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GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND MAN'S FREEDOM

"I believe in God, the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible."

THROUGHOUT our discussion we will be continually reminded by our findings, that if we would at all approach human adequateness in our conception of God, we must recognize the fact that revelation, though using metaphors, far transcends them. Moreover, we must remember that technical terms are borrowed from one science by another, and, again, are used popularly to the detriment of their full meaning.

I

The term "create" is no exception to the above observation. To-day the psychologist tells us that man is "creative", meaning thereby that man has powers of constructing and projecting psychic phenomena so as to mould them, to some degree, into an expression of himself. That such "creation" is only re-arrangement must be obvious to any who consider the question seriously. To be fair to the psychologist, he does not wish to imply aught else than that this re-arrangement is quite unique and supra-physical. However, we need not wander into the realm of epistemology to content ourselves with the use of the term "create" which is proper to our investigation.

In Genesis i., the word "create" connotes not merely the popular so-called "creation" of an artist or thinker. It is the term used to express the output of that primary activity of Deity whereby all things that are became. When we say that God made heaven and earth, we do not mean merely that He moulded chaos into cosmos. Probably wherever we have found records of human thought upon this question there has been found the magnificent conception of the Prime Mover and First Cause which came more nearly into its own in the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. Judaic and Christian thought—which, be it remembered, has been under the special guidance and nurture of the Holy Spirit—has in no way lagged behind the findings of the rest of mankind. The Judaic doctrine of creation—which is the Christian doctrine—is that before creation (to use the

schema of time) nothing was save God. "In the beginning God created"; and only when He set out in creative activity did the world "become (i.e. come into being) without form and void". In other words, not only did God, alone, by His own word, bring cosmos out of chaos, but He brought chaos into being from nothing (i.e. nothing outside Himself).

We may now draw some obvious conclusions from the very nature of the creative act without swerving from our path to examine more exactly the relation between Theism and Pantheism implicitly suggested above.

The first obvious conclusion is that the God from Whom and by Whom all things were made, must also be the God in Whom all things consist. Any doctrine which denies this truth is anti-Christian, and must reduce to a dualism in which the creature is either not from the Creator, or not entirely by Him.

Secondly, since God is thus not only the Author but also the Conserver of all things, so that in Him all things consist, then the true contingency of the creation is not uncertainty of event but dependence upon God. While not denying so-called "second causes" we must be quite convinced that nothing happens outside the will of God. In other words, any conception of the smallest deviation of an atom from that course which is the creating and conserving will of God is involved in contradiction. Therefore, that contingency which is popularly attributed to world-events so as to permit us to say, "The facts might have been different", is due to human finitude but is an untrue expression of the nature of the world-in-itself. The truth concerning all world-events is that they obey, by their own nature, an incomprehensible necessity which is the immutability of the counsel of God's will. That the world is as it is, is in itself the proof that it could not be otherwise. Could it be otherwise, then we must choose between two alternatives: either God can change His will, or God does not completely control His creation. Each of these alternatives has, at one time or another, been defended in the history of theology. They are both refuted, I believe, in the Biblical doctrine of God.

Introductory to a delineation of some of the truths revealed in the O.T. concerning God, we may notice that our language heretofore has been entirely in accordance with belief in the personality of God, and has even implied it. This belief is fundamental to the O.T. as to the N.T. To the O.T. saints, God is

no abstract power but the all-powerful Person with the attributes of morality—holiness, mercy, justice, etc. In fact, some have accused the O.T. writers of gross anthropomorphism. We are all, no doubt, prepared to forego the discussion which any such criticism would involve and to accept the position that the anthropomorphisms of the Bible are true but figurative. God, then, is Personal but not human.

II

Is the Biblical doctrine compatible with the belief that God can change His will ?

At first glance the O.T. seems to answer affirmatively, for it ascribes "repentance" to God in its anthropomorphic descriptions. This repentance is, of course, not the repentance from sin or error, but a change of mind in consideration of circumstances. The prophets Joel and Jonah both speak of God "Who repenteth Him of the evil"¹ which He works or intends to work upon the disobedient. The same figurative description occurs in the prophets Amos,² Isaiah,³ and Jeremiah.⁴ God is said to repent that He had made man on the earth, in one daring instance (Gen. vi. 6).

That such "repentance" should be taken literally is clearly inconsistent with the view we have adopted concerning Scriptural anthropomorphisms, and with the more sublime portions of revelation. Besides, the literal method of interpretation, when applied throughout, would make God a mere man with hands, eyes, an arm, a mouth, and lips. If we revolt from such a conclusion, then we admit that God "manifested Himself to men in place and circumstance though with no implication that He was locally confined".⁵ Similarly must we hold that He manifested Himself to men in human psychological and spiritual experience with no implication that He was subject to human variability or imperfection.

We perceive, therefore, the consistency of the O.T. anthropomorphism with the more theological statements therein, e.g.

¹ Joel ii. 13; Jonah iv. 2.

² Amos vii. 3, 6.

³ Isaiah xlvi. 9.

⁴ Jer. xviii. 8, 10; xxvi. 3, 13.

⁵ Hastings, *Dict. of R. and E.*

“The strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for He is not a man, that He should repent”.¹ Indeed, the whole conception of Jehovah—I am that I am—which is fundamental to the religion of Israel, is the statement of God’s unchangeable transcendence and the anthropomorphic statements must have been always in subordination to this leading revelation.

The O.T., therefore, does not describe God as changing His will. On the contrary, countless passages testify to the immutability of His counsel.²

Nowhere in the N.T. is God described as repenting; and the doctrine of the immutability of His will is outstanding.³

We may, therefore, justly conclude that the Biblical doctrine of God is incompatible with the belief that He can change His will.

Is the Scriptural conception of God compatible with a belief that He does not completely control His creation?

Modern phraseology concerning natural events is remarkable by its absence in Scripture. For example, we say “it rains”. We find this phrase in Amos iv. 7, but it is most unusual. The normal expression is “the Lord sent rain from heaven”, or the like. Thunder, lightning, hail, fire, brimstone, water, all the forces of nature, are spoken of as under His immediate control. In Scripture, there is no such conception as chance or accident. So complete is the control of Jehovah, that what man calls the chance fall of a lot upon a fair or foul ground is recognized as the direct expression of God’s will. (Prov. xvi. 33; 1 Sam. x. 19-21; Josh. vii. 14, 15; Judges i. 1-3; Lev. xvi. 8-10; cf. Acts i. 24, 26.)

Not a sparrow falls to the ground without the Father, and He feedeth the ravens. Little wonder, then, that when God Incarnate sailed the lake even the winds and waves obeyed Him.

We may conclude, from our reading of Scripture, that in the realm of “*nature*”, God exercises complete control over His creation. More serious differences of belief emerge on the question of His control of the human spirit. So far we have established that, at any rate, if God has not complete control over the human spirit, this is due to the uniqueness of His relation thereto. In other words, on such an hypothesis, there is, in the spiritual

¹ 1 Sam. xv. 29.

² e.g. Ps. xv. 4; Isaiah xiv. 24.

³ e.g. Rom. ix. 19; Eph. i. 11; Heb. vi. 17; 2 Tim. i. 9.

realm, that which is unparalleled in inanimate creation. The popular statements made on the question are of precisely this nature, and therefore it becomes more important to search out the foundations of this doctrine, whether there be any unsoundness in them. To attempt the task, however, in a reasonable way, we must be patient; not rushing headlong into intricate difficulties, nor jumping to hasty conclusions, but being content to be led from the broader cosmic view to the narrower soteriological one.

The cosmic doctrine above may have seemed extreme to some, although it is firmly established by Scripture. The apparent lack of moderation may, probably, be reduced to the fact that, in its character of a general survey, it did not denote the place and activity of "second causes". This difficulty will at once resolve itself if we ask: Did God destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, or did the fire and brimstone destroy them? The answer—which is obviously the only possible one—is that God destroyed them by fire and brimstone. This statement, we have seen, cannot be interpreted to mean that Jehovah one day descended from His throne and spent the night pelting a tiny portion of the inhabited globe. We infer, rather, that the "second causes", i.e. the sequence of the course of nature, was such that it fulfilled the judgment of God upon the unrighteous. Let us notice, in passing, that the purpose of God is always moral and personal in Scripture. Applying this conception to creation, since we argue from design in creation to intelligence in the Creator, may we not similarly argue from moral personality in the Creator to moral teleology in creation? The underlying principle in both arguments is that the creation is an expression of the character of the Creator. "All things were created by Him and for Him."¹ We must, moreover, remember that as a rule the Biblical argument is from God to the world rather than the converse which is the modern method. If God "upholdeth all things by the word of His power",² and is Himself holy and just, Truth and Love, then He must control the course of His creation in accordance with the moral principles which are His attributes.

We must press this argument further, however, to see clearly into concerns of our main subject. God's character is

¹ Col. i. 16-20; Eph. i. 10; 1 Cor. xv. 24-8, etc.

² Heb. i. 3.

unchanging and so (to use the schema of time) is the same before creation as after creation (i.e. in conservation). Therefore, God the Creator is the same moral Personality as God visiting His creation in judgment. Since we saw that the creation is entirely from God, then it must reflect His character, both in its very nature and in its active processes. In short, the popular conception of material things as amoral must be relegated to the position of a useful but merely relative concept. Since the Source of all things is God, all things are moral in action and by nature. That which follows a moral teleology must be in some way essentially moral, for teleology is the outworking of the nature of things, not an end superimposed upon their activity. The term "moral", admittedly loses much of its connotation when applied extra-personally, but should be so used, I think, to express the continuity in physical and psychical or spiritual teleology. This universal "moralness", if we permit ourselves to compose such a term, is the grand conception of O.T. and N.T. In the O.T., Genesis i. propounds a teleology involving every blade of grass, having man as its climax, and God as its infinite Source and End. In Genesis ii. the outlook is re-focussed soteriologically. All nature is for man's use, as in Genesis i., and man is for God's friendship. The same general conception may be found throughout the O.T. Especially in Psalms, the end of creation is the exaltation of Deity. Such also is the teaching of the N.T., e.g. 1 Cor. xv. 28. "When all things have been subjected to Him . . . That did subject all things unto Him, that God may be all in all."

III

We have now outlined the position that this Creation is a moral creation, not merely morally controlled but made with a moral nature. So far as I know, this conception is the only one which can adequately account for the Biblical identification of God with His "second causes". The adoption of this view reconciles the two aspects of the world-process which seem so contradictory, namely, natural law and God's providence. Clearly, on our view, there is no longer opposition between them, for God's providence is natural law, and the unexpectedness of some occurrences is due to our ignorance of the nature of the creation.

These considerations may cast a new light, for some, upon the N.T. truth that "all things work together for good to them that love God". They work together so because they *are* good, and their true being is the purpose of God. In this way, we grasp somewhat of the immanence of God in His creation. For our purpose we need but to note that necessity is not impersonal, nor is the impersonal amoral. Moral necessity is the truth of natural law; for its Source is God, the moral and unchanging Person.

No doubt the foregoing discussion has seemed rather outside our subject, but we may now justify our deviation. The establishing of the essential "moralness" of all things has been of value chiefly because it dissolves the opposition between circumstance and moral choice. If the Biblical doctrine be accepted, then a man must not only always be able to act morally, since all things are moral, but for that very reason can act only morally. The conception of an amoral mechanical action is ruled out as an untruth. We can only permit its use in a relative sense. Thus, a man is always capable of ethical action also. The untruth in this statement is due not to the essential nature of things or of man, but to the perversion of their nature in evil. The presence of evil in the creation compels us to launch out again upon our quest concerning man's freedom.

We have decided to adopt the fundamental optimism of Genesis i. Man, then, is essentially good. Yet he has fallen and his very righteousnesses are as filthy rags. The whole creation is created moral. Yet through the very climax of creation is introduced evil, the immoral. God completely controls His creation. Yet that creation turns anti-God. Jehovah places the apple of His eye in the garden and walks with Him in friendship. Yet He curses His creatures, and drives the man out of the garden. So we may heap antithesis upon antithesis to delineate the problem of evil which is part of the problem of man's freedom.

Probably the first point to realize in all these fundamental problems is that God is infinite. The purport of this latter proposition is not merely that God cannot be comprehended, but that there is nothing outside God. Therefore, the real problem of evil is to account for it in such a way as, on the one hand, to avoid the dualism of putting evil outside God, and, on the other hand, to avoid making God the Author of evil, at any

rate in such a way that any could say "God is evil." Furthermore, we must avoid, in our view of evil, the adoption of the following unscriptural tendencies:—(a) rendering evil partly or wholly a good, (b) rendering moral evil (in its restricted personal sense) irresponsible or inevitable.

Creation is finite and therefore implies self-limitation on the part of God. We need not press for an elaborate exegesis of this proposition, nor outline a Christian Pantheism. One aspect of its truth will be universally granted, namely, that God's immanence and God's immensity (as in Acts xvii. 28) are self-limitations of the Deity, and that the nature of the creative activity itself is such, in so far as it may be considered the outgoing of God's power in a certain way and for a certain end. After all, creation involves condescension. The Infinite made the finite. Nor is God's condescension imperfect. In making the finite, be it said in reverence, He accepted all the implications of finitude. The possibility of evil was one such implication.

God's creation, we have seen, is apprehended by the finite mind as purposive, i.e. as directed towards an end, which implies to the finite mind the possibility of alternative, which implies the presentation of possible evil. The possibility of evil is not evil, for possibility has no being till actualized. So the consciousness of choice is no mere illusion.

In the omnipotent, infinite Being, possibility and actuality must coincide,¹ for nothing is outside Him; and, therefore, nothing presents itself in opposition to Him. Thus to God there are no alternatives. What corresponds to finite choice and deliberation is His activity in accordance with His own nature. The Infinite is absolutely free since absolutely self-determining. For Him, being beyond alternation, there is no possibility of evil, much less evil itself. Whatever we say concerning evil, or even its possibility, must, therefore, be said with reference purely to the finite. In passing, we may note that the above discussion outlined the truth of Kant's distinction between God's will which is holy, and man's will which may be righteous. The holy will is "good absolutely", so that "its maxims necessarily coincide with the laws of autonomy". Such a will is absolutely self-determined and does not act from duty, but purely from its own intrinsic nature. It is its own standard, so that its morality is not the attaining of an end but purely the unlimited activity

¹ Cf. Leibniz, *Monadology*, 44.

of itself. Such is God's will for we have seen that He is above alternatives and absolutely unrepenting. "God made man in His own image." He reproduces this absolute will in terms of finitude through man. Each choice that a man makes is an expression of himself, and issues in action. Each action is a factor in producing a habit by repetition. Habits are factors in the man's character. Thus the man who repeatedly chooses in obedience to God's will becomes the man who habitually obeys God. The man who habitually obeys God does so, finally, because his character makes it impossible to disobey. Thus, in the finite, stabilized righteousness is the image of God's holiness. We must hold this ideal in view lest we be disheartened in the stress of temptation, or in the quest for an answer to the problem of evil.

IV

The problem of evil is inseparably bound to the finite, for Scripture teaches us that it is prior to *this* creation. The Devil and his angels sinned before the woman was beguiled. Thus evil is not confined to this creation whereof we have experience but pervaded the realms of finite beings in the very heaven. Moreover, the Devil was held responsible for his rebellion and was punished. Does this responsibility for choice imply that an alternative choice was possible? Could the Devil have remained obedient? Could Adam have resisted the temptation to eat? If we can approach to an answer to either of these questions we shall do well. But let us fly like Daedalus, not Icarus! Let us take the question which concerns Adam, not the one which concerns the Devil, lest we scorch our wings in too ambitious flight!

The freedom of the Infinite is absolute self-determinism. The finite can never attain, therefore, to absolute freedom, since it is not self-existent but contingent in the true meaning of that term, namely, essentially dependent upon God. The free choice of a finite being is the choice in which all the determining factors are within the self. In the finite righteous choice the contingency of his very being should be consciously realized, i.e. in moral dependence upon God. Now the finite is not perfect-in-itself but only perfect after its kind. Moral perfection, we have seen, implies a proper relation to God. May not this

requisite relation be considered as requiring for its fulness God's special grace, since the finite at the commencement of its history would be *sine* experience and, largely, *sine* knowledge? Hence, apart from the direct intervention of grace, error and wilful error (i.e. sin) would result. Thus sin would be concomitant to finitude but not essential to it.¹ If asked: Why should God intervene only for some? we assume no false modesty in declining to answer. Let us remember, also, that the bestowal of mercy or grace is not a subject for demands based on the principles of equity, for mercy transcends justice.

Some may object to this theory because it describes evil as a negation. The negation becomes positive, however, when a finite person sins.

Leaving our speculative deviation, we must return to our question, which is: Could Adam have chosen not to eat? Since responsibility implies freedom, then Adam's choice was free. Therefore, all the determining factors were within himself. His environment, in so far as it influenced him, was within himself, for such is the real way in which the self is influenced, namely, by the assimilation of the extra-self. Since Adam fell, and the truth of freedom is self-determinism, then Adam's nature was not *non posse peccare*. Was it *posse non peccare*? If Adam was able not to sin when tempted, how could he sin? Herein lies the crux of original sin, that Adam did not exercise his full freedom but willed to enslave himself under the bondage of sin. Thus by an intrinsic partial negation of himself, in some way directly relative to his finitude, man assumed a bondage. Here we are compelled to acknowledge that we are face to face with an insoluble difficulty. We have speculated above, in a slight degree, only to find ourselves cast in the end upon the inscrutable will of God. We know that will to be absolutely holy. We can but cast ourselves upon His mercy.

Our finitude has, then, rendered us unable to answer definitely the question whether Adam's nature was *posse non peccare*. But we have established the fact that he is responsible for his sin, since he fell by his self-determined choice. At the same time, we have been compelled to admit that God created not only the-man-who-would-be-tempted but the-man-who-would-sin. Either God purposed everything that happened in creation, or else there is dualism. Either all things have their

¹ Cf. Leibniz, *Monadology*, 42.

ground in God, or some have not. Being Christians, we must take the first of both these pairs of alternatives. Neither of these statements, however, is equivalent to saying "God is evil" or "God is the Author of evil", for we stipulated at the outset of our investigation of the problem, that evil is peculiar to finitude and so absent from God though not outside His ultimate purpose Who created and upholdeth all things.

The extraordinary use of terminology to which we have just attained, demonstrates the abstruseness of a subject which comes into man's ken directly from its Source in the ultimate. For example, we framed, under the over-powering persuasion of Scriptural doctrine, the conception of the Holy Will, which is beyond all alternatives.

V

We have here reached the border of the capability of human conception. To alleviate our strained condition, however, we must tarry a short while ere we return to lower levels. When we consider God in Himself, apart from His creation, we cannot but form such concepts of Him as the above. We may not apply to God in His transcendence the attributes in which He manifests Himself to His creation, without radically altering the meaning of those attributes. For example, how can we call the transcendent Godhead good? Good implies evil, and evil implies finitude. The only meaning which the term "good" may have when so applied is to denote that the Transcendent God is He Who in His relations to His creation is good. When we consider God pre-creationally, or as including His creation, we consider Him in transcendence. We see, therefore, that we may not then call Him good or bad. Indeed, God Who is all, Infinite and Absolute, is incapable of predication. His name Jehovah is, in itself, the affirmation of this truth. Therefore we conclude that God, considered in Himself, is not capable of the moral attributes "good" or "evil". Considered in relation to His creation we can call Him only good, for He is absolutely holy. But absolute holiness carries in its bosom all positive excellence.

In the metaphysical use of the term "evil", some even dare to say that "evil is within the Infinite". We rightly withdraw from statements so dangerous, yet we must not be unjust in our

interpretation of them. When applied to the Infinite and Transcendent evil can mean no longer what it means in the finite. Taken as implying intrinsic opposition, it cannot attribute moral opposition or the opposition of two finites to the Transcendent, since He is the One Infinite. The term can only signify the eternal intrinsic logical opposition which is the activity of the living God, an opposition which in the finite creation of God issued in the positive imperfection which is moral or material evil.

Therefore, we cannot say that "God is evil." Neither may we say that God is the Author of evil, in the popular interpretation of the term. Since He is the Source of all things, evil must find an explanation in Him but only in a logical or creational sense. Evil is no attribute of God. It is only the necessary consequence of finite freedom.

The outcome of our daring adventure has been to establish the truth of man's freedom, responsibility, and depravity. No Christian can tolerate the view that freedom is an illusion. Quite apart from the preceding investigation, this hasty theory, like others of its temper, commits suicide when faced by cross-examination. The basic assumption of human action is freedom. Once an illusion is recognized for an illusion, it ceases to have being any longer. Therefore, if anyone believed that freedom is an illusion, and this belief were in accordance with fact, he would cease to act altogether.

Man, then, is a free agent immediately responsible for his actions. Yet this freedom is within the sovereign control of the Creator, for God hath chosen some in Christ before the foundation of the world. How can this fact—and be it recognized that it is a fact of Scripture—be accorded with the fact of man's freedom?

The first attempt to arrange the desired accordance is the relegation of God's choice to dependence upon God's foreknowledge. It is suggested that "God hath not cast away His people whom He foreknew" because His foreknowledge of them enabled Him to see that they would believe and respond to His calling. God is sometimes likened to an exceedingly skilled chess player in face of an amateur at the board. From His resources of knowledge, He anticipates the moves of His opponent and compels those very moves, unconsciously to their author, to fulfil His purpose. Such a metaphor is not intended to be

exhaustive, and we must respect it as an honest attempt to cast light on obscurity. Unfortunately, it casts a shadow upon the essential truth which it contains and emphasizes a less adequate aspect. Implied in the game of chess is the purpose of the superior player which, by means of continual readjustment of the pieces, he compels the other player to obey. But the game is won in spite of the loser's will, not in accordance with it. If such were God's method of salvation, then it would not come by *faith*.

Again, the whole metaphor is incapable of its subject. God, we must consider, is not only the Controller, but the Creator. The fulness of the implications of the word "create" can never satisfactorily be made explicit. One fact we have, at any rate, made plain, namely, that thereby we state the origin of all finite being, not merely the assignment of character to it. Can we suppose, then, that the Creator's knowledge of His creature is like a man's knowledge of the machine he designs? "God spake, and it was done." The expression of His thought was being. The expression of our thought is only re-arrangement. Yet even a man can calculate what his machine will do, by knowing what it is. The horse-power of a motor-cycle is not determined by seeing how large a weight it will lift, but by measuring its cylinder and stroke. This practical and homely illustration should demonstrate the truth that work is the out-putting of what a thing is. In the same way, the history of an individual must be the explicating of his implicates or potentialities, subject, of course, to the factor of environment. However, when considering a creative knowledge the opposition between self and environment is not the *a posteriori* opposition in finite experience. Besides, environment may be considered as a collection of individuals—selves and things. In short, God's knowledge is not *a posteriori*, as is ours, for He is the Source and Author of all. Since He made all things, He made them as they are. He knew, also, each creature and its environment before He made them (to use the schema of time). He knows the beginning in the end, and the end in the beginning, and by Him all things consist. Therefore, that which is to us the implicit becoming explicit, to God is always and only the explicit. Wherefore, God's foreknowledge is not merely infallible induction *a posteriori* from creation. It cannot be divorced from action or actuality, as in human experience.

Two infants struggled within Rebekah's womb. "And the Lord said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two peoples shall be separated from thee; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger." How could such a prediction be foretold of unborn babies, were not the entire course of events fixed in the counsel of God? Passages in Scripture such as this one, render utterly ridiculous the conception of God as the mighty Casuist, Who does not know whether I will read the next word or not, but is capable of fulfilling His purpose in either case. In the world left us by such a theory, God is only imperfectly immanent, and we certainly do not "live and move and have our being in Him". He is but a tremendous man with a stupendous intellect, re-adjusting continually a creation which He must study continually *a posteriori*.

It may justly be contended that we have exaggerated the theory which we criticize. We reply to such an accusation that we have only developed the theory logically. If any single action of a man is indetermined by his self (and, if you like, his environment), then the psychic is subject to no law. Only on this hypothesis, in any case, can the theory we criticize be held; for otherwise God could deduce from the man's *self* how the man would act. But this power is denied Him by the theory. On this view, then, you and I had better pretend that we are not; for to be is to be, not because you have been, but purely and simply because you are. Moreover, there is no "you" or "I" that was and now is, except by some strange accident—and that accident you cannot prove, since deduction from the present will give neither past nor future. In fact, by reducing God's Personality within the limits of human persons, the theory destroys the Identity of Personality.

VI

The theory last considered is the grosser form of doctrine which makes God's election depend upon God's foreknowledge. The aim of all such doctrine—though seldom so clumsily stated as above—is to retain some merit on man's part whereby God is disposed to elect. Nothing could be more remote from the Scriptural teaching on the question, as we shall see presently. For a very short space, however, let us first show how theories

of this nature are compelled to admit their own inability to avoid placing the final solution to the question in the sovereign decree of God.

Grant, for the moment, that God chooses some to salvation in Christ before the foundation of the world because He foreknows that they will be the faithful. Why is His foreknowledge of them what it is? Why can He not foreknow them as rejecting Him? The only answer is: because He has created them and their environment in such a way that their reactions to His gospel are not rejectionary.¹ Why did He create a universe in which some reject offered grace and others do not? The only answer that can be given is that such a determination lies in His inscrutable will. In this way, the theories of foreknowledge that we are investigating, when dredged of their shallowness, become the doctrine of election by God according to the good pleasure of His will, which, we shall see, is election by grace.

The Scriptural doctrine of predestination must now be outlined; but we cannot attempt to do so without emphasizing its points in opposition to other theories.

There is an unjustifiable opinion—which I perceive dies a hard death even among the learned—that in the O.T. election is national and not individual. Now, the O.T. writers are quite innocent of such a view. They write of God's call to Abraham, of His choice of Isaac and rejection of Ishmael before the birth of the former, of His promotion of Jacob over Esau pre-natally, and of Joseph over his family (foretold in the dreams of his childhood), of His preference through Jacob of Ephraim to Manasseh, of His call to Moses (miraculously preserved in infancy), of His promise to harden Pharaoh's heart, etc. All our examples have been taken without searching from Genesis xii. to Exodus xii. We could multiply the number till we had no time for further discussion. In any case, a nation is composed of individuals and the nation cannot be chosen apart from the individuals in it. Moreover, to suggest that God elects *en masse* is to suggest that His knowledge is incapable of dealing with the needs and aspirations peculiar to the individual, or else that the value we place upon the individual is not paralleled in the heart of God.

¹ This statement does not deny progress in the creature, but only denies a progress not accounted for by that which progresses and the factors involved in its progress. The preventive grace of God may, for simplicity, be considered as one of the latter.

Our deduction is clear. God works through the individual. This truth stands paramount in the method of choosing the first King of Israel and subsequent kings. The prophet was sent to anoint the man to be king. Could anything be more individualistic and yet more emphatic of the sovereignty of God? One lone individual, to whom God gave His Spirit, was sent by the Spirit to another individual to give to him the outward sign of a special plan of God for him, of which hitherto he was unconscious.¹

Thus the statement that in the O.T. election is national is not the whole truth; and the statement that in the O.T. election is not individual is a positive untruth. We find both national and individual election in the O.T.

Another statement commonly made is that in the O.T. election is to privilege, not to life. Such a pronouncement is a claim to clearer insight into the O.T. than had the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews. No one can believe the eleventh chapter of that Epistle, and separate between the election of the fathers and election to life. As Calvin remarks, in *Institutes*, Bk. ii, Chap. x, Sec. i, some "think of the people of Israel, just as they would do of some herd of swine, absurdly imagining that the Lord gorged them with temporal blessings here, and gave them no hope of a blessed immortality. Let us guard pious minds against this pestilential error."

When we read the prophets, we find that the vision of Ezekiel may be applied to God's elective working—wheels within wheels. "Jacob have I loved" (Mal. i. 2; cf. Amos iii. 2), saith the Lord, and in Jacob He loved all the children of Israel. Yet this love for the nation is not the love whereby God elects to salvation. Terrible is the denunciation upon the perverse people and salvation is for "the *remnant* of Jacob" (Micah iii. 12; iv. 7; v. 7; cf. Isaiah, etc.). Therefore, within the national election to privilege was the election of the remnant to salvation. Thus St. Paul says: "They are not all Israel that are of Israel" (Rom. ix. 6; cf. ii. 28, 29). No one can read the O.T., for example the prophet Ezekiel, and believe that God's dealings concerning wickedness and righteousness are not with the individual as well as the nation. So that the election of the remnant is by election of the individual (see Ezek. xxiii., xxxiv. 11, 12, 22).

¹ The nature of the election, not its purpose, is here discussed.

However, in a discussion of this length we do well to pass at once to the N.T. where the O.T. is found in fulfilment. What is the N.T. teaching on God's predestination? (a) Does it consider man's merit? (b) Does it negate man's freedom?

(a) Even in the O.T. we can entertain no doubt concerning the absence in man of any ground for God's election (Ex. xxxiii. 19; Ps. viii. 4; Is. xlii. 22-xliii. 3).

It is stated repeatedly and expressly to be of free choice and love.

In the N.T. this aspect is the central theme of all the inspired declarations on the subject. We have already demonstrated the inherent fallacy in doctrines which base God's election upon an inadequate view of His foreknowledge. The N.T. bases God's election upon His predestinative decree. The classical passages are Romans viii.-xi. and Ephesians i. 1-12, but the doctrine is not confined to these portions of St. Paul's letters; nor is it by any means peculiar to him. For example, the doctrine is assumed by St. Peter (1 Peter i. 2, 18-20).

In the portion of the Epistle to the Ephesians mentioned above, St. Paul teaches us (i. 4) that we are chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world in order that we should be holy and without blemish before God; thus attributing holiness to election, and not election to holiness. If, then, holiness is the end, not the ground, of election, some reason extrinsic to the elect must have determined God. The phrase "*chosen in Christ*" has precisely this implication. The passage continues, only to base the choice upon the fact that God had predestinated or foreordained us unto the adoption as children through Jesus Christ unto Himself. We cannot possibly be said to merit predestination! This consideration adds force to the following words: "according to the good pleasure of His will"; and, lest we should still cavil at the exact meaning of these terms, St. Paul adds that the whole process is "to the praise of the glory of His *grace* which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved (i.e. in Christ)." Thus the end of predestination is primarily the exaltation of God; and, because God "hateth nothing that He has made", the means to that end is the salvation of some men.

Salvation is utterly undeserved and sovereignly gratuitous, the passage explains, for when God maketh known to us "the

mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Christ (A.V. in Himself)”, we learn that we have been “predestinated (R.V. foreordained) according to the purpose of Him Who worketh all things after the counsel of His will; to the end that we should be unto the praise of His glory.” Nothing could be more plain from this statement of the facts, than that God predestines and elects men utterly irrespectively of what they merit, but absolutely by His sovereign grace as the Creator and Redeemer.

In the section of the Epistle to the Romans, the attention is naturally centred upon the great summary of the question in Rom. viii. 28-30. No doubt, someone will wish to say that here predestination itself is based on foreknowledge. In the first place, let us note that the predestination or foreordination spoken of in this verse is to “conformity to the image of His Son”, which, on the common theory, is the object of God’s foreknowledge. The term “foreknowledge” is not always, therefore, used in precisely the same sense. In this verse, it is plainly used with a pregnant meaning as in the O.T., e.g. Gen. xviii. 19, where God says, “I have known Abraham to the end that he may command his children . . . that they may keep the way of the Lord . . . to the end that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him.” Our exposition of God’s knowledge which made it coincident with actuality was, therefore, quite Biblical. Though some use the term foreknowledge in the limited popular sense, we must not bind upon St. Paul, or the Apostles generally, a similar use! In Acts ii. 23, St. Peter tells us that Christ was “delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God”. Here is the pregnant use of the term again. Not only did God know that Christ would be delivered, but He delivered Him *by* His foreknowledge. Bearing in mind our previous discussion on the subject, we see how much fuller of meaning the term was for the Apostles than for us. Therefore, what St. Paul seems to say in Rom. viii. is that God’s pre-creational knowledge expressed itself in creational predestination. That is to say, God’s knowledge was not divorced from actuality. It referred not only to the creation which was its immediate expression, but also to the final redemption of creation and the salvation of the elect for the exaltation of God’s glory by Christ Jesus.

VII

We seem to have now reached the point where we must gather up all our resources for one more conclusive excursion into the depths of revelation. The commencement of our investigation foreshadowed the nature of the venture now upon us. It discussed certain fundamental aspects of the creative activity of God. We are convinced that there can be no irreverence in the earnest quest for truth. Let us, however, prayerfully determine that the end of our venture be not to glorify ourselves but to find God and to cast ourselves upon His mercy.

The difficulty underlying all popular discussion of God's elective purpose is that we forget that God created the heavens and the earth and all that in them is. If God is the Source of all, then our experience is only the outworking of what He made at the beginning. Experience in time is successive. God, being eternal, must have an eternal experience, i.e. a non-successive experience. "He lives in an eternal present." So we saw, earlier in this essay, that God's knowledge is not *a posteriori*, but that He sees the end in the beginning, and all His knowledge is explicit. Applying such a conception of God's knowledge to Him *quâ* Creator, we cannot fail to recognize the fact that God's plan is not distinct from His creative action. For His creation is the expression of His will, which must include His knowledge. Thus God created all things to an end, and that end was in their beginning—to us implicit or concealed altogether—to God explicit and as clear as their beginning. Hence, when God creates He predestinates. Let us once for all grasp this essential truth—Creation implies Predestination. If we admit that we have been created—as I suppose we all do—then, *ipso facto*, we admit that we have been predestinated, and predestinated to the minutest action that we perform.

Otherwise God is reduced to an aimless, though no doubt very amiable, Adventurer, Who has the power to bring things into being out of nothing, but prefers to see what way they will turn out rather than to "make even the wrath of man to praise Him", or to "uphold all things by the word of His power". The concept of God as the free Personality in the universe, is not the concept of lawlessness but of absolute, immutable Self-determinism. In short, if God has a character, then creation is

predestination. Why, then, do we object to the doctrine that God has predestinated some men to life in Christ ?

We have seen that one root of this strange objection is an unworthy conception of God's methods, namely, that He could find merit in men whereby to be disposed to elect, whereas His election is of sovereign grace and spontaneous love. Another root, I believe, lies in the fear that God's predestination negates man's freedom. So we pass on to answer the second great question which we set ourselves, in attempting to outline God's purpose as revealed to us.

(b) Does predestination negate man's freedom ? Obviously, if Creation is Predestination, then the latter in no way negates human freedom ; for human freedom is the outworking of creation. In our previous discussion, we saw that the truth of freedom is self-determinism. Since God creates the end in the beginning, He creates the self-of-to-day in the self-of-the-first-moment. In the self-of-to-day must be the ground of the decisions of to-day. The ground, nay, the identity, of the self-of-to-day is the self-of-the-first-moment, i.e. the original self of creation. But the ground and source of the original created self is God Himself. Therefore, while human decisions are free—and we established the reality of human freedom long since, by no mere sophistry—yet human decisions are absolutely necessary since their ground is God, the great unchanging "I am". Predestination cannot, therefore, negate man's freedom. Rather, man's freedom is the outworking of God's predestination. It is good that we should burn this truth into our minds, for it is the cure to Fatalism. The fallacy of Fatalism is that it supposes that God, or what serves in His place, superimposes a fate upon each man, as it were, extrinsically ; whereas the truth is that God's predestination is creational, and cannot be known save by the exercise of freedom which is its outworking. Let no man, therefore, pit his puny intellect against the creative working of the Almighty, to say : "Thou hast fated me to damnation." Such a claim is blasphemy of the most awful type, for it is the wilful assertion that a finite man can comprehend the purpose of the Infinite. Blasphemy also is it to say : "God has fated me to salvation and I need not worry." The only ground for confidence of such predestination is the witness of the Spirit, the experience of the effectual calling of God, and the resulting life in Christ (i.e. grace preventive and grace co-operative).

Thus we have seen that God's predestination does not consider man's so-called "merits"; and that it establishes human freedom. Yet some still resist the doctrine that God elects some men to life in Christ. Why is there still room for objection? I believe that the resistance thus prolonged is maintained upon a misunderstanding whereby they conceive that God is, by the doctrine, described as a vindictive Governor arbitrarily choosing the victims of His wrath and the subjects of His love. What renders this misconception so effective, is the large measure of truth which it contains. To deal with it with the carefulness that it deserves, we must consider two questions: (a) Does election involve reprobation? (b) Is God's election arbitrary?

VIII

To continue our investigations into these paths with any profit, we must, one and all, be willing to place ourselves consciously in the position of creatures. "O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why didst thou make me thus? Or hath not the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" (Rom. ix. 20, 21). We cannot dictate to God "in Whom we live and move and have our being". We must simply accept what He has revealed to us concerning His ways. In deep humility, therefore, let us go forward.

Throughout the Bible, a strong distinction is drawn between the righteous and the unrighteous, or wicked, between the godly and the ungodly, between the saved and the lost. Each member of the pair is considered as exclusive of, but implying the other. After all, in all common sense, what can the N.T. mean by denoting certain people as chosen and saved, unless others are not chosen and lost? To use a somewhat startling illustration—if every person in the world were mad, then no one would be! (In such a case, madness would be sanity.) Similarly, if God elects, or will elect all to life in Christ, then the phrase "chosen in Christ" has no particular denotation. The terrible but inevitable truth revealed in Scripture is that not all are chosen, and not all are saved. Election implies rejection, just as selection implies choice. Predestination implies Reprobation. We cannot

but shudder at the thought. Better to be filled with awe, than to disregard God's revelation.

Our second question remains: Is God's election arbitrary? If "arbitrary" mean unprincipled, the answer is emphatically negative. If "arbitrary" mean irrespective of *a posteriori* considerations, the answer is emphatically affirmative. The teaching of Scripture is not obscure on this question, though it casts us for the final answer upon that which transcends human reason and knowledge; and in the realization of that answer we are reduced to utter dependence upon God in deepest Christian humility.

St. Paul teaches us that God's elect are "called according to His purpose" (Rom. viii. 28). Later he shows that in order that "the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calleth, it was said unto her (Rebecca), The elder shall serve the younger. Even as it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau I hated" (Rom. ix. 11-13). St. Paul was thereupon confronted with our very question; for if God's choice is arbitrary in the sense of unprincipled, at once the charge arises: "Is there unrighteousness with God?" To this blasphemous, but natural suggestion, hear the Apostle reply, "God forbid: For He saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that hath mercy." Then the case of Pharaoh is cited and the conclusion drawn: "So then He hath mercy on whom He will, and whom He will He hardeneth." The kernel of the argument here is that election is of *mercy*. Can we dare to deny to God the right to exercise His mercy upon some, because all have sinned and earned judgment? Do we venture to suggest, either, that His mercy must negate His justice? Do we, His creatures, assume the right to question that will of God which is the source and ground of all things? If we persist in pressing the question, hath not God ultimately the right to make us as He choose? Or does our will take logical precedence to the Creator's? Precisely the same sovereignty is ascribed to God's will by St. Paul in Ephesians i. 1-12. Here, however, two verses throw considerable light upon our quest. In verse 8, he describes God's grace as that "wherein He hath abounded" (A.V.), or "which He hath made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence; having made known unto us the

mystery of His will." In verse 11, the elect are described as "foreordained according to the purpose of Him Who worketh all things after the counsel of His will; to the end that we should be to the praise of His glory." Here, then, is that "purpose of God according to election" referred to in Rom. ix. While assigning to the will of God absolute sovereignty, St. Paul emphatically denies to it any caprice, but speaks of it as wisdom, prudence, purpose, counsel. Therefore, to refer election ultimately to the unknown will of God is not to suggest that God is capricious. Being the absolutely free Infinite, we saw, in our discussion of true freedom, that He is therefore absolutely self-determined. Therefore, God's election is arbitrary as independent of all but God Himself, but God Himself is necessity.

IX

One more problem seems to confront us if we would claim to deal with obstructions to our doctrine. The question arises in this form:—admitting that God is just in condemning the reprobate, and not unjust in saving the elect, how can the Scriptures then teach that Christ died for all men? How can Art. xvii, "On Predestination", be reconciled to Art. xxi, "Of the One Oblation of Christ Finished upon the Cross", "for all the sins of the whole world"?

Christ saith: "Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out"; but, also, "No man cometh unto Me except the Father draw him." These expressions must be interpretable in accordance with each other, or else the whole body of faith falls shattered in a ruin of inconsistency. We have already shown that popular Universalism is untenable. Beyond shadow of doubt, election is particular and not universal. Some points of interest may here gain our attention towards elucidating the apparent deadlock that has arisen.

In the first place, the term "all" is in Scripture, as in ordinary speech, liable to more than one meaning. "All" may mean "everyone", or "every class". The latter is clearly its meaning in the oft-quoted phrase: "God hath shut up all unto disobedience, that He might have mercy upon all" (Rom. xi. 32). So also in 1 Tim. ii. 4, "Who willeth that all men should be saved."

Again, we must not make the mistake of equating "who-soever" with everyone, e.g. John iii. 16. "Whosoever" at once limits membership to a definite class. The same observation obviously applies to equivalent phrases, e.g. "Him that cometh", "He that hath ears", etc.

Again, and our final observation is the most worthy of our attention, we must not wrest Scripture from its context nor treat it irrationally. St. Paul in Romans viii.-xi., Eph. i. 1-12, and like passages, speaks of the will of God absolutely. He is there discussing the ultimate, eternal, creative counsel of God inscrutable to us. To it he attributes the final explanation of the mystery of Predestination. Yet we find that some, disregarding the essential character of these passages and similar ones, claim to find a discrepancy therewith in other portions of Scripture such as Ezekiel xviii. 23: "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked? saith the Lord God: and not rather that he should return, and live?" Is the prophet here discussing the philosophical implications of reprobation or election? He is merely treating of the loving mercy of God Who urgeth all men everywhere to repent. We have elsewhere dealt with the difference to be observed in applying attributes to God in His transcendence and in His relation to His creation.

In passing, we may note here that when St. Paul finds the ground of election in "the good pleasure" of God's will, he is not speaking of a pleasure due to an experience. The good pleasure of God's will is not the result of an *a posteriori* choice of created men, for it is the counsel of His good will whereby all things are to the praise of His glory. The content of this concept is, therefore, quite different from the content of "pleasure" in Ezekiel which explicitly refers to God in His dealings with men *a posteriori*, i.e. under anthropomorphic metaphors. We must remember that "There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions" (Art. i). Wherefore we may conclude that, in His condescension into the realm of human experience God grieves over the death of the wicked and offers salvation to all, but in His transcendence God is above grief or joy, working all things according to His determinate counsel, the good pleasure of His will.

The recognition of God's infinitude and sovereignty drives man to his knees in prayer. For man is a free creature utterly dependent upon his Creator, whether consciously so or not. His

knowledge and will are finite, yet his end is to exalt the Infinite. Therefore, the consciousness of his limitations leads him to appropriation of the Fatherhood which God offers to the children of adoption. Seeing that man, being finite, cannot will the infinite will, his endeavour is to will in accordance with it. Thus the Son of Man prayed: "If it be possible . . . nevertheless not My will but Thine be done." In His human finite knowledge, He did not define the limits of the possible, yet by obedience He gained the conviction that His suffering was God's will (see John xviii. 11; xix. 11; Matt. xxvi. 54). So He gained the fuller sense of submission which attuned His will to choose meekly and nobly that one cup reserved for Him by the determinate counsel of His Father, which was, indeed, the only possible path for Him to tread. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. ii. 12). Obedience and humility are the virtues of those "chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world", and in their exercise the elect become God's freed men, and are free indeed. Hear the testimony of one who lost himself in his Lord, and so found his true self: "I know how to be abased, and I know also how to abound: in everything and in all things have I learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want. I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me" (Phil. iv. 12, 13).

We may no longer tarry upon these blessed paths of God's revelation to us. Yet in our hearts we are the better for our quest. Our whole discussion, and especially our last thoughts, have corroborated the marvellous fact that the doctrine of Predestination is not merely a piece of theological speculation to provide delicate controversies for people with much time to spare. Predestination is a life—the life which must be lived by the elect. If they refuse to study their Father's gracious revelation concerning His will, they thereby suffer the loss of the fulness of the peace that God gives, they know the bitterness of the uncertainty born of ignorance of God's greatness, they experience the anxiety born of want of confidence in the sovereignty of God.

The certainty of my salvation depends not upon the measure of my faith. Election is of grace, not of works. "While we were yet sinners, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." Election is of *grace*, not of works. Yet the inscrutable creative purpose of God was such that He planned a response from the climax of His creation, an answering vibration from the heart of

His own image. His will was not to over-ride the divine beauty of that which He had made ; but out of its very nature, wherein Himself was mirrored, to cause a paeon of praise which even the sinless angels could not give. " And every created thing which is in the heaven, and on the earth, and in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, ' Unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb, be the blessing, and the honour, and the glory, and the dominion for ever and ever ' " (Rev. v. 13). " O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God ! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past tracing out ! . . . For of Him, and through Him, and unto Him, are all things. To Him be the glory for ever, Amen."

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