

DELIVER US FROM EVIL

By JAMES WALSH

LAST EVENING, by chance it seemed, I happened to look in on a television interview given by a Mr and Mrs Quinlan to a very admirable B.B.C. Television news commentator.¹ Julia and Joseph Quinlan of New Jersey are the parents of Karen Ann, a healthy and extremely talented young woman of twenty-two, who was suddenly stricken down by a mysterious disease of the brain two years ago and who has lain motionless and barely conscious in a hospital bed ever since. The unconscious Karen Ann became the centre of a *cause célèbre* which ended up in the Supreme Court of the United States. She was on a respiratory machine, which the doctors thought was necessary to keep her clinically alive. Gradually, Karen Ann's parents became convinced that the machine was a bizarre means, militating against the minimal comfort of the girl, and indeed against her basic dignity as a human person. The doctors, invoking in a literal and selective fashion the hippocratic oath, refused to turn off the machine. The parents, with more than ordinary courage, took them to court. Judgment was given for the hospital against the parents; but they persevered, and the Supreme Court reversed the decision. Karen Ann is still minimally alive. The quality of the parents' faith is profoundly impressive. The mother visits her daughter daily, the father twice a day. Mrs Quinlan quietly confessed that one day she suddenly realized, in making the petition in the Our Father, 'Thy will be done', that she was praying in reality 'my will be done'. Both she and her husband stated with a calm that so many viewers found intensely moving, that they never prayed for her recovery or that God should take her: simply 'thy will be done'. They told how they had received thousands of letters of thanks from people who found themselves in a like predicament. Joe remarked that so many who hitherto were afraid even to mention death were beginning to reflect and to discuss and were coming, mysteriously, to understand

¹ On a high-quality news programme 'Tonight', covering current affairs of national and world importance, and other topics of general interest. The date was 6 December, 1977.

it. He believed that Karen Ann in some obscure way was an instrument of God's compassion ('God is using her to help others', he said); and that he himself was content with this; he knew that the Lord would take her in his own good time.

Technological development, the advancement of medical science, the unveiling of the secrets of nature: these are the modern trials for testing christian faith. Death, and the remaining causes of death (except perhaps, and paradoxically, war and the motor vehicle) tend to be the supreme evil. We have come to expect life to be owed to us, in quality and in longevity. And if men still need reasons for disbelief, they easily find them in natural catastrophes and in man's inhumanity to man. Less than thirty years ago, catholic philosophers were still offering, as a proof for the immortality of the soul, the allegedly ingrained belief in the heart of man that 'the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us' (Rom 8, 18). The pendulum has now swung to the opposite pole. We are praying during the second week of Advent after communion: '... may this sacrament teach us to weigh carefully the things of this world and to love the things of heaven'. At least, this is how a current and officially approved translation runs. The Latin remains the same as it has been for many centuries: ... *terrena despicere et amare caelestia* - 'to despise the things of this world ...'. It is wholly admirable to take Marx seriously in the cause of simple justice and the defence of basic human rights, against which so many nominal Christians sin grievously. But even a theology of liberation distorts the truth when it begins to persuade us that there was not meant to be any distinction between the transitory and the eternal.

The thought of the Psalmist, whose dispositions the Church strives to inculcate as she offers the norm of christian belief in her prayer, is wholly other. Though a man's soul or spirit is so peculiarly his own that it is identified with his person, its principle of existence is the breath of God, to be given or withdrawn at pleasure. The instability of the union between body and soul and the consciousness of weakness and utter dependence is endemic to human existence. When God withdraws his favour, man accepts that he is incapable even of thought.

Thou hast taken me up and thrown me away
My days are like an evening shadow
I wither away like grass (102, 10-11).

As for man, his days are like grass;
 he flourishes like a flower of the field;
 for the wind passes over it and it is gone,
 and its place knows it no more (103, 15-16).

It is because man knows how fleeting his life is, that it is 'nothing in thy sight' (39, 4-6), that he is full of gratitude for existence:

When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers . . .
 What is man that thou art mindful of him,
 And the son of man that thou dost care for him (8, 3-4).

And his wonder at God's providence is integral to his consciousness. God's Spirit which gives him life is no longer simply breath; it is the special protection of a personal bond which unites him to the One who makes him and redeems him (31, 5), which guarantees that he will live through trouble and persecution. The pauline paradoxes about God's feebleness and man's strength (cf 1 Cor 1, 25ff), and man's weakness being his glory (2 Cor 12, 9) were not so startling once as they may be now. The medieval and renaissance man, too, could marvel that the rest of creation did not rise up and destroy the sinner who repudiated this providence and protection.² And when it did happen that the good man was tempted into resentment by the sight of the wicked prospering, he would at last 'come to his senses' and confess:

. . . I am continually with thee;
 thou dost hold my right hand.
 Thou dost guide me with thy counsel,
 and afterwards thou wilt receive me to glory.
 Whom have I in heaven but thee?
 And there is nothing upon the earth that I desire besides thee.
 My flesh and my heart may fail,
 but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.
 (73, 23-26).

The absence of the pathetic fallacy in scriptural poetry, and particularly in the Psalms, has often been remarked; and it has sometimes been confused with a lack of awareness of the beauties of nature. The reason may well be that the Psalmist is so keenly aware of his dependence on the divine presence, so consciously convinced that the only possible catastrophe, in respect of God who gives his

² Cf *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius*, 60.

gift of life so freely, is for a man to die in his sins. The evil that man suffers, not only at the hands of nature but of his neighbours, ceases to be evil once he is aware of the personal presence of his God, whose absence is the explanation of all human suffering, as the story of Job teaches.

The union with God and the longing for him, which in the Psalmist appears predominantly passive, in that it follows on the fulfilment of the Law (cf Pss 1 and 15), takes on an un hoped for, an undreamed of active connotation in Christ, and in those who are empowered to come to the Father through keeping the word. Already, in the Old Testament, the law as properly conceived is the wisdom which is in God and governs all his creation.³ Now the Son, through whom and in whom all things were created, who is the first born, the head of creation (cf Col 1, 15-19), is so at one with the Father as to be, in human as well as in divine terms, the very expression of the Father's being (cf Heb 1, 3). We can see the Father in him because he is the essence of concentration on the Father's will and work:

This is what it means to be the Son essentially, to be truly filial:
it means to be able to do nothing of oneself,
to do for oneself all that the Father does,
to do nothing except this, and to do all this.

It does not mean to do some things by myself,
and to do other things through the Father.
It does not mean to act on my own initiative in this,
and on the Father's in that.

All my spontaneous action is always to wish and to do
all that the Father does and wishes,
even to that impossible point of never wishing or doing anything
except what the Father does and wishes.
And this point of impossibility is omnipotence,
this slavery of adoration is liberty, holiness.

All this is because the Father loves the Son.
For everything is the Father's,
and all that comes from the Father is love,
including the love by which the Son loves the Father.

³ Cf Dennis J. McCarthy, 'Law and religious experience', in *The Way*, vol 17, no 3 (July, 1977), pp 166ff.

For if the Son can do nothing
 that he does not see the Father doing,
 he can no longer love anything
 except what he knows is loved by the Father.⁴

The work of God, the will of God, is nothing else except that which is accomplished in Christ, in his redemptive life, death and resurrection. Its consequent accomplishment in each of those who are 'destined in love to be his children in Christ Jesus, according to his will' (Eph, 1, 5), who are to be 'filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding' (Col 1, 9), is the entire term of the Trinitarian activity. It is eminently true to say that all has been or is destined to be revealed in God's eschatological deed in Christ. It is little wonder that we call the kind of authentic christian attitude revealed in the example we gave at the beginning of this article 'profound faith'. Learned scholars have said that 'faith is always seen to be the act in virtue of which man separates himself from the world and turns round completely towards God in response to his eschatological deed in Christ'.⁵ This deed has been very perceptively described by the fourteenth century Englishwoman, Julian of Norwich, as part-revealed and part-hidden until everyman is presented mature in Christ (cf Col 1, 28):

There is a deed which the blissful Trinity shall do in the last day, if I see it aright; but what that deed shall be, and how it shall be done, is unknown to all creatures which are beneath Christ, and shall be so until the time when it shall be done. The goodness and the love of our Lord God wills us to know that it shall be done. But his might and wisdom by the same love wills to hide and conceal from us what it shall be, and how it shall be done . . . This is the great deed ordained by our Lord from without-beginning, treasured and hid in his blessed breast . . . for just as the blessed Trinity made all things from naught, right so the same blessed Trinity shall make all well that is not well.⁶

'You have died', says Paul, 'and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory' (Col 3, 3-4).

⁴ Irenée Hausherr, 'The will of God and christian obedience', in *Supplement to The Way*, 5 (February, 1968), pp 10-11. Cf Jn 14, 30; 5, 19-21.

⁵ Cf Rudolf Bultmann and A. Weiser, *Faith* (London, 1961), p 85.

⁶ J. Walsh, *The Revelations of Divine Love* (London, 1973), pp 98-99.

What is contrary to this will, Jesus teaches, is all that is evil in the heart of man,⁷ and the painful consequences of man's submission to the powers of evil: mainly sickness, physical and mental, and death. There is no doubt that, according to the New Testament, and particularly Paul and John, man in his sinful disobedience allies himself with the principalities and powers, whose leader is the Prince of this world under his various titles: Satan, Beelzebub, Belial, the dragon, the lion, the wicked one, the accuser, the tempter, the destroyer, the adversary, the enemy.⁸ 'For we are not contending', says Paul, 'against flesh and blood, but against the principalities and powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the high places' (Eph 6, 12). And though it is true that the world, which for John is the manifestation of the malign influence of those powers, is overcome by faith (cf 1 Jn 5, 4-5), by trust and confidence in him who has overcome by his passion (cf Jn 16, 33), we are not yet removed from the situation in which we are exposed to their onslaughts. Our pride, our self-will, our drive towards self-sufficiency and self-interest, are all their natural allies. Hence, though the final petition of the Lord's Prayer is primarily an eschatological prayer against the final triumph of the evil one, which has already been answered in and through Christ, we are reminded by the embolism of the eucharistic prayer that there are countless ways in which the vestiges of that broken power still operate. These have still to be put down in the way in which Jesus himself conquered sin and death: by the loving surrender to the Father's will. As the early christian aphorism cited by Paul states it concisely: 'If we have died with him, we shall also live with him; if we endure, we shall also reign with him' (2 Tim 2, 11-12).

It becomes clear, then, why the field of the spiritual combat is traditionally identified as the 'world, the flesh and the devil'. The 'christian ethic' does not work upwards through so-called natural virtues – a sort of yoke-horse with a natural eudaimonism which is thus given a supernatural direction. There is no christian morality without faith, and no faith without that effective and conscious longing for union which is the sign of Christ's having already united himself with our nature, so as to reform the Adam in each of us.

⁷ Cf Mt 5, 37; 9, 4; 13, 48-49; 21, 41; 22, 41; 22, 10.

⁸ The texts are too numerous to list. There is a comprehensive catalogue in H. Schlier, *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament* (London/New York, 1961), p 12, note 8.

We are graced from the first moment of our existence 'to yield ourselves to God as human persons who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness' (Rom 6, 13). So it is that we share Christ's own battles in the service of the Father.

Because this struggle against the principalities is so unrelenting (martyrdom is its only authentic model, as several texts in the Apocalypse show⁹), christian spiritual history is strewn with a variety of attempts to find a compromise. One of those is the oft-repeated argument that Providence cannot possibly extend to all the choices that our circumstances call on us to make, to all the events in our lives. Even more insidious are the attempts to show that a good God could never permit physical evil, much less will it, or that a holy God could never tolerate, much less actively share, moral evil. Yet if this were so we would find ourselves praying to God, as though he were a pagan deity, to ward off the bludgeonings of chance; or like Aristotle, whose God had to be indifferent to his creation, or he would at least share responsibility for the undesirable sufferings of others, which man's vices, perversion, selfishness and despotism occasion. The Fathers have consistently taught, in the words of Origen, that God never does anything without a reason, nor permits anything to happen without a purpose.¹⁰ If such is to be integral to our thinking, we need a consistent sober and unwearying reflection, in order that we may resist, firm in the faith (cf 1 Pet 5, 8). Or we must pray for something of the vision of Julian of Norwich, who saw all that was made in the shape of a tiny round speck of material, so unsubstantial that she was afraid it might collapse into nothing, it was so small. The point was, that, in spite of its uncertainty of existence, 'it lasts and ever shall last; for God loveth it'.¹¹ She expresses herself more clearly and graphically than the great Origen:

I saw truly that God doeth all things, be they never so little. And I saw truly that nothing is done by hap or by chance, but all by the foreseeing wisdom of God. If a thing be hap or chance according to man's judgment, the cause is our blindness and lack of foreknowledge.

⁹ The martyrs are those who have overcome the devil by giving testimony to the Lamb, in whose blood they overcome: 'for they loved not their lives even unto death' (Apoc 12, 11; cf 5, 5; 7, 14).

¹⁰ *First homily on the 1st book of Kings*, 10.

¹¹ *Revelations, ibid.*, p 53.

For those things that are in the foreseeing wisdom of God from without-beginning, which he rightfully and worshipfully and continually bringeth to their best end, in their coming about they fall to our notice suddenly and without our knowledge . . . so I understood in this showing of love, and know well, that in the sight of our Lord God there is neither hap nor chance. Wherefore I needs must grant that all that is done is well done, since our Lord God doeth all.¹²

She was to hear that the principalities, in the person of the fiend, are overcome by the power of Christ's passion – a deed only to be revealed in its entirety when all those who are to be saved come up above.¹³ She was to understand as well that there is 'a great oneing between Christ and us. For when he was in pain, we were in pain; and all creatures that could suffer pain, suffered with him . . . Thus was our Lord Jesus pained for us; and we all stand in this way of pain with him, and shall do, until we come to his bliss'.¹⁴ This is why nothing is unforeseen, nothing left to chance.¹⁵ 'For the longing and desiring of all mankind that shall be saved appeared in Jesus. Jesus is all that shall be saved, and all that shall be saved is Jesus; and all this of the charity of God, with the obedience and meekness and patience and the virtues that belong to us'.¹⁶

The Father looks with the same compassionate love on each of his chosen children, especially in the sufferings occasioned by their own sins, as he does on his first born, eternally begotten, in his humbling of himself as he stoops and falls into the maiden's womb in the Incarnation and in the hard pains and grievous fallings of his passion.¹⁷ And the divine creative nature is so inventive, so rich in merciful love, that it is best conceived of in terms of Mother as well as Father.¹⁸ Ultimately, Julian intimates that the answer to the constant christian petition 'deliver us from evil' is to understand that:

there is no higher stature in this life than childhood – in the feebleness and failing of might and understanding – until the time that our gracious Mother (Jesus) hath brought us up to our Father's bliss. And there shall be truly known to us his meaning . . . 'All shall be well; and thou shalt see it thyself that all manner of things shall be well'.¹⁹

¹² *Ibid.*, p 66.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp 69ff.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p 78.

¹⁵ *ouden apronoōton*; St Basil, *In Hexaem.*, VII, 15: PG 29, 161.

¹⁶ *Revelations, ibid.*, p 141.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 140ff.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 163ff.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p 171.

What she is saying here is that the most sublime expression of man's relationship with God in the response to gift in contemplative prayer is the acceptance of human inadequacy and the fore-shortening of the insight into mystery: an acceptance which arises from loving trust in the God who, because he is the ground of this unitive petition, will certainly grant it.²⁰ She defines this petition as 'a true and grace-giving, lasting will of the soul which is oned and fashioned to the will of our Lord by the sweet and secret working of the Holy Spirit'.²¹

Christ's own prayer, in the supreme moment of his crisis, the agony in the garden, informs us that the petitions 'thy will be done' and 'deliver us from evil' are one and the same. As we have said, the content of revelation is that all who shall be saved in Christ are the term of the activity and purpose of the triune God. 'God our Saviour desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth' (1 Tim 2, 3-4), and this through Christ's confrontation of and victory over the evil one. It is Christ whose prayer for deliverance is answered first, as the Epistle to the Hebrews recalls: 'In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear. Son though he was, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and being made perfect he became the source of salvation to all who obey him' (Heb 5, 7-9).

'He was wounded for our transgressions', says the prophet of the Suffering Servant, 'he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed' (Isai 53, 5). Similarly, through his mercy and compassionate love, we are assured in our hope that when we pray in love for our brethren, and especially for our dependents, 'thy will be done', we recognize that by our association in Christ with them in their sufferings, our own petition 'deliver us from evil' is in that moment being answered. We are offering ourselves and them in a mutual loving act to the Father who can save us, and others, from death. We become the means ('he is using her to help others') to the fulfilment of his salvific will hidden in its detail in the Son. And we wait with patience and expectation for its final revelation.

... we have been in the foreknowledge of God, loved and known in his endless purpose from without-beginning. In which unbegun love

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp 113ff.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p 114.

he made us, and in the same love he keepeth us, and never suffereth us to be hurt in a way that our bliss might be lessened. And therefore when judgment is given, and we are all brought up above, then shall we clearly see in God the Secrets which now are hid from us. And then none of us shall be prompted to say of anything: 'Lord, if it had been thus, it had been well'; but we shall all say with one voice: 'Lord, blessed may thou be!' For it is thus, and it is well.²²

²² *Ibid.*, pp 207-208.