

JULIAN EDMUND TENISON WOODS

Mary MacKillop's 'Julian Tenison Woods – A Life', published almost 97 years after it was written, strikes the reader with the depths of spirituality, theology, and pastoral and scientific endeavour of the man, and reflects Mary's admiration for his **'utilising every hour in advancing religion or science, helping his neighbour 'in season and out of season'**, in other words, capturing his life in terms of spirituality, science and pastoral ministry. She summed it up beautifully in one line of a poem, also towards the end of the book, **'God was his science, God's love all his art'**. Throughout the book I have to say, I was deeply impressed by Julian's spiritual advice to Mary, and even found some sayings attributed to her in his letters, such as, 'never see a need without trying to do something about it'!

I found these themes again in a review of Mary Cresp's **'Prayer Chats with Julian: The integration of Spirituality, Theology and Ecology in the Life of Julian Tenison Woods'**. Some effort at integration would seem to be vital in order to understand a man with such diversity of interests, with expertise in so many different areas (we could add composer, musician, and artist, and remarkable social skills to those already mentioned). 'Spirituality, Theology and Ecology' would surely be a key place to start, and immediately brings to mind Thomas Berry and his conviction that just as there is only one God, so too is there only one creation story; not one from science and one from the Bible, or one from American Indians and another from Aborigines and so on. Each culture throws its own light on the story, as does the Bible. So we really have to allow each story, including that of the Bible, to bask in its own light. Our problem comes when we start to theologize on the stories independently of the constantly increasing light that science is throwing on the beginnings of the Universe. Clearly we must reduce the tendency to hold in tandem religious and scientific views in stark contrast with each other as a sort of right brain / left brain dissonance that enables each to be accepted in their own context without relationship to the other.

I'm not for a moment suggesting that Julian considered these issues; just that the various aspects of his work must be considered in relationship as well as in independent context. For instance, according to the review, Mary Cresp notes the connection between Julian's theological reflections on God, his spirituality and its close relationship with Creation and in Nature. To quote the review: **'The inter-connectedness of Creation and spirituality vigorously espoused by Fr Julian in relation to ecology enabled him to write "God's beauty, His goodness, His Fatherly watchful care of me and all Nature pursues me everywhere."** There seems to be here, a real mysticism in Julian – which I'd like to take up again later – that broadens the context of his rigorous scientific interest in flora, fauna, their environments and their underlying geology.

But to turn for a moment to the Readings you've chosen for today (1 Pet 3:8-15; Mt 6:25-34) with their focus on community life and trust in God. Might we link these by extending that trust to those we live with in religious community, making it therefore, not just personal, but institutional. That kind of total trust in God and in the work of founding the Institute shines out in every page of advice that Julian communicated to Mary, and in the light of the common experience of the scarcity of vocations today, it seems particularly relevant to us. May I leave you to reflect further on Julian's advice to Mary in this area, advice which would already be close to your own hearts, because it flows through so clearly in her own correspondence to her sisters. Rather, the point I would like to take up is that of the number of times I found traces of Passionist Spirituality in his thinking and advice – primarily, his capacity to measure the likelihood of success for an initiative by the suffering that it involved. It seems to me to be on every page – the Cross as an infallible sign of God's handiwork – a theme, if you don't mind me saying, straight from St Paul of the Cross. If Julian picked that up in the short time he spent as a Passionist Novice, then I'd have to commend both him and his

Novice Master - and wonder why that clarity of teaching appears not to have endured for later generations of Passionist novices!

Julian's emphasis too, on poverty, and his disappointment at the changes wrought on it in the final approval of the Rule, would have to be a reflection of the attitudes of Paul of the Cross which he had picked up in his time with the Passionists. And on a lighter note, one further influence would appear to be found in the various customs Julian learnt in the Passionist Novitiate, and introduced to his and Mary's Institute, customs now in abeyance in both Institutes, but certainly held in common by both prior to the *aggiornamento* of the Second Vatican Council.

I'd like now to take up the theme of Julian's mysticism, and suggest one further Passionist influence on him, the mysticism of St Paul of the Cross who was himself influenced by the Rhineland mystics, and especially Tauler. Perhaps we can see this mysticism taking its own peculiar shape in Julian because of his scientific bent, but held in common with such great creation mystics as Hildegard of Bingen or even Julian of Norwich, a theme we meet again in Teilhard de Chardin and even more recently, in Thomas Berry. I don't want to overstate my case here, but in Mary's 'Life' of Julian I kept hearing echoes of Berry, who believed so unequivocally in creation as the first revelation of God, and in the Scriptures not simply played out against the backdrop of a static creation, but as an intimate part of the ongoing revelation of God through the constant moulding and forming work of his hands – ongoing creation, therefore, as well as ongoing redemption. For Berry it is not just a matter of creation finishing and then Revelation and Redemption taking over, with the result that creation becomes the background against which our lives, our human history and even Revelation itself, is played out. Nor is it, of course, a kind of two-storey universe of attic and basement, with the supernatural in the attic having to be dragged down to the natural in the basement. Rather is it the recognition of the continuing Revelation of Creator, Redeemer and Life giver in both creation and redemption.

Let's take an example. I mentioned the Cross earlier, as a fundamental element in Julian's spirituality which he communicated to Mary as the ultimate determinant of what work might be said to be truly of God, rather than something merely of oneself. Well, Thomas Berry, who died only last June, and was incidentally, also a Passionist, has exactly the same benchmark in his thought, so that for instance, he can take Jesus' words about the seed dying in order to give life, and apply them across the board, from the star dying in order to produce suns, planets, life forms and even us, to the life that grows out of death in the food chain and even in human relationships – all the little deaths we die in order to find life for ourselves or others. What is implied here is that the Cross and sacrifice is to be found in every nook and cranny in the Universe, and that Christ's sacrifice is not foreign to our world, but is all of a part in it. Death/Resurrection, then can be seen as part of the pattern of the Universe, and we can begin to explore Redemption, not just as some sort of intrusive Divine action, but all of a piece with the rest of God's Plan. It would be interesting for someone to tease out this theme in Julian's thinking and see where he might stand on this.

Finally, I'd like to conclude with Julian's wonderment at the complexity and variety of the world around him, which shines through his scientific writings; and the spirituality through which he constantly reads God's plans and purposes in it. And since I've referred to Thomas Berry a few times already, I'll let him have the last word: **'We will recover our sense of wonder and our sense of the sacred only if we appreciate the universe beyond ourselves as a revelatory experience of that numinous presence whence all things come into being. Indeed, the universe is the primary sacred reality. We ourselves become sacred by our participation in this more sublime dimension of the world about us.'** (*'The Great Work'*, 1999, p. 49).

I have no doubt that this would be taking things further than the thought of Julian Edmund Tenison Woods, but I do think that it truly captures his spirit.