

## XII

## THE UNITY OF ALL THINGS IN GOD

THE CONCEPTION OF HISTORY AS A GRAND UNITY, WITHIN which all the accidents of time may be resolved, is possible only to God. God sees history whole. To Him a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years. In this He reigns alone. Ancient philosophy and modern science alike fail to give us this inner perspective of time. The conclusion of Solomon, that "no man can find out the work that God hath done from the beginning even to the end" (Eccles. 3: 11), is abundantly justified from experience. But what could not be discovered *by* man has been discovered *to* man: this discovery is made to us in the Bible. Genesis gives us origins: the book of the Revelation, conclusions: the Writings between, the whole long course of man's spiritual history. Prophecy moves freely throughout this vast field. Reading the Book, we begin to perceive that the unity of Scripture is, in some vital and mysterious way, correlated with the unity of human history. This conclusion, when formed, must profoundly affect our personal attitude to the Bible.

If all Scripture is thus vitally related to God's activity in history, the fulfilment of Scripture must, in some sense, coincide with the full sum of God's purpose at the end of the ages. In a word, the Scriptures are teleological. They are directed toward a final disposition of all things. Their inner dynamic force moves unerringly toward the fulness of times, when all created things, whether in heaven or on earth, shall be subdued to the authority of God. This element gives them their prophetic and apocalyptic character. It dominates alike the histories and the doctrinal teachings. Moreover, this eschatological outlook is not, as sometimes alleged, an escape from present realities, a reaction to disillusionment and despair: it is rather the consistent hold, in despite of adverse circumstances, upon a sure and certain but long-deferred hope. It is, in truth, the very life-stream of the Scriptures.

That history derives its final unity from God is supported by solemn personal affirmations, given by God Himself through the mouth of His prophets. In the confusion of the nations the Lord reassures the faith of His people in His sovereignty over time and space, saying:

"I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God" (Isa. 44: 6).

And again:

"I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me;

"Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done" (Isa. 46: 9-10)

And yet again:

"Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I the LORD, the first, and with the last, I am he" (Isa. 41: 4).

As the First, He is the primal Lawgiver of an ordered universe: as the Last, He is the ultimate Judge of all. He rules every intervening circumstance. Time and space are subject to His Word. He who is before all things is also after all things. He who speaks the word of creation speaks also the word of destiny; thus uniting in Himself the function of Lawgiver and of Judge. And so it is written, "One only is the lawgiver and judge" (James 4: 12).

In thinking of history as one complete whole we must not forget that the material from which it is composed is that of individual persons. Historical movements are the activities of personality. Co-ordination can only come through ability to grasp the varied and multitudinous elements that compose society. Where, then, may be found the single personality who can so hold together all history in himself as to control its complex movement and secure the fulfilment of the great scheme of Divine prophecy embodied in the Scripture?

"And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open the book, or to look thereon.

"And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath overcome to open the book, and the seven seals thereof.

"And I saw, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, having seven horns, and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth" (Rev. 5: 4-6).

In this apocalyptic vision we have the answer to our question. It is He whom on earth John had known as Jesus of Nazareth, now risen from the dead and seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; and who in the sublime consciousness of Godhood could say of Himself, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Rev. 22: 13).

The promises of the patriarchal period, the types of the Levitical institutions, the Messianic hopes of the prophetic writings, the records of the four evangelists, the Christology of the Pauline letters, and the visions of the Apocalypse, bear

common witness to one great fact, that the processes of the Divine purpose throughout the ages are controlled by Christ. An enumeration of some of the more significant allusions in Scripture will show that this is so.

“I will put enmity between thee (the serpent) and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3: 15).

“Thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee.

“Ask of me, and I shall will thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession” (Psa. 2: 7-8).

“And I saw in the night visions, and, behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one like unto a son of man, and he came even to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him.

“And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed” (Dan. 7: 13-14).

“When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory:

“And before him shall be gathered all the nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats” (Matt. 25: 31-32).

“. . . unto a dispensation of the fulness of the times to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth; in him” (Eph. 1: 10).

“For in him were all things created, in the heavens, and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him and unto him” (Col. 1: 16).

“And they sing a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation” (Rev. 5: 9).

As the Christ, the Son of the Highest, incarnate in human flesh, Himself truly God and truly man, this One of whom the Scriptures bear witness is the pivot upon whom history is balanced. All things were made by Him, and by Him shall all things be gathered together in one. As the heir of all things, the One by whom God ordained and fashioned the ages of time, Christ now sits on the right hand of the Majesty on high, upholding all things by the word of His power, and only awaiting the day when all

things shall finally be subjected unto Him and God will be all in all (Heb. 1: 2-3; I Cor. 15: 28).

Time centres in Him. Values are given to antecedent and to subsequent events by those of His incarnation: supremely so, by His death and resurrection. This Divine event is a central point of energy, the radiation of which is thrown out to the extremes of human history. It penetrates in every direction. In the eternal Present of this, the great Event of history, subsist alike the Past and the Future. It is the key to the human situation. Take it away, or weaken its spiritual content, and the Old Testament becomes a pointless collection of Hebrew records, and the New Testament writings an unfounded fantasy of religious enthusiasts. The deliberate and continuous emphasis placed, throughout all parts of Scripture, upon this dynamic act of God, illustrates how the Scripture itself is held together in Christ, and finds its fulfilment in Him.

Prophecy binds history with God. It shows history to be a grand scheme, grounded in the decisions of the Divine will. Were history a self-developing process we could conceivably interpret it in terms of natural evolution; but prophecy shows it to be the concrete expression in time of a Divine purpose. The structure of events is not fortuitous but deliberate. The shape of things to come has its mysterious origin in the depths of that inscrutable Will from which all things proceed and take form and meaning.

“For who among men, knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him? even so the things of

God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God” (I Cor. 2: 11). Until disclosed through prophecy the decisions of the Divine mind are incalculable by human foresight or intelligence, and baffle the conjectures of human reason. All things are being worked out after the counsels and foreknowledge of God (Eph. 1: 11). Even in human affairs thought and purpose precede action. Before the execution of a great enterprise, a whole scheme of things is planned for in the mind—remote contingencies foreseen and provided against, means and methods worked out, alternative possibilities considered in order to provide freedom within a fixed framework. All this may be done before ever a word is said about it; then, to show that events are not simply to regulate themselves, decisions and plans are announced beforehand, not perhaps all at once, but in stages appropriate to the progress of the work. In some such way prophecy shows forth the wisdom and foreknowledge of God, even as time and space show forth His handiwork and power. Certainly so serious student of history can afford to neglect Bible prophecy. The fact that the Bible puts

forth a claim so comprehensive and, if true, so important for human destiny, makes it all the more imperative that such a claim should at least receive a proper hearing. On the face of it there is no reason why it might not be true, and so also the adequate interpretation of the problem lying in the heart of life.

The cross was, and still is, the sign of the intersecting attitudes of God and man, the decisive encounter between human sin and Divine love. There, prophecy rises to its meridian: there, history has its culmination. On man's part, a public decision has been proclaimed: on God's part, a predetermined counsel fulfilled. The resultant crisis exposes with inescapable logic the real state of affairs. Man's latent opposition to God here becomes, in one act, open revolt. Diplomatic relationships are broken off. The cross is in effect a gesture of undisguised hostility: from the consequences of this act no retreat is possible. Initiative for further action remains with God.

That initiative has been taken. In the resurrection of Christ, God has negated man's decision. "The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob—the God behind the history and behind the prophecy—has glorified his son Jesus, whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate" (Acts 3: 13). The witness of the apostles is explicit upon this fact. They reiterate it again and again, as being of major importance, saying:

"Him . . . ye have taken, and by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay:

"Whom God raised up, having loosed the pangs of death" (Acts 2: 23-24).

"God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified" (Acts 2: 36).

"Ye denied the Holy One and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted unto you:

"And killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses" (Acts 3: 14-15).

"In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even in him doth this man stand here before you whole" (Acts 4: 10).

The situation created by the cross is therefore completely in the hands of God, who has dealt with it by elevating this same Jesus, whom men crucified, to the seat of universal authority, and by appointing a day in which, by that Man, He will judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17: 31). The further proclamation that, by an act of grace, an amnesty extended toward the whole world, God is now exercising His sovereignty in bestowing remission of sins on all who will repent and believe on the Name of His Son, is the very heart of the Christian Gospel.

From this it will be readily seen that salvation is not now a case of recovering a forfeited position (as if we could undo the cross), but of being lifted up into a new spiritual environment, an experience so radical that it is described as a passing from death unto life. The whole world, by the cross, is now found in resistance to God, and subject to His judgment: the whole world, by that same cross, is now, according to the witness of the prophets and apostles, the subject of Divine mercy. Under this conjunction of circumstances, therefore, we are addressed as individuals, by God, in the Gospel. The death and resurrection of Christ create for each of us a moral dilemma from which there is no escape. A personal decision must be made, and upon that decision hangs, not only our present happiness, but our future destiny.