

From the Ignatian Tradition

EXTRACTS FROM AN ABRIDGEMENT OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION¹

Achille Gagliardi

*Achille Gagliardi (1537–1607) was an Italian Jesuit, theologian and writer on spirituality and mysticism. He worked closely with St Charles Borromeo, implementing the reforms of the Council of Trent in the Church in northern Italy. His book *Breve compendio di perfezione cristiana* was first published in Brescia in 1611, and was quickly translated into five languages. The extracts that follow are taken from an early English translation by the Benedictine abbess Mary Percy (1625).² As Juan Marín's article above shows, this translation is particularly interesting in revealing ideas and emphases that were subsequently edited out of other versions of the text. A central idea in this book is that of the 'annihilation' of the soul as it grows closer to God. This does not mean the soul's destruction so much as its being caught up wholly into God, and is an idea that Gagliardi developed from the writings of the fourteenth-century French mystic Marguerite Porete. It corresponds to some extent with the saying of John the Baptist: 'He must increase, but I must decrease' (John 3:30).*

Hindrances to Virtue

AFTER THAT THE SOULE is exercised thus in purging & disappropriating her selfe in these spirituall motions, and in desire of solid vertue, as hath bin said: there wil follow a higher degree which is this. It happeneth

¹ This is Mary Percy's title for her translation. In early modern English the word 'abridgement' could be used to mean 'digest' or 'summary'. Her text is unmodernised except that the interchangeable use of 'v' and 'u', and of 'i' and 'j' has been regularised, and contractions have been expanded.

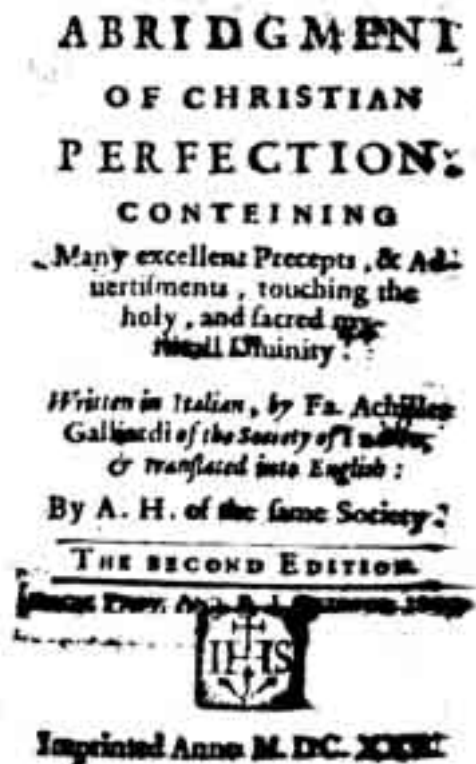
² In the first edition, whose title page is reproduced overleaf, the translation was attributed to a Jesuit, Anthony Hoskins, who probably collaborated with Mary Percy.

often, that having such desires, the soule cannot attayne unto that she pretendeth, and that for some worldly, or humane cause which doth hinder it: as for example, when we must leave prayer, by the which the soule findeth her selfe prompt, apt, ready, and as it were invited to unite her selfe with God. And obedience on the other side, or charity requireth to leave it for another worke of great distraction, but profitable to our neighbours. And this wilbe necessary not only in one worke, or at one tyme only, but it shalbe needfull also concerning our manner of living, to leave the quiet, and contemplative life, in which the soule felt her selfe greatly inflamed with ardent desire of solid vertues, to busy herself in the negotiations of the active life, in which she shall have great repugnance, and by which she shall receave many occasions of distraction; nevertheles she seeth clearly, that she is called by God to leave that for this, & sometymes also shall find hinderances which proceed from God, to wit, when God giveth us not so quickly as we would, this vertue & perfection, which he inciteth us to desire.

In the like occasions the soule is accustomed to feelee payne, anxiety, and sorrow, for such hinderances, and is therewith very much afflicted. It is needfull heere that she consider, that there may be selfe-interest in this busines, although it be very secret, and hidden, which she ought to cast away wholly, with a noble and couragious abnegation.

The sorrow then, and anxiety that afflicteth the soule in such desires, and maketh it unquiet, procedeth ordinarily of selfe-love: and although it be without sinne, neverthelesse it is a hinderance betweene God, and the soule; seeing that as a thing created, it hindereth perfectiton, and keepeth the soule backe from arriving to the top of the same. Also the propriety is discovered plainely, although it be of a holy thing, and it seemeth therby (althogh indirectly) that a man will give a law unto God. And finally the unquietnes that afflicteth the soule inwardly, is not of God, whose spirit is sweet and gracious, and full of peace and tranquility: & to take away such unquietnes, he must forsake such desires, & the vertue it selfe, in the manner that followeth.

First a man ought to accept, & receive this desire as a gift of God, without resting or staying himselfe in his proper delight and satisfaction, as hath been sayd in the degree before: and he ought to procure with all diligence to put it in execution, never letting passe any meanes, that he doth not try by experience, & put in practice, that thereby he may come to such vertue and perfection: for so much as doing this, he chaseth far away all tepidity, & negligence.



Title page of *An Abridgement of Christian Perfection*

When these hinderances before declared happen, he ought presently to thinke that the divine bounty is not pleased at that time in the execution of his desire, and therefore he ought to renounce it quite, with protestation that he will have neyther vertue, nor perfection (I meane, the execution, or act of desire only, for the ground or essence of the desire ought to remaine) but even such, and in that manner, & when God will give it; renouncing utterly al the rest. He ought then to take away all anxiety, and grieffe, discovering plainely his selfe love, & his owne interest, that was hid under such desires, although they be holy: & also learn this most high doctrine, which is, that such a desire even of martyrdome; with this anxiety, although it seeme to be a great thing commeth to be very base, & little, for so much as it is selfe-interest, & a hindrance between God and the soule: which being taken away, the desire remayneth as great as ever, and instead of the anxiety, it is accompanied with a mervaylous tranquillity in God, and in his divine Will.

***Her love
unto her
Lord, is more
then unto any
perfection***

And note well, that the soule that hath such a desire with repose, & tranquillity, without the vertue and perfection desired, is more agreeable to God then any other who hath such a vertue; which if she had not received, or had not attained unto, would haue beene much grieved and troubled, seeing that he obtaineth most perfection, who is most conformed to Gods will and pleasure, and exchangeth the vertue created, for the divine will increated, which doth farre surpasse, and infinitely exceed the other: notwithstanding the desire will remayne, not with humayne feare, that afflicteth & disquieteth the soule, but with a divine feare, which is annexed necessarily unto the desire.

For to desire a thing that we cannot have, bringeth feare, which is accompanied with paine, untill such tyme as it is obtained: but this is a paine from the which doth proceed a mervaylous contentment, and a resignation unto God, knowing wel that our Lord is pleased greatly with such a pain, to wit, to see a soule quiet, and full of peace in her payne, to resigne her selfe and accomplish his will, who for to please her Lord, willingly and of her own accord, wil remaine deprived of a good, that she so instantly doth desire, because her love unto her Lord, is more then unto any perfection, or vertue.

In such a soule remaineth ordinarily a divine light, that doth instruct & teach her, what great diligence she ought to use, without ever relenting, or waxing cold & negligent; but a soule must not rely upon the same, seeing she doth not come to this that she desireth by her diligence, and industry, how great soever it be, but by the will and pleasure of God, who sometymes giveth it, & sometimes not, even as he best pleaseth. Therefore by rejecting, and loosing all esteeme of our owne diligence, & industry, is gotten a certayne confidence & filiall security, that God, who hath given the desire, will also give the perfection, when he shall please, and according to his will. And thus for his owne part, the soule putteth, and casteth herselfe as a little infant into his armes, and is most contented withall, thinking no more of it, but with a pure & sincere resignation unto God, worketh as out of her selfe, and, as we may say, at adventure leaveth all care of her selfe to our Lord, as a little infant, with a kind of divine tranquillity.

To this so high renunciation, and disappropriation doth correspond the subtraction, or withdrawing of our Lord already spoken of, when he doth not give the vertue we demand, which we ought to admit with

joy, and cooperate in the manner aforesayd. Also there is discovered clearely a conformity with the divine will, very secret, and knowne but unto few, seeing that man leaveth God for God, that is to say, leaveth and renounceth God, in as much as he bringeth any selfe interest with vertue, and perfection, to have him more excellently, to wit, without any interest. From whence followeth a most high transformation, and an admirable Deification, from which is accustomed to proceed excellent gifts, and very rare lights, worthy of such a love, and so great union with God.

[...]

True Annihilation

Man, & whatsoever is created concerning their first origen, proceedeth of nothing; & of himselfe, by a thousand wayes, to wit, by infinite myseries of soule and body (to the which he is subject) is ready, and tending to returne to the same nothing, if God by his bounty did not conserve him; and a man sinning is made worse then nothing. By the meanes of this consideration of this our first origen, and of all thinges created, we must endeavour or esteem our selves, and all thinges created as nothing, and not to love, desire, seeke, or will any thing for our selves: and thus we shall get a perfect anihilation of our will.

We must consider, that this true anihilation maketh the soule to become a true portraict and resemblance of the soveraygne greatnes of God, for that it taketh away the hindrances that are betweene God and the soule; which is done by not willing, or desiring any thing: and thus she becometh a most faire, & cleare mirrour or looking glasse. For even as when we would, that a glasse should receyve in it selfe perfectly and entierely the image & figure of some object, it is needfull, that so much the further the one be set from the other, as the object is greater in it selfe; so the greatnes of God being infinite, by the meanes of this anihilation, the soule only taketh from it selfe all obstacles that do hinder it from uniting it selfe with God; but which is more, by a great submission in her basenes, & a true knowledge of the infinite greatnes of God, she draweth herselfe infinitely far from the same, and by this meanes commeth to be disposed, and able to receyve in her this infinit object of God; and the same Lord by the pleasure he taketh, & infinit love that he beareth to this soule, imprinteth and engraveth presently

in her, a true resemblance image, & portraict of all his greatnes, even to the last Center of the same.

This anihilation is of great force to purge the soule of passions, taking away entierely al the objects of them, seeing that he that hath no will to any thing for himselfe, hath not what to desire, love, feare, or hate: whereof commeth also that it purifyeth the soule, concerning the intention, taking away all pretence of any created end whatsoever in all our actions, & maketh it truly capable to have no will to any other thing then to the pure glory of God in himselfe, seeing she careth for nothing els; from whence also proceedeth an entire and totall victory over all temptations; seeing that unto him that desireth nothing, the divell hath not any object to present: and if he doth, he is presently rejected, and driven away with this resolution of not desiring any thing, & by this meanes he is in all thinges vanquished and put to flight.

The affects and principall signes of this anihilation are these that follow.

The first is, that the gifts & graces that our Lord communicath to the soule that is endued therewith, she receiveth them not, nor retayneth them in herselfe, for so much as that which is nothing cannot receyve in it selfe any thing, but receaveth them in God, & referreth them unto him from whome they proceed.

Secondly, that she doth not appropriate them to herselfe, nor rejoice in such graces in herselfe, neyther is she troubled if they be taken from her, or that she happen to loose them; but equally, whether she having them or no, she remayneth content in her nothing.

Thirdly, she maketh no accompt of this grace, but for so much as our Lord wilbe served by the meanes of the same.

Fourthly, she doth not esteeme the grace in it selfe, but for that by the meanes of it, she commeth to a greater knowledge of the giver, and esteemeth him the more.

Fiftly, she doth not exalt herselfe for any gift or grace that she can receive, but alwayes keeping herselfe in her nothing, remaineth in the same concept, and opinion of her basenes.

Sixtly, in the workes that she doth, she knoweth truly that of herselfe she doth nothing, but discovereth in a high manner the divine assistance in them, and that it is he which worketh all, & whatsoever happeneth



Adoration of the Trinity, by Dürer

unto her, although never so grievous & hard to support, yet with an entire peace she reposeth in him.

Seavently, in the tyme of subtraction, and drynesse of spirit, she is not mooved with it, neither seeketh any remedy, or consolation, but with all submission imbraceth it, and giveth herselfe in prey unto it, as unto a proper object of nothing.

[...]

The Effects of Deiformity

In the beginning, & in consideration of these wordes of our Lord, *Ego dixi Dii estis*: I have sayd, you are Gods &c. and in this that he sayd unto his Father, *ut unum sint, sicut Pater in me, & ego in te, ut & ipsi in nobis unum sint*, that all may be one, as thou my Father art in me, and I in thee, so also that they may be one in us. Heere we must endeavour to penetrate into the excellency, & greatnes of the perfection we are

called unto by our Lord Jesus, to wit, to unite our selves in such sort by efficacy of wil, and by the vehemency of a loving affection, to the divine wil, that being transformed into the same, we be no more, as we may say, our selves, nor that which we were before, but like unto God, & in God himselfe, Deified to the imitation of the union of the Sonne of God, with his eternall Father.

Being prostrate, with a most profound submission in the depth of our nothing, in the presence of the height of his greatnes, as altogether astonished, and relying on the love which incited him so much to abase himselfe, even unto us, thereby to rayse us up to himselfe, we must crave of this love a correspondence of affection, which may live in us with a vehement desire of this true and perfect Deiformity in him.

We must consider, that this Deiformity consisteth to have our will united by such efficacy of love, with the divine, that she feele no more from henceforward herselfe, as if verily she were not at all, but that only she feele in her the divine will, & that all her actions, desires, & works tend to the only accomplishing of the same. In such sort, that even in vertues, and holy thinges, she willeth them no more, with a created will, nor by it, but only by the increated, made hers by an entiere transformation into it; considering that our Lord Jesus intended to shew this in these words, *non mea, sed tua voluntas fiat*.

That the humanity of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of his most holy mother, & of all the blessed, by the working of God in them, and by the knowledge, and enjoying that they have of the divinity, are as it were swallowed up, and rayased into this foresayd being, and unity, and in the same most perfectly deified: and finally that all the Saints, and the just yet upon the earth, are transformed into God, & from thence afterwards returne to their being, as a drop of water being cast into a great vessel full of wyne, is changed into the same, & after being out of the sayd vessell, returneth to his first being.

We must consider, that after the soule is arived unto such an estate, that she hath taken away, by the vertue of this Deifying love, and of the other aforesayd lights, all that might hinder the working of God in her, then hath she attayned unto this Deiformity; and this Deiformity produceth these effects that follow.

1. She is Deiformed in all her actions, doing them, as if God did them, and not herselfe; & thus in them, & by them entreth wholly unto God, and acknowledgeth him, & enjoyeth him.

2. Even as a sinner doth no action but out of God, being deprived of his grace, even so on the contrary, such a soule doth not find or doe any thing in which God is not, and by meanes whereof, she doth not enter, and unite herselfe unto God.
3. She esteemeth not of any thing, but in as much as it commeth from God, or that it be done for God, & in God.
4. Although that somtymes our Lord hide, and withdraw himselfe from such a soule, yet in this subtraction, & hiding, she retireth wholly into God, hiding herselfe in him, without any sweetnes or feeling: yea how much the more, that by meanes of this rigour, leaving, sharpnes, and bitternes, it seemeth that she is far from God: so much the more she returneth, is Deiformed, and reposeth in him.
5. Being most certaine and assured, that she herselfe, as of herselfe, cannot performe any thing that is good, by reason of her totall inability, knowing truly that she is nothing, hath nothing, and can doe nothing of herselfe; she is not confounded, nor any whit troubled, yea even in the midst of confusions, she findeth herselfe much assured, & contented, knowing certainly that she seeketh not any thing proper, & that nothing of hers is therein, but God doth all immediatly.
6. Although she should raise the dead, and do such mervailous workes, & great things, yet she would neither care, nor esteeme of such workes, or be moved with them; but in as much as God would, she should: & although she should possesse al the treasures of heaven & earth, she would not esteeme of them in themselves, nor for herselfe, but refer, and offer up all things unto their first origen, from whence they proceeded.
7. Although she knew sensibly that she had God in her, yea and though it were in the same manner as our blessed Lady his holy Mother had, she would not be moved any more, then if she did not perceave any such thing at all or that she had him not in herselfe, but in God, only imitating heerin the glorious virgin Mary, who having in her armes our blessed Lord, held him, as if she had not had him, but as if her armes had ben Gods, & as though he held himselfe, & this was the most excellent Deiformity of this most pure soule.

8. When the soule that is come to this Deiformity, seeth herselfe to be praysed, she taketh no maner of pleasure therin, neither is she troubled, afflicted, altered, or moved any whit at all, for so much as she is wholly in God, and receyving the praises that belongeth to God, referreth and offereth them all unto him.
9. Two soules Deiformed, having betweene them great conformity of affection, intertayning one another with mutuall love of very great efficacy, & with great disappropriation; and therefore being to be separated one from the other never so farr, for the greater glory of God, do care nothing at all, nor are they any thing disquieted, for whatsoever accident, how great or grievous, that may befall them.
10. If God would publish to the world the Deiformity that he hath given her, she would not be disquieted or troubled, but would say, Lord thou hast done it, doe whatsoever it pleaseth thee, for the whole work is thine.

A DIALOGUE ACROSS TIME

Julian of Norwich and Ignatius Loyola

Oonagh Walker

ONE OF THE PLEASURES of age for the dedicated reader is having the leisure to *reread*. The texts of a lifetime begin to talk to each other, and unlikely voices hold dialogue across centuries. Books once read as solo pieces now bring with them a consort of echoes and affinities. That was how it was when I recently decided it was time I revisited Dame Julian of Norwich.

I first encountered *Revelations of Divine Love* many years ago, when studying Middle English. Our tutor,¹ a fine medieval scholar, placed Julian in her local and linguistic context and also showed how she was part of a rich tradition of European mysticism and devotion. I enjoyed her lively style with its down-to-earth imagery, all the more engaging in the robust Middle English dialect she used; and even in those pre-feminist days, there was a quiet satisfaction in knowing that she was almost certainly our first woman author writing in English. However, she remained a distant figure: someone who spoke to her own time but had nothing to say to us. The admiring following she has gathered in recent years has shown me how blinkered I was in thinking this. It was time to reread.

So, a lifetime later, I return to *Revelations*, this time in modern English, and find that Julian is far from being trapped in her age. Her warm, womanly voice dissolves time and the questions she dwells on are still urgently asked. As I read, I hear other voices chiming in, especially that of St Ignatius. Julian of Norwich and Ignatius of Loyola may seem

¹ Eric Colledge, later, in religious life, Fr Edmund Colledge OSA, who, with James Walsh, edited *A Book of Showings to the anchoress Julian of Norwich*, 2 volumes (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978).

a strange combination, given the differences between them of time and place, social status, upbringing, life experience and, most of all, gender. Yet, as I continue to read Julian and to remember Ignatius, I see them more and more as spiritual brother and sister, with different but complementary qualities. Julian's warmth and tenderness are supported by a fine analytic mind and a spirit that enables her to speak out with what was *manly* courage for those days; while the penetrating intellect and organizational skills of Ignatius are softened by his capacity for friendship and ready sympathy for those in trouble. The spiritual empathy and inner knowledge each attained through contemplating Christ's passion—which they both saw as the supreme manifestation of God's love—shape a theology which sets great value on the human person. While acknowledging sinfulness, they both focus upon God's unwavering plan for humanity, which must be played out, not with eyes set upon some transcendent future, but in the raw reality of daily life.

***'This Place of Enormous Labours, Sorrows and Calamities'*²**

Both Julian and Ignatius lived in troubled times. The fourteenth century, when Julian was alive, was calamitous in every possible way: the Black Death; famine and distress among the peasantry in England leading to the Peasants' Revolt; the endless campaigns of the Hundred Years' War; the Great Schism which tore the wider Church apart; and the local Church all too often seen as oppressive and corrupt—its wealth an affront to the poverty all around it. Those within the Church who clamoured for reform were condemned as heretics and brutally suppressed. As an anchoress, living in the heart of the city, up against the walls of the church of St Julian (from which she probably took the name by which we know her), Julian must have been in the thick of it. She would have been well aware of all the distress surrounding her anchorage. Although immured herself, she would have had a little slit window to the outside world where people could come for counsel and guidance in their troubles. Listening to so much sorrow, she might have resorted to *contemptus mundi*, gloomily rejecting this life and pinning all her hope on the life to come. Yet, among all spiritual writings, there are few so joyful as Julian's *Revelations of Divine Love*.

² Ignatius to Isabel Roser, 10 November 1532, in Ignatius of Loyola, *Personal Writings*, translated by Joseph Munitiz and Philip Endean (London: Penguin, 1996), 124.