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A RELIGIOUS VIEW OF HUMAN PERSONALITY.

(A Sermon preached before the University of Oxford on Oct. 26, 1902.)

'For as the Father hath life in Himself, even so gave He to the Son also to
life in Himself.'—S. JOHN v 26.

These words spoken primarily of the Logos—the eternally
begotten Image of the Father, or primarily of the Son Incar-
nate—the human revelation of God? I must venture to think
of the words spoken by the Christ in flesh of Himself the
words must have direct reference to the *Incarnate Christ*; and
the words are no exception to the rule. Such a view is
confirmed by the phrase with which, in the next verse, the
text concludes, 'And He gave Him authority to execute
it, *because He is the Son of man.*'

We are, then, to take the words as having reference—not
indirectly, perhaps, but direct—to *human being* in the Person of
Christ. But if to human being in the Person of Christ, then, in
some sense at least, to the consummation, and therefore to the
ideal, of what human being is. I do not stay now to ask in
what precise way the relation ought to be stated between
humanity in us and Humanity in Him. At the very least, there
is an instructive analogy between the two; so that what is
a leading principle of humanity in Him has in it a lesson about
our humanity, and for us. At some risk, then, of seeming abrupt-
ness, I must venture to begin by assuming that the words of the

text have a direct application to humanity, even our humanity, in its true ideal meaning, as designed and discerned by God.

Any such *a priori* assumption is greatly strengthened when we begin to observe what it is that the words assert. They assert two things, and the two make a paradox: for they seem, on the face of it, to contradict each other. 'Even so gave He to the Son also'—it is, then, a gift, derivative and dependent. 'To have life in Himself—as the Father hath life in Himself': it is, then, an inherent possession, and compared, in this point of its inherency, to the inherency of the life of God. It is Life—at once given *and* inherent: at once dependent *and* distinct: at once an outcome of the Father's being, an act or expression of the Father's love, *and* an existence over against the Father, like in sovereign self-completeness to the Father's own. Such a paradox contains, in fact, an exactly true account of the actual reality, or at least the full ideal reality, of human conscious being.

The two sides are both present together, and the two sides are both to be taken account of. Logic may or may not succeed in correlating them: but to ignore either is to fly in the face of experience. It is easy for thought so to emphasize either side of the reality as to exclude the other altogether. It is easy to think of the inherent possession as everything. It is easy to see nothing, as characteristic of man's conscious selfhood, except the independence; to find its whole *differentia* in distinctness; to imagine that separateness is the great reality. One man is distinct from another: and both are distinct from God. I am what I am apart, alone; for good or for evil an object, a centre, and a goal, to myself. Now no doubt very much of *prima facie* consciousness is like this. And no doubt also this sense of self-sufficing independence may be said to have been closely connected, as condition, with not a little of human enterprise and of human excellence.

On the other hand it is not difficult, nor unnatural, at least to reflective thought, to conceive of created consciousness as a mere mode or part of universal consciousness, of the particular as but a partial presentment, a rendering in detail, of the general purpose or mind, of man at his most as a mere element in God. This is the opposite extreme. So far from finding the whole *differentia*

of particular being in distinctness, it really breaks down all distinction whatever. It explains the wonder of created personality quite simply by explaining it away. It merges the individual in the absolute. Whether, on those terms, it would ultimately succeed in conserving any conception of personality at all, even as applied to God, is a question which we need not now ask. Human personality it certainly does not conserve. No doubt it has been at many times usual for thinkers to conceive of personal consciousness, for all purposes, in terms too exclusively of conscious intelligence,—of thought, that is, rather than affection, of mind rather than will. Now it is much easier to think of the particular mind than of the particular will as a mere part or reproduction of the universal. It was therefore perhaps no very unnatural result of this exclusive over-emphasis upon thought or intelligence, if men were unduly disposed to let the idea of real individuality go: or at least if they found themselves in some intellectual difficulty, when they tried to show that their system of thought would not end in the loss of it.

These are the two extremes. But in point of fact either of these by itself is really one-sided. It may be easier, no doubt, as far as simplicity goes, to adopt either view by itself, than to bring the two into harmony. But it would be (what is often tempting to the thinker) a simplicity purchased at the cost of truth. A truer fidelity to experience would make impossible the exclusion or exclusive adoption of either. The logical dilemma is here, as it is so often, out of place. Each may have, indeed, in some sort, to be explained by the other. But the reality, on the one side, of individuality distinct and inherent, and on the other, of fundamental union with, and dependence on, God,—seeing that both are certainly, in some sense, true—cannot constitute any real or final antithesis.

It is to be noticed that they seem most opposed to each other in the earlier and more imperfect stages of consciousness; the consciousness, that is, of children; or of many, it may also be, of us, who are apt to remain as children in things like these. We seem to begin with feeling ourselves wholly by ourselves and to ourselves. This life within,—with its capacities, and its aims, its records, and its hopes,—it is all *my* secret. I know: and no other knows or can know but I. If there be risk run, it is my

risk. If there be achievement, it is my achievement. If there be weakness or wrong, it is alone, it is apart, it is mine, only mine. This sovereign separateness is the very essence and prerogative of my being.

How different from this is the later consciousness—especially of the noblest and the holiest of men. If we look to the picture of them, as it has been again and again unfolded to us,—Behold ! there are no secrets jealously shut off ; but rather every inmost motive and thought laid bare. There is the growing sense of an eye which sees and has seen through every secretest veil ; of a power which has guarded and guards every step of the path ; of a wisdom which has revealed itself to and in the soul with consummate wisdom of patience ; of a power and a love, not originated from within, which have more and more made the consciousness of the very self what it has been, and is, and is capable of becoming. Till the end is at least a conscious approximation towards real union of thought and of spirit—the man characterized through and through by the reality of the indwelling Spirit of God.

Such union is not for a moment the dissolution but the consummation, not the merging, but the crowning, of the several self. Never is the man so perfect in insight and wisdom as when he sees as God sees, and knows according to the truth itself : never is the man so perfectly free as when he can will and does will in absolute accord with the meaning and will of God, which is the highest harmony and perfectness of the nature, made in God's image, which God has bestowed upon him : never is he, as self, so completely all that self had meant, or been, or aspired to mean or become, as when he is at last a conscious and living and willing and joyous reflection of the very being and character of God.

It is true of course that this is transcendently beyond what any man has realized in his experience here and now on earth. The best man, perhaps, has but glimpses,—and his glimpses, though real, may be fitful and overclouded,—even of what he himself really is, and is to be. But it is true also that this is the end towards which the experience of saints is, even visibly, tending in present experience : saintliness is, even here and now, however incompletely, a growth towards the capacity of real

mirroring, through God's gift of power, of the character of God. And it is at the same time true that it is in the final end or goal, it is in the consummation, unattained, indeed, yet more or less certainly discerned—it is not in the essential imperfectness of its first, weak, rudiments—that we shall rightly distinguish the real *differentia* and the true definition of the conscious selfhood of man.

No doubt our language, at its best necessarily figurative, may sometimes, and to some minds or in some parts, obscure the truth which it can but roughly represent. We may speak, as S. Paul spoke, of created human being as, in its ultimate reality, 'reflecting, as a mirror, the glory of the Lord'¹; but reflection and mirror are metaphors which require to be guarded very carefully. So if we speak of human being as an echo, or a likeness, a reproduction, or an image, or a response: our best words not only say at most but a part of the truth, but with that part they are apt to say also, verbally at least, something else which is not quite true. Take such words, for instance, as 'reflection' or 'response.' We need to make quite clear to our thought the contrast between an active and a passive reflection, between a living and a dead response. The response we speak of must be one of living will: the reflection we mean must be an activity of willing love. Our words will fail at the pinch, unless these things, will, love, life, are found to be implied within the words.

But, if we think, we shall find that they are so implied. There is a sense, indeed, in which all created being is a reflection of something of the Being of God. The snowflake and the crystal have the impress of Him: they are a real part of His revelation. So, in other ways, are the sunset, and the thunder. So, in other ways, are the unconscious growth of an infant, or the instincts of animals, or the motions of the stars. Something there is—a real being, a real beauty, which is *given* to them: which is stamped on them: a stamp, a gift, from the beauty of the being of God. But there is in them no inherent life. There is expression, Divine expression, *through* them: and yet it is not really *they* who express. They? There is no real 'they.' They are but channels, methods, fragments, glimpses, through which God indicates some separate aspect or detail of the expression of Himself.

¹ 2 Cor. iii 18.

How far different is it with the living self of man! It is the prerogative of his created being to have a life which, though none the less absolutely given, is yet given as inherent, when given. It is the true meaning of man's nature not only passively to reflect, as a mirror, some fragment of God's being; not only metaphorically to respond to some isolated attribute of God; but to be a living image—radiating as He radiates: willing as He wills: loving as He loves: nay, even willing with His will, and loving with His love, animated by His spirit, and radiating the very glory of His Person: a response to His essential being; a reflection of His inmost character: a living image of His very self. 'Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God: and such we are. For this cause the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not. Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him even as He is. And every one that hath this hope set on him purifieth himself, even as He is pure¹.' . . . 'And he that keepeth His commandments abideth in Him, and He in him. And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He gave us².'

The reflection of the crystal and the snowflake is partial, is passive, is dead. But the reflection of will as will, of life as life, of character as character, of love as love, of sovereign personal being as personal and as sovereign: this cannot be less than personality—royally complete in love and character, in life and reason and will. These are the very things in respect of which man is, in his ideal, the living image, the response to the being, the mirror of the glory, of God. As response, the response would fail, as reflection, the reflection would be untrue, if it did not necessarily contain and imply the livingness of these things.

The union with God, for which man yearns, and which is the consummation and ideal meaning of man's being, is no mere selfless merging in the Divine. The goal of man's being is union, not extinction. 'I in them, and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one³'; this is the crowning of the perfectness, it is not the obliteration, of man. Merge man's selfhood in the being of God, make him a mere part or mode of

¹ 1 John iii 1-3.² Ibid. 24.³ John xvii 23.

absolute existence: and it would be idle to talk of either reflection or response. The very words necessarily imply such living distinctness as is essential to the possibility of communion and unity. Oneness of Spirit is not mere unity of number. There can be no reality of communion, there can be no living oneness, in simple identity. 'As the Father hath life in Himself, even so gave He to the Son also to have life in Himself.' The ideal goal of man's being is life, a life inherent, with inherency like to the inherency of the life of God: for to image God, to reflect His very being, is the ideal end, which is the real meaning, of man. There would be no living reflection, no radiating, no willing, no intelligence even, if the individual were absorbed within, were a mere part or aspect of, one divinely self-conscious whole.

And yet all this inherency upon which we insist, is itself, as we no less insist, essentially givenness. It is derived, relative, dependent, creaturely. It is not—cannot be—apart, either by itself, or for itself, any more than it is from itself. Its whole excellency depends upon its relativity, upon its reality of communion, upon its oneness of thought, will, love, with God who is its goal as truly as He is its source. It is self, not maintaining its selfhood by separateness, or by the possibility of separating, but rather perfected in the final surrender of all that tends really to separate, glorified in the attainment of a union never again to be impaired or qualified, at rest in perfect harmony with Wisdom and Righteousness and Love, at rest, in oneness of Spirit, in Christ and in God.

In God because in Christ. What is there in the ideal Christian consciousness which is not, to a S. Paul or to a S. John, *in Christ*? The directness of the phrase may stagger us. We may set ourselves to soften it; we may explain what it actually says away: but however we deal with it mentally, we cannot deny that it pervades the thought of the New Testament, and pervades it in this form.

The phrase must needs be the right phrase. But how much does the phrase mean? The question is sometimes raised,—and it is at least a legitimate, if it is hardly an illuminating, question,—whether created persons are to be conceived of as within God, or without? Is God limited by them? Is their being an addition

to the Being of God? and does the addition constitute some existence, besides God, which is not God? The question is a question of logic rather than of reality; a question that is, not so much of what is, as of what human distinctions, of thought and of phrase, are subtle enough to define.

In the light of what has already been said I hope that we shall recognize that there is something really artificial in a question like this; artificial, that is, in the antithesis which it implies, and upon which it depends. But if the question be raised, then neither the simple 'yes' nor the simple 'no,'—neither the simple 'within' nor the simple 'without'—is wholly true as answer without the other. If there is indeed a sense in which created persons are without, yet almost all that is ordinarily meant by that withoutness is in fact a departure from the true law of their being, and is therefore no part of the ideal truth. If there is assuredly a sense in which they are within, that withinness, even in its ideal consummation, leaves them not the less, but so much really the more, self-identical as themselves. There is indeed a true sense in which it may be said of us all, from the beginning, that we are within God: for 'in Him,' as S. Paul preached to the Athenians, 'in Him we live, and move, and have our being¹.' But the truth here expressed is but shadowy, incomplete, unrealized, when compared with that to which S. Paul looked forward as the far-off ideal, the perfectness which shall be consummated at last, 'when all things have been subjected unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subjected to Him that did subject all things unto Him, that God may be all in all².'

Are created persons an addition to God's being, so that His being can be said to be limited,—limited by what they are? In so far as they can be said to be an addition at all, they are certainly an addition which can be said to utter and so to enrich, to express, and to glorify by expressing, rather than in any sense to limit Him. Limitation of God? It would be far nearer to the truth to conceive of them as constituting a new outpouring and enrichment of Divine self-expression through the willing and living reality of selves—of Him, by Him, and unto Him,—of selves whose meaning and whose glory it is—each in his several part, or aspect, or quality—to image faithfully, and to make

¹ Acts xvii 28.

² 1 Cor. xv 28.

adequate response to, the very character and reality of His being.

It is indeed only too true that though, in divine idea, and in dim underlying possibility, men may be, from the first, within God: there is in them also that which tends to withoutness, and does set them without and apart in some painfully real measure of experience, in proportion as they have rebelled, and have identified themselves with sin. Sin is, in its essence, withoutness. We all, who know what sin is, have some dim instinct at least as to what such withoutness means. And the tendency of sin, progressive and habitual, is towards that consummated separation from the being and nature of God, which is spiritual death. But the sense of withoutness, with which our self-consciousness begins, and which sin terribly accents and tends to make more and more real, is no proper reality—it is rather the contradiction of the proper reality—of what human life means. Only sin is the real withoutness. Very different from this is that element of withoutness (if so it is to be called) or quasi-withoutness, that negation of mere self-destroying identity, that gift of inherency of being, which gives meaning and life to unity. If men's first rudimentary and most imperfect experience lays a wholly undue emphasis on their separate distinctness, as distinctively separating, yet on the other hand, as men grow in divineness of character, and learn more and more how the true meaning of their being is to be One in the Oneness of the Spirit of God; more and more obvious is the sense in which they are not without, but are within, Him,—‘their life is hid with Christ in God¹.’ They are without just so far as to be really,—that is, livingly and lovingly—within. They are without in the sense that they are not self-identical with Him. They are not God, that their surrender, through Him, to union with Him, may be real. They are within more vitally by far than without: yet with a withinness no doubt, of which a sort of withoutness—the distinction which makes mutually conscious relation possible, the distinction implied in every real unity of Spirit—is itself a necessary aspect or condition.

If there is difficulty in this, the difficulty lies in the application of logical distinctions and dilemmas to the complex simplicity of

¹ Col. iii 3.

life. Logic fits perfectly only to things which human thought can wholly analyse and comprehend. Very rarely can human thought so compass (as it were) all round as to comprehend and formulate wholly anything so fundamental as conscious life,—uncreated or even created. But whatever the difficulty of statement may be, to experience at least the reality, if complex, is not perplexing nor difficult at all. Experience knows that both sides of the truth are true, whether logical forms can correlate them fully or no. It would not be after all very profoundly philosophical to explain away either side of a complex experience because it seems hard to adjust it logically with the other.

Christian life, then, our own life, our life in this University, or elsewhere,—is it pitched high enough? Its view of itself, its aspirations for itself, the meaning of its own work, the upshot of its own being,—do they not fall continually below the dignity which is inherently theirs? Men feel sometimes the significance and the solemnity of dying: do they feel the intense solemnity, the divine significance, of living,—of being men? Remember that it is not only immorality or wilful rebellion: it is not only religious indifference or contempt: but it is all pride and bitterness of spirit, or levity of life, or idleness, or unworthy conversation and amusement, it is every form of self-concentration or self-worship, which gives the lie to the true meaning and purpose of human life. In real right, and in real power, are we not more, far more, than we are willing to be? Is it hyperbole if S. Peter speaks of our becoming 'partakers of the Divine nature'? Is S. John's conception of 'fellowship with the Father' or of being 'in Him that is true,'—is our Lord's supreme teaching about inherence in Himself,—so much high-flown and misleading metaphor? The real meaning of you is not to be found so much in your imperfect rudiments as in your ideal consummation; not in your worst but in your best; or rather in that transcendently better, which your best can as yet but faintly adumbrate. In the imperfect stages of human consciousness the meaning of created personality is obscured, and discernible only most imperfectly. In its consummation it is what only the Incarnate has revealed in Humanity: so that even the opening phrases of the Epistle to the Hebrews, or such words as I have taken for my text, are

found at last to have a degree of relevance to it which at first we should never have even dared to dream.

This is the goal and the ideal. It may be that the method of reaching it has some sore surprises and perplexities. Of these we do not speak to-day. Discipline, Sacrifice, Crucifixion,—or, what may be even harder to understand,—confusion, conviction, even (as it seems) utter mental or spiritual overthrow: all these have a place, a strange place sometimes, even a staggering place, in the education of saints. Yet do not, even for these, lose the meaning, or lower the aim, of your own human being. It is hard, through gathering darkness, to keep the ideal very high. Yet in the height of the ideal, there is hope, and there is life. To be men is—as it seems—to be capable of suffering, of sorrow, of perplexity, of remorse, and of shame. Yet to be men *indeed*—is, after all, to be as gods; echoes of God; adequate responses to God; not illustrations only of some attribute of Divine power or beauty, but rather—alive with His life, and aflame with the brightness of the Spirit of His love, and possessed through and through with the fire of adoration towards Him—light of His light, and fire of His fire, and righteous will of His righteous will!—real, personal, living reflections, or images, of Himself: of His character, and of His Being.

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