

Sayings of Johann Tauler

The soul is [God's] image, the same Image God possesses within His own pure divine Essence. And here, in this Image, God loves and comprehends Himself and rejoices in Himself. He lives and works and has His Being in the soul.

Just as my cloak and my clothes are not me and yet serve me, so also vocal prayer serves and leads occasionally to true prayer, although it falls short of being that by itself. For true prayer is a direct raising of the mind and heart to God, without intermediary. This and nothing else is the essence of prayer.

Who knows where and when and by what means God will choose to come and bestow His gifts? It is a hundred times better to stand patiently under the shelter of the divine will than to aspire toward high virtue with its full-blown emotional satisfactions which we love so dearly.

The nobler things are, the commoner they are. Love is noble, because it is universal.

It is indeed a wilderness into which God is taking us: a life of detachment in which we shed our desires, spiritual and natural, in our interior and exterior life.

He who desires to become a spiritual man must not be ever taking note of others, and above all of their sins, lest he fall into wrath and bitterness, and a judging spirit towards his neighbours.

Sayings of *The Theologia Germanica*

Sin is self-will.

Nothing burns in Hell but self-will.

We should mark and know of a very truth that all manner of virtue and goodness, and even that Eternal Good which is God himself, can never make a man virtuous, good, or happy, so long as it is outside the soul; that is, so long as the man is holding converse with outward things through his senses and reason, and doth not withdraw into himself, and learn to understand his own life who and what he is.

Christ's human nature was so utterly bereft of Self and apart from all creatures as no man's ever was. Neither of that in him which belonged to God, nor of that which was a living human nature and a habitation of God, did he, as man, claim any thing for his own. His human nature did not even take unto itself the Godhead, whose dwelling it was, nor anything that this same Godhead willed, or did or left undone in him, nor yet any thing of all that his human nature did or suffered; but in Christ's human nature there was no claiming of any thing, nor seeking nor desire, saving that what was due might be rendered to the Godhead; and he did not call this very desire his own.

As it is with the will, so it is with knowledge, reason, power, love, and everything that moves in man: It is all God's domain, not man's.

[God] wishes to lead our spirit to the very heights—so noble is it—beyond the body, into a spiritual realm. He desires the body to retain its dignity, being practiced in virtue, in trials and rejections, patiently borne. God wills that both spirit and body should hold their proper place, so that they may be reunited in a dignity a thousand times higher, devoid of all fear

Think, and think earnestly, how great, how unutterable will be the joy and blessedness, the glory and honour of those who shall see clearly and without veil the gladsome and beauteous face of God, how they will enjoy the best and highest good, which is God Himself. For in Him is included all pleasure, might, joy, and all beauty, so that the blessed in God will possess everything that is good and desirable, with everlasting joy and security, without fear lest they should ever be parted from Him.

The people who want to prepare their own souls and not give themselves up to God have their faculties entangled in their faults to such a degree that they cannot free them. They don't even want to, but prefer the pleasure of following their own wills.

But the others, who have risen above themselves to God, hasten to Him with their misfortune at the first onslaught and victory of sin, in such a way that there is no longer sin, because they enjoy a godlike freedom.

Such acceptance of the present is not meant to be an abject submission to "what happens to be" but a faith-filled willingness to confront the present reality confident in God's faithfulness.

Sin is nought else, but that the creature turns away from the unchangeable Good and takes itself to the changeable; that is to say, that it turns away from the Perfect, to 'that which is in part' and imperfect, and most often to itself. Now mark: when the creature claims for its own anything good, such as substance, life, knowledge, power, and in short whatever we should call good, as if it were that, or possessed that, or that were itself, or that proceeded from it - as often as this comes to pass, the creature goes astray.

The truly religious man is always more concerned about what God will do *in* him than what He will do *to* him; in his intense desire for the purification of his motives he almost wishes that heaven and hell were blotted out, that he might serve God for Himself alone.

In a divinized person the godly characteristic is humility deep in a person's being. Where there is no humility we cannot speak of a divinized person. Christ taught this in words, works, and life.

Where the will is entirely surrendered the rest would certainly be surrendered, too. This is how God would receive back His own and how, at the same time, man's will would not be his own. God has created the will but not in order that it become self-will.

Sin is to assert self-will in independence of and against the eternal Will.

Tauler was born in Strasbourg around the year 1300. At 15 he entered the Dominican convent, becoming a 'Black Friar', a member of the Order of Preachers. In 14 years of study he listened to the great mystic Meister Eckhart - 'the founder of German philosophy' - the mystic John of Sternengassen and the theologian, John of Dambach. It is likely that he knew the mystic Ruysbroeck at Groenendael. He completed his studies in Cologne.

He was sent to Basle in Switzerland in 1340 for three years where he met the mystical group 'Gottesfreunde' - Friends of God. During this period he 'dried up' in the cathedral pulpit one Sunday and was banned from preaching for two years! He preached at least 145 sermons and hearers wrote notes on them - which is all we have. His style of preaching was both dignified and homely. He protested against ecclesiastical routine practice as a sufficient lifestyle for 'being in Christ', e.g. during the Black Death of 1348 he gave himself to caring for the sick and dying.

The value of his sermons comes from self-knowledge, humility and awareness of the Spirit of Christ within. A wounded healer, he preached on suffering and God, mysticism and love of one's neighbour, grace and works. To quote Tauler: "With whomsoever you rejoice, and with whomsoever you sorrow, with him will you also be judged." He stresses finding God in the 'here and now' and compassion.

He had an ecstatic experience which lasted "half an Ave Maria" in which he entered the divine darkness and experienced an at-oneing of his soul with God, with the result that his preaching and care were greatly deepened. He did not dwell on this. Robert Vaughan in *Hours with the Mystics* describe Tauler and the *Theologia Germanica* as 'standing almost alone in rejecting the sensuous element of mysticism—its apparitions, its voices, its celestial phantasma. With many of his friends mysticism became secluded, effeminate and visionary, because it was not balanced by benevolent action; in Tauler's case by devoted conflict against priestly wrong.'

He was living proof that mystical experience roots one in both the glories of God and great practical compassion for all creation: 'Mercy is born of that love which we ought to exercise towards each other.'

'God does not lead all His servants by one road, nor in one way, nor at one time; for God is in all things; and that man is not serving God aright, who can only serve Him in his own self-chosen way.' His sermons continue to feed us in the 21st Century.

Bibliography

Vaughan, Robert, *Hours with the Mystics*, Gibbing & Co., London, 1893.

Inge, W.R., *Light, Life and Love*, Methuen & Co., London, 1935.

Martin Luther is credited with discovering this brief masterpiece about 160 years after it was first written, with recognising its genius and arranging for it to be reprinted and distributed. It was written around 1350, by a teutonic knight of Frankfurt am Main who worked as a priest and warden'. Luther had it printed in 1516, speculating that the author might be Johann Tauler. The Pope banned the book in 1612.

This is a book of *sapientia experimentalis*, of experience of the divine presence in one's life. Luther wrote that, next to the Bible and St. Augustine, he had never read anything about God's way with humanity, as helpful and true as this little book. It is a work of the highest ethical mysticism.

In 56 short chapters, we have a guide to resting and reigning in Christ that we may be as another bearer of the same divine light and love that Jesus displayed so completely. The spiritual life, of which there is too little talk in today's church, is no less than the life of the Holy Spirit living in and through us as it did in Jesus. For this to take place there needs to be a constant and continuous 'dying to self'. "I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me." (Gal 2.20) This is not in order to avoid the stresses and strains of everyday living. As Chevalier Bunsen once wrote:-

"Sin is selfishness: Godliness is unselfishness:

A godly life is the steadfast working out of inward freeness from self: To become thus Godlike is the bringing back of man's first nature."

In this treasure we learn 'how a righteous man in this present time is brought into Hell, and there, cannot be comforted, and how he is taken out of Hell and carried into Heaven, and there, cannot be troubled,' it tells us what is the old Man, and what is the new Man. How we cannot come to the true Light and Christ's Life, by much questioning or reading, or by natural skill and reason, but by truly renouncing ourselves and all things. How when a Man is made truly Godlike, his love is pure and unmixed, and he loves all creatures, and does his best for them, and how he who would love God, must love all Things in One.

'What is then this union? Nothing but a truly pure simple repose in the one eternal Will of God.' 'What sin is, we have called the desire to seek something other than the simple, perfect Truth and the one eternal Will.'

'Should someone in the kingdom of heaven claim something as his own, he would be prompted toward hell by his very claim, and he would turn into a devil.'

'In hell everyone wants to have a self-will. Therefore all is misery there, and wretchedness.' Eternally relevant teaching.

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Bibliography

Trans; Hoffman, Bengt, *The Theologia Germanica of Martin Luther*, SPCK, 1980.