compounded this by connecting sexual intercourse and reproduction with the passing on of 'original sin'. The complexity of Augustine's thinking is well-expressed in Bonner, G. (1986). *St. Augustine of Hippo. Life and Controversies*. Norwich: Canterbury Press. p. 378. *It is from, and by, concupiscence that the guilt of Original Sin is conveyed from the parents to the child. Concupiscence itself is not Original Sin; it is a wound and vice of human nature, making it a slave to the devil; can be the occasion of sin, even in the baptized; and is the means whereby Original Sin is transmitted. It is an infection which conveys an inherited legal liability'* (my italics). Bonner also crisply explains Augustine's (and Jerome's) mistranslation of Romans 5:12 which drove him to stress that human guilt was transmitted *seminally (literally) from Adam rather than being an issue of repeated human falling*. For a gentle defence of Augustine and an illuminating placement of him in his context, which does much to undermine modern 'demonising' of him, see Harrison, C. (2000). *Augustine. Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- xxiii) See the crucial discussion in Dunn, J. D. G. (1998). *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark. pp. 51-73 for an extensive and insightful review of the range of meanings of

soma, 'embodiment, and sarx, 'flesh', in Paul's writing. Briefly, Dunn argues for the continued translation of sarx by 'flesh' because it is a technical term for Paul (p. 70), but stresses that whereas sarx encompasses a range of meaning tending towards the negative- human physicality, mortality and frailty vulnerable to the pressures of sin-soma gives potential for a positive celebration of our embodied createdness. He writes: 'we could say that Paul's distinction between soma and sarx made possible a positive affirmation of human createdness and creation and of the interdependence of humanity within its created environment' (p. 73). I am indebted to conversation with my colleague Dr Mark Bonnington on this point.

- xxiv) In Fife, J. (1993). *To Be Honest*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd. p. x. I am indebted to my colleague the Revd. Charles Read for this reference.
- xxv) Strictly speaking, the sin in Genesis 3 is disobedience, not pride as such. Hence metaphors of rebellion' in much Christian evangelism. But the root cause of this 'rebellion' is often portrayed as pride, or a human unwillingness to remain in an appropriately creaturely, humble, situation with respect to God's authority. Hence the language of pride is the most apt. But, more broadly, if we read the Genesis narrative not as a paradigmatic Fall - Genesis 3- followed by examples of its consequences in 'real' life, but rather as one (if crucial) account of what it is to be 'sinful', but amplified by other insights into human sinfulness, then we find ourselves with a range of interpretations: the jealousy and resentment leading Cain to violence (Genesis 4); the marriage of the 'sons of God' to the daughters of men suggesting a crossing of God-given boundaries and a rivalry with God, which resulted in evil and especially violence (Genesis 6); the Tower of Babel suggesting arrogance and competition with God (Genesis 11).

- xxvi) *Adversus Haeresis* 4. xx. 7, p. 490.
- xxvii) Hooker, R. *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity (Laws)* volume 1. ii. 3, p. 152. The quotation is from Wisdom 8:1.. Currently the most straightforward way to read Hooker is to find a second-hand Everyman edition of Books I-V of the Laws, first published in the 1590s. The outstanding critical edition is the recent Folger Edition. My quotations are normally taken from the Everyman edn. but checked against the Folger edn.
- xxviii) *Laws* 1. xiv.2, p. 216. The point of citing this reference is not that these points of doctrine are ones that all Christians today would regard as necessary but that they were so seen in the sixteenth century.
- xxix) I think that, contrary to popular opinion, the most disturbing element of theological training for Evangelicals is not biblical criticism but this dawning awareness of how the Church had to wrestle to discern both the canon of the New Testament and further, how to express such fundamental beliefs as the divinity and humanity of Christ, when Scripture did not speak with an unqualified clarity, as in the debate with Arianism. See Lohse, B. (1985). *A Short History of Christian Doctrine* (revised edition). Philadelphia: Fortress Press. Chapters 2 and 3, or White, G. (1993). *The Mother Church Your Mother Never Told You Of*. London: SCM Press. Chapters 2, 5 and 7.
- xxx) *Laws* 3.iv. 1, p. 303.
- xxxi) Hooker stretches sixteenth-century Protestant theology a long way. At times he sounds very clear cut: 'It is our wisdom, and our comfort; we care for no knowledge in the world but this, that man hath sinned, and God hath suffered; that God hath made himself the sin of men, and that men are made the righteousness of God' (Justification, p. 21). But he strains to be inclusive. He writes of the pagan Gentiles: 'In this which they confessed, that lieth covered which we believe, in the

rudiments of their knowledge concerning God, the foundation of our faith concerning Christ lieth secretly wrapt up, and is virtually contained...' (Ibid. p. 43). He rather backs away from the radicalness of this position but it is an indicator of how he was trying to tie together his valuing of common human wisdom with Christian revelation and salvation.