

Sayings of Madame Guyon

The love of God encompasses everything within itself and everything that is rooted in love stems from God.

To seek after God in the right way is easier and more natural than breathing.

God, is only to be found in our inner selves, which is the holy of holies where God dwells.

Prayer is the application of the heart to God, and the internal exercise of love... To attract and draw the soul into the rest of love, and not into the many ways of the self.

All who desire to pray may pray without difficulty as they are strengthened by those universal graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit which all men and women possess.

Prayer is the guide to perfection, and prayer delivers us from every vice, and gives us every virtue; for the one way to become perfect is to walk in the presence of God.

Prayer from the heart is not interrupted by the thoughts from a person's mind. Indeed nothing can interrupt this prayer except for ungodly inclinations.

Salvation consists in a total change of the whole person as he turns from his outer life to his inner life.

The greatest book in the world is Jesus Christ himself. He will teach you everything that can be readily understood by the inner self.

To experience for oneself all the many things that afflicted Jesus Christ, is far more sublime, than merely to think about them.

Our souls can only be renewed when we are passive towards the Spirit who alone can renew us. For who can restore the image of God within us in its original form, except for Jesus Christ himself who is the essential image of his Father?

They must learn how to close their human eyes and how to open their spiritual eyes. Then they should concentrate on building up their inner spiritual being and, through their trust in their God who lives in them, come into the divine presence.

Do not turn to prayer hoping to enjoy spiritual delights; rather come to prayer totally content to receive nothing or to receive great blessing from God's hand, which ever should be your heavenly Father's will for you at that time. This will enable you to live close to God in times of sadness as well as in times when you are being comforted by God.

In a similar way when our emotions are set on fire, if we try to stir them up even more, we extinguish the flame, and the soul is deprived of its nourishment. We should, therefore, in stillness and quiet, with respect, confidence, and love, swallow the blessed food that we have tasted.

The ideas we have of the divine being fall infinitely short of what he really is. A living faith in his presence is all we need.

We can rest assured that God will never give up with us until we are totally given over to God. Then he will kill off in us anything that remains alive but which ought to be put to death. All we have to do is to remain faithful to God and wholly attentive to his will, and everything that is necessary will be given to us.

The closer the soul draws to God, the further she travels from her own wishes. In this way the influence on her life from her passions diminishes. The soul should have a pure and disinterested love, as it seeks nothing from God, but only to please him, and to do his will.

The interior is not a stronghold to be taken by storm and violence; but a kingdom of peace, which is to be gained only by love.

When at any time the passions are turbulent, a gentle retreat inwards to a present God, easily deadens and pacifies them. To contend with them, in any other way, only serves to irritate rather than appease them.

The only way to achieve mortification is through inner recollection.

Besides the potent magnetism of the centre itself, there is, in every creature, a corresponding tendency to reunion with its own particular centre, and this is vigorous and active in proportion to the spirituality and perfection of the subject.

The more passive and tranquil the soul remains, and the freer she is from self-motion and self-exertion, the more rapidly she advances, because the energy of that central attractive virtue is unobstructed.

We have to dedicate the present moment to God since this brings with it God's eternal order, and is an infallible declaration of his will which has to be carried out and is incumbent on everyone. We must attribute nothing that happens to us as if it came from man but see God's hand in everything.

We must cooperate with and help to bring about God's purposes which tend to strip us of all our own self-effort so that God may be enthroned in our lives. Let this be done in you; and do not allow yourself to be attached to anything, however good it may appear.

This action of the soul is accompanied with the utmost tranquillity. When she lives selfishly the act is forced and constrained; and, therefore, she can easily perceive it: but when she lives under the influence of the Spirit of grace, her action is so free, so easy, and so natural, that it almost seems as if she did not act at all.

Madame Guyon

1648-1717

The French mystic Madame Jeanne-Marie Bouvier de la Motte-Guyon is known, today, as Madame Guyon. She was born in Mentargis, about 50 miles south of Paris, on April 13th, 1648. Her parents were of standing and piety. Her own childhood was beset with many illnesses and a change of home address nine times in ten years did nothing to strengthen her delicate and sensitive character. Her education was minimal. Aged twelve, upon reading St Francis de Sales and Madame de Chantel, she sought the gift of prayer. In 1664, aged sixteen, she married a man over twice her age. The marriage was arranged by her parents. Twelve years later she lost two children to small-pox and her husband in quick succession, leaving her a widow at twenty-eight with three young children.

A Barnabite friar, priest and popular preacher, Père François Lacombe became her spiritual director. In 1676, four years after the death of her husband she began travelling with Lacombe and her youngest daughter, leaving her other children behind.

In her autobiography she related how she passed through interior experiences into ever deeper states of prayer. She had several years in which prayer was easy for her and God was ever present. Then a period of eight years of spiritual dryness that she called 'mystical death' in which God seemed absent: she lost all interest in matters spiritual and was frightened of her sinfulness. From September 1683 to May 1684, she suffered an emotional illness in which she believed herself utterly possessed by God: her own will being so given over and consecrated to God that she described her actions as truly being God working through her. She saw herself as being in an 'apostolic state' during which she preached her view of the mystical life rather than the Gospel of Christ. Teaching the mystical life gained her many followers amongst the clergy and French high society.

We do well to remember her simplicity in evaluating her teachings on 'the prayer of simplicity' as best shown in her most famous work 'Moyen court et très facile de faire oraison' (*A Short and Very Easy Method of Prayer*). It was published in 1685. The following year she and Père Lacombe moved to Paris. Frequently accused of a wrong relationship with Père Lacombe, her moral life has never been faulted. The Archbishop of Paris, François de Harlay de Champvallon, wished his great-nephew to marry Madame Guyon's daughter but was thwarted. Consequently he had Lacombe arrested in 1687 on the charge of teaching Molinos' heresies and the priest spent the rest of his life in the Bastille and other prisons. He died in a lunatic asylum at Charenton in 1715.

A few months after Lacombe's arrest, on 9th January 1688, the Archbishop had Madame Guyon arrested. She alleged this was arranged by her own brother also a Barnabite, Père de La Motte. She was detained in the Convent of St Marie. After she produced a written retraction of her work at the insistence of theologians, she was released seven months later by

the good offices of Madame Maintenon, the second wife of King Louis XIV.

Within a few days, at the home of the Duchess de Béthune-Charrost, she met the man who became her most famous supporter. Her piety and inspirational speaking won over the Abbé François de Salignac de Lamothe Fénelon. For many years he supported her teaching on 'the prayer of quiet' and 'the union of pure love'. He later became Archbishop of Cambrai.

Along with many mystics she taught that 'abandonment involves us in casting off of all self-centred concern so that we may be completely at God's disposal.' Compare this with 'Be still, and know that I am God' (Ps. 46:10). The ecclesiastical authorities were very suspicious, jealous and opposed to her, maintaining that she minimised the importance of the external world, the value of good works, charity and the role of church hierarchy.

This 'contemplative in action' (Ignatius of Loyola's definition of a mystic) wrote forty four other books including her autobiography. This last, like St Thérèse of Lisieux, was at the insistence of her spiritual director.

Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Theologia Germanica*, Meister Eckhart, Teresa of Avila, and Ignatius of Loyola taught comparable truths. Protestants of the stature of John Wesley, Count Zinzendorf, Hudson Taylor and Watchman Nee have praised *A Short and Very Easy Method of Prayer* for its ability to draw the reader into a fuller relationship with Our Saviour.

On Mary Magdalen's Day in 1672, aged 24, she had made a spiritual marriage with the Lord asking only for a dowry of 'crosses, scorn, confusion, disgrace and ignominy'. These she got. Bishop Bossuet of Meaux - who was a great influence on Jean-Pierre de Caussade - was asked by Madame Guyon to examine all her writings with a view to assessing their theological correctness in September 1693. The following year he offered to give her a certificate of general orthodoxy. Public outcries lead to a Conference at Issy under Bishop Bossuet, De Noailles (Bishop of Chalons) and Tronson (Superior of St Sulpice). Bossuet was vehemently opposed to her and she was imprisoned in December 1695. She was released in poor health in 1702, aged fifty four, and banished to Blois. There she died on June 9th, 1717.

The Revd Neil Broadbent

Bibliography

- Backhouse, Halcyon, (Ed:) *A Short & Easy Method of Prayer*, Madame Guyon, Hodder and Stoughton, 1990.
Fairweather, W., *Among the Mystics*, T & T Clark, 1936.
Upham, T.C., *The Life of Madame Guyon*, Allenson & Co, 1961.