

*THE TEACHING OF PAUL IN TERMS OF THE  
PRESENT DAY.*

X. THE ALTERNATIVE : IMPERSONAL POWER OR PERSONAL  
GOD.

ACCORDING to the teaching of Paul, there is nothing really and in the highest sense true except (1) the axiom that God is, (2) what arises inexorably and necessarily out of this fundamental principle. The universe around us, then, becomes intelligible to us only through its relation to God, the original power, which gives reality to all the rest of things.

There are some who prefer to regard this primal reality under the impersonal term "power" or "force" or "energy." For many purposes it is immaterial to us at the moment whether you speak and think of "the power which constitutes," or "God who constitutes the whole." After all, distinction of gender is here merely figurative; the nearer one comes to the Divine, the less important does such a distinction become; in common experience you observe that "it" and "which" are used nearly as much as the personal pronoun and relative about the child in the first months or years of its life, and as Wordsworth says, the young child is nearest to the Divine :

Trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God, who is our home :  
Heaven lies about us in our infancy !  
Shades of the prison-house begin to close  
Upon the growing Boy,  
But he beholds the light . . .  
At length the Man perceives it die away  
And fade into the light of common day.

The difference lies in the recognition of personality ; but one need not, therefore, quarrel with those who prefer

the impersonal form, "the force which constitutes the whole," to the personal form. That difference stands apart from our purpose; and we welcome the admission that a certain unifying principle does give intelligibility to the universe; and that this principle is not immobility, but force or energy. We prefer to give a personal form to the fundamental proposition; and we believe that those who choose the impersonal form miss much of true philosophic thought. This impersonal statement of the first principle in the Universe leaves no place in its philosophy for man, and man then becomes an alien, so to say an impertinence or an anachronism, in the scheme of the universe. Such a principle, if it remains hard and does not develop towards a recognition of personality, must lead at last to the Oriental non-Hebrew systems of thought, which find the necessary goal and true end of human existence in shaking off human nature and becoming once more merged in the ultimate and primary energy.

Still we must welcome the recognition of this one constituting "force" as a stage in thought, which is likely sooner or later to produce the consciousness that this is a half-way position; and we therefore find in it an approximation to a better statement of the one ultimate nature. Here we have room and atmosphere wherein to work. On the contrary, we had neither room nor atmosphere in that dull and blind materialism out of which, during the last half of the nineteenth century, scientific theory was gradually and slowly struggling.

To Paul, however, the distinction between the personal and the impersonal expression was, in a religious view, vital—certainly vital in his ordinary preaching. Only misapprehension and misdirection could result if he addressed the masses in terms that might seem to admit the distinction as indifferent; for it is not indifferent, but vital.

There are, however, degrees of opposition. Some forms of religion or of philosophy were more hateful to him, and were regarded by him as more hostile, than others. The superstition and idolatry of the ordinary Anatolian cults were especially detested by him.

Paul knew well that there is a time for everything, and that only among them that are full grown should he speak philosophy.<sup>1</sup> Most dangerous was it to talk philosophically among the Corinthians, a middle-class audience, who possessed that half-education or quarter-education which is worse than a lesser degree of education combined with greater rustic sympathy with external nature. Among them he must insist in the most emphatic terms on the simple and absolute personality of the Divine power and message; he must "preach the Gospel not in philosophic terms," lest the philosophy might make unintelligible the truth about the redeeming death of Jesus.<sup>2</sup> In speaking to this kind of audience he perceived that he must have in his mind nothing save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.<sup>3</sup> To a simpler almost rustic audience he could speak in terms that were wider and less precise, and bid them "turn from these vain things unto a living God."<sup>4</sup>

Paul had experimented in the more philosophic style of address, when he was engaged in discussion with the philosophic teachers of Athens and was required to explain his doctrine before the Court of Areopagus and the audience

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 6.

<sup>2</sup> To preach the Gospel: not in wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made void, 1 Cor. i. 17.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 12: so in Acts xviii. 5.

<sup>4</sup> So the American Revisers rightly. The English Revisers wrongly retain from the Authorised Version "the living God." I shall generally cite the American Revision, which appears to me superior to the English Revision. Many years ago I was struck with the fact that, when I tested any case, in which the American preference is indicated in the list at the end of the English Revised Version, it proved better than the English.

of interested and curious persons who always thronged the courts in that period (as we know from Pliny to have been the case later in the century), and whose keen partisanship and applause or disapproval were more powerful influences even with professional lawyers than the opinion and verdict of judge and jury. There he used a non-personal form of expression: "What therefore ye worship in ignorance, this I set forth unto you"; and perhaps also a sentence or two later "that they might seek the Divine, if haply they might feel after it and find it";<sup>1</sup> and certainly afterwards "we ought not to think that what is Divine [or 'the Godhead'] is like unto gold or silver or stone, graven by art." Paul's purpose in this address is to start from the admission of this universal principle, the Divine nature as immanent in the whole universe including man, who is its progeny, and to argue that his audience must logically take the needed further steps, first to regard the Divine as a personal God, and second to understand the purpose of God in regard to man through the mission of "the man whom he hath ordained," and finally to comprehend the ideas of final judgment and the resurrection of Jesus.

Incidentally I may take this opportunity of acknowledging that I went too far in my book called *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen*, p. 252, when I declared that the Apostle "was disappointed and perhaps disillusionised by his experience in Athens. He felt that he had gone at least as far as was right in the way of presenting his doctrine in a form suited to the current philosophy; and apparently the result had been little more than naught." I did not allow sufficiently for adaptation to different classes of hearers, the tradesmen and middle-classes of Corinth, or the more strictly university and

<sup>1</sup> Acts xvii. 27. Western authorities read the neuter gender in 27, as all good MSS. have in 29.

philosophic class in Athens. It is true (as there shown) that Luke recognised and recorded the change in style of preaching at Corinth ; but on the other hand it is improbable that Luke would have preserved a careful report of the address at Athens, if he had not recognised it as typical of Paul when speaking to an educated Hellenic audience. Whether it is true that Paul felt disappointed with the results of this address, and resolved to change his method always and permanently to the purely and completely personal evangel, we cannot say. The fact is certain, that (as both Luke and himself mention) he did adopt the latter method definitely and emphatically at Corinth ; yet the inference is also equally certain that both Luke and Paul must have regarded as justifiable in suitable circumstances the other method, viz., taking the impersonal philosophic position as his basis and upon this foundation building up his doctrine of the personality of this primal force, the purpose and plan of the personal (as Paul would say, the living) God in regard to man, and the rest of his evangelical teaching. If he used the latter method less, his choice implied no disapproval of the method as wrong, but only a preference for the other method as more effective.

We notice also, in passing, that Luke marks his report as being only a brief account of a speech, for he implies in v. 18<sup>1</sup> that the listeners caught the word "Anastasis" on Paul's lips, misunderstood it, and mocked at it as the name of a strange deity. Now the word does not occur in Luke's report, but only a cognate verb in inflected form. The actual noun must probably have been used in the address as it was spoken ; and Luke here leaves a proof

<sup>1</sup> Although v. 18 refers generally to the language which was characteristic of Paul at Athens, and not specially to the address before Areopagus, Luke gives this address because it was characteristic, and must therefore have intended that the noun should be understood as implied in the verb.

that he is giving his own summary of a much longer address: that the address was long may also be inferred from the wish of the audience that it should be cut short, though the wish was expressed politely in the form that "we will hear thee concerning this yet again."

In Paul's attitude towards a philosophic statement of the nature of God, we perceive the Hellenic and philosophic side of his mind. The doctrine of an impersonal Divine nature or Divine power may be taken as the beginning of a recognition of the higher truth. Knowledge or truth in religion is not to Paul a hard, definite fact presented in the unchangeable terms of a creed or confession: it is a living idea, capable of infinite growth towards the higher truth, or of perversion and degeneration through being misunderstood and overgrown by error. The idea, though in a sense imperfect, is true while it is growing towards truth. The force through which it grows is Divine.

## XI. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD.

The true end of life is to attain, or in more accurate language to realise, the righteousness of God in the personality of the individual man. This term, "the righteousness of God," is a wonderful and exquisite expression, concentrating in itself the whole of Paul's aspirations and theory and teaching. His aspirations are his teaching. He is what he teaches, and he teaches what he is. To him "to live is Christ," and the goal is a higher life attained through the term of death, for it is "rich to die, to cease upon the midnight with no pain," and thus to enter by the gates of death into the new and higher life. That process is always going on, moment after moment: the old perishes, and the new begins, because the new is only a transformation of the old, as the fundamental or constitutive force of life passes out of

one state or one form into another ; and this constitutive force is God.

Of this force (which is God) in man, the life, the reality, the essence, lies in progress towards the goal. Attainment is the reaching of the goal ; and the goal is in a sense attained in every moment and in every effort by which the man strives onwards towards it. Yet the goal is not attained if the effort is relaxed and the process of continuous attainment stops. So long as the effort is maintained, the goal is being always attained, and yet it is not attained : it is reached, and yet it still lies in front. Here you are once more placed in presence of the same apparent contradiction which is expressed in that typical passage from Philippians iii. 10 ff. (as quoted in Section IX.) ;<sup>1</sup> and the solution lies in the idea of growth, evolution, development, the continuous reaching forward towards the higher life, the forgetting of what has already been attained, the strengthening in man of the Divine possibility which is innate in him, and thereby the growth into conformity with Jesus, in whom that Divine element wholly overmastered the human element and reigned supreme.

The "righteousness of God" is not to be thought of as a quality or characteristic which is possessed by God, or of which God could divest Himself. The nature and being of God is righteousness : that is involved in the axiom that God is good. The same righteousness belongs also to man in the sense that it is the goal and end which man has to attain. This righteousness is God, and it may come into the possession of man. Just as God is love, so God is righteousness ; and just as man may become possessed of love, so He may come to possess righteousness.

St. Paul, then, as we saw in Section IX., could declare that he (i.e., every saint, every true Christian) possessed

<sup>1</sup> EXPOSITOR, Feb., 1912, p. 145.

that "righteousness of God" which was the goal and ultimate end of his whole life and work, that he had attained already that salvation which he was to gain as the prize of the race of life. Is this a permissible and justifiable mode of expression? Is this the sound and true teaching? Such is a question that may arise at this point; and it may be answered with an unhesitating affirmative. The case may be thus illustrated by turning to another question: Do we possess freedom of will or not? Freedom of the will is that to which we may attain as the crown of growth and the prize of life; but we do not possess it to begin with, nor do we possess it in our life. Our will is largely enslaved by external conditions; yet we have the potentiality of freedom, and we can grow towards the realisation of it. Thus we possess freedom of will, because we can attain towards it if we live aright, and the process of attaining is the proof of our possession. We are free, because we can be free. We have freedom, because we are able to attain freedom. So it is with righteousness. In the attaining towards it, we have already grasped it. He who is growing towards it, has it reckoned to him as his own, according to Paul's expression. It is counted to him because it is his—through the grace of God working in him and through his new life, for he is new born, new made.

( This "accounting of a person as righteous" who has never previously done anything good or righteous<sup>1</sup> is, therefore, not retrospective, and does not merely imply that his sin is forgiven. Mere forgiveness of sin by God would be a purely negative idea; but here we are in presence of a positive power or force. That a man's sins are forgiven does not make him righteous. A parent may forgive his son, or a friend may forgive his neighbour; but thereby the son or the

<sup>1</sup> So Paul says emphatically in Romans iv. 5.

neighbour need not necessarily benefit so as to become better ; very often he is no better, and the process may have to be repeated even to seventy times seven, and still be required again and yet again. We want something positive, some energy in the man who is forgiven, before the "righteousness of God" is reckoned to him. There is not here involved any fictitious imputing of righteousness (as it were by a "legal fiction") ; still less is there any actual imparting of righteousness to a man who had none (as if so much money were placed to the credit of a bankrupt). The man himself is remade, and righteousness grows in him through his faith in a Divine idea, and the power that this exercises over his whole nature. This growing righteousness is, in the most real sense, the righteousness of God, the righteousness which is God. The growing tree is the tree, and yet it is only attaining to the perfect tree.

The process then is threefold : it originates from faith, it takes place by means of faith, and it results in faith (*ἐκ πίστεως, διὰ πίστεως, εἰς πίστιν*). The three expressions are not conjoined in any sentence of Paul's writing, although we have here brought them together. The first and third are conjoined in the splendid expression of Romans i. 17, "therein [in the Gospel] is revealed a righteousness of God from faith unto faith," and this follows after the words, "the Gospel . . . is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." The two expressions "from faith" or "by faith" (*ἐκ πίστεως*) and "through faith" or "by faith" (*διὰ πίστεως*) approximate closely to one another. The former tends to be used where the ruling thought in Paul's mind is of the Divine power acting on or in the man's nature, and the latter when the thought rather is of faith working from within the man's nature outwards.

These two manifestations of faith are really, however, one. The power of God exists in and through man. As we saw

in Section VIII., a God who remains apart from and uninterested in man does not fulfil the first axiom that God is : He must show Himself in and through man. A God that is mere negative creative possibility is not the real and living God. God, in order to be really God, must be a positive creating power. Through man God shows Himself in His real and living power. Not merely is it true that there must be God. It is equally true that there must be man, in whom the power of God manifests itself. Hence the faith which works from without on the nature of man is identical with the faith that works from within the nature of man. The former finds its expression in the latter.

The result of the power of faith in action is to recreate or to reinvigorate itself. It grows by itself through expressing itself in deed. The condition of faith is that it must express itself : it must create, because it is essentially creative : it is of God, and like God it exists and lives through exerting itself. Faith is a force, not a mere dead fact ; and a force that does not act, but remains passive, has ceased to be a force. The faith which exists in a man's nature, therefore, must either drive him on into action, or cease and die. Further, the nature of this force is to grow stronger through exerting itself. Where faith has once entered, it becomes forthwith the driving power in the man's character : it absorbs into itself all the man's nature and mind : there remains nothing else alongside of it within the man : all else is subordinated to it and driven on by it. This power is capable of infinite expansion. Through its activity it grows ; and, as the man's entire nature is now summed up in it, that nature grows stronger through action. In each step forward that the man takes under the impulse of this power of faith, he leaves behind him the old self and assumes a new self. He recreates himself in growing, i. e., in acting ; or rather, " it is no longer I that live," as Paul says, " but

Christ liveth in me ”<sup>1</sup> and through me. The Divine power having once seized on the man must be single and progressively victorious, going on from strength to strength ; or it must die out in the degeneration of the man’s nature.

There is, however, a certain tendency in man always to rest content with the present moment and the present condition. Even when man has once attained, that tendency towards contentment and acquiescence may come into operation. But there can be no contentment and self-realisation (which is the realisation of the Divine element in man) that can last beyond the moment, for the Divine, the righteousness of God, lies always in front ; and one has not yet, at any moment in the course, attained. To cease effort is to permit the beginning of degradation, i.e., “ to die.” One cannot remain as one was. If progress and effort stop, deterioration begins.

A driving power, therefore, is needed, not merely in the first effort, by which one turns one’s back on sin and struggles towards righteousness, but in the sequel. The new effort is a new start, each new effort is again the first step, in a process that stretches onward towards God. The past effort, which gained one stage, forthwith is left behind, and another effort is needed. In each and every effort the driving force is the same ; it is faith, belief in the ideal, the firm conviction that God is good. One starts from faith, one makes the succeeding steps by means of faith, and at each step one attains to a higher power of faith.

The idea that God is working out by a process that extends through the ages the issue of salvation for the individual man, is expressed very clearly in Romans viii. 28–30. First of all, in verse 28, Paul puts in the strongest terms as a starting point his fundamental principle, that God is good : “ We know that to them that love God all things work together for

<sup>1</sup> Galatians ii. 20, a passage that must constantly be quoted.

good, *even* to them that are called according to *His* purpose." Everything that happens, however painful or hard, contributes to benefit those who love God ; but such apparent trials and blows of fate must not be contemplated in too narrow a view. In the narrow view they seem calamities ; but if you take a wider view, if you contemplate life as a whole, if you observe how all the circumstances and conditions of life " work together " in the order and purpose of the world, then you find that the total effect is purely for good. Hence the further definition is added : " they that love God " are explained as " they that are called according to *His* purpose."

Here the will and " counsel of God " (as Homer, *Iliad* i. 5, and the great Greeks would call it) is introduced. This Hellenic and philosophic view is always found moderating and informing Paul's thought. That " counsel " works itself out to its final end through the tangle and confusion of the mixed good and evil of human fortunes ; and the medley of good and evil becomes intelligible only through the Divine will which can be traced in it. Nothing can be understood except in its relation to God. His will is the principle of order which gives unity to the mass of contradictions and difficulties ; and this order expresses itself as growth or development or evolution.

This process or evolution is stated in the next two verses : " Whom He foreknew, He also foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren ; and whom He foreordained, them He also called ; and whom He called, them He also justified [i.e. caused to be righteous] ; and whom He justified, them He also glorified." God with perfect knowledge saw and knew the whole universe : in other words, the universe is the unfolding in time of His purpose. From the human point of view this knowledge is entitled foreknowledge ; but, in the

nature of the Eternal "I am," this knowledge is only the outlook over the universe as a whole, outside of time, on the plane of eternity, i.e. as present, permanent, real. Towards this permanence Paul is always looking; for it he longs (as we saw in Section IX.), and he finds it only in God.

This knowledge or foreknowledge of the character and situation of each individual implies the marking out already before their birth of certain individuals to attain the end and consummation of human life, which is that they should grow into conformity with the image and personality of Jesus—for such is (as we have seen) the perfection and goal of man to Paul. It also leads to the calling at the proper moment, "i.e. the fulness of the time," of these individuals; as for example Paul says about himself in Galatians i. 15: "when it was the good pleasure of God, who marked me out from before my birth, and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him," carrying into effect the long-preparing purpose of God. This calling is the act of God, originating from His good will and choice; but at the same time the choice is not merely arbitrary or capricious; it is the carrying into effect of a plan in accordance with the nature of the universe and of the individual; and it presupposes that the individual on his part is able to hear the call and to respond to it.

In the calling, as in the foreknowledge, it is also implied as the certain and necessary sequence that the individual is justified, i.e., that his course turns towards the good and that the idea of the good and the aspiration after the good take possession of his whole nature and personality, so that he struggles with all his might towards the true end of human life and towards perfect conformity with Jesus. It also is implied that this course is ultimately successful, and that the consummation is attained and the individual is "glorified."

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