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# The development of the Christian conception of God

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THE DEVELOPMENT  
OF THE CHRISTIAN CONCEPTION OF GOD.

by

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## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN

### CONCEPTION OF GOD..

In entering into a discussion concerning the Deity, the writer, cognizant of the extensiveness and sacredness of the theme, is compelled to say, How vast is the field to be surveyed! With how sacred footsteps should such hallowed ground be trodden! There is no attempt to speak a final word on a subject whose intricacy and profoundness the future milleniums of still advancing intellect can hope only partially to unravel and faintly to divine. So thoroughly and critically have the profoundest minds of all the centuries investigated the phenomena of both animate and inanimate nature, and impartially probed into all the evident proofs for a Divine existence, and so widely and wisely have their conclusions been distributed for reflection by the general mind, that it cannot be expected even to give expression to a new idea or voice a new thought on the problem before us. But what strikes one as peculiarly suggestive is the antipodal conclusions reached by thinkers and philosophers whose integrity cannot be questioned— a diversity ranging from the Atheism of the Atheist, to the Theism of the Christian. And to the question; Shall there ever be a unity of thought as to the essence of the First Cause? we feel compelled to answer; Because of the constitution of the human mind and because of the essential nature of the problem, it is futile to

hope for a harmonious agreement. \* "Canst thou by searching find out God?"

It is not the purpose of this paper to give in detail the conceptions of God as reached by the varied races in their ever changing degrees of intelligence- which conceptions are expressed in the Great Religions of the world. Such a description would fill many volumes. Rather to select from these conceptions one, viz;- the Christian Conception, and to show its essential content, as containing a greater degree of truth than any other, or all other conceptions of the Deity, in that it is perfectly consistent with the highest reason and is peculiarly adapted to the mental and moral needs of the race, is the important problem before us.

By way of contrast and for the enlightenment of our position, it may be of service to note in a cursory way the origin of the idea of God among primitive peoples and the conceptions of God in other Religions than the Jewish and Christian.

We are assured by historians that there has never existed a tribe or nation destitute of a belief in higher beings. This constituent of human nature seems a universal phenomena and as old as the race. \*\* "Whether the etymology which the ancients gave of the Greek word *ánthropos*, man, be true or not, (they derived it from *ὁ ἄνω ἰθρῶν*, he who looks upward); certain it is that what marks man to be man is that he alone can turn his face to heaven;

\* Job XI; 7.

\*\* M. Müller, *Science of Religion*. P. 12.

Certain it is that he alone yearns for something that neither sense nor reason can supply." Whether during the immense prehistoric period, when man first appeared upon the scene and the peoples were distributed to different quarters of the earth, and when the earliest languages began to develop, man had any idea of God is traceable only through the memorials of tools and weapons that have been preserved. The Archaeologist alone can decipher for us the mental state and the civilization of these peoples by reference to these remnants. \* "Judging from the connection between the material and mental elements of culture, it can be inferred with a high degree of probability that the religions of the races prior to the beginning of civilization could not have been higher than the religion of the lowest existing savages."

The first form of consciousness of a religious instinct expressed itself in the worship of natural objects, conceived as superhuman persons capable of influencing human destiny. The Religions of the races have always been from the vague and indefinite to the clear and definite. The inorganic as well as the organic worlds furnished primitive man with objects of worship—animals and trees, sun, moon, stars, the earth and the stones that lay upon it, were all worshipped as possessing some supernatural power, that affected the lives of men. The whistling of the wind and the clashing of the thunder, and the flashing of the lightning were

\*Schurman, *Belief in God*. P: 77.

looked upon as angry gods whose wrath must be appeased by sacrifices and supplications. The term used to designate the worship of natural objects as possessing spirits is animism or fetichism. Ancestor worship also had a prominent place among the earliest forms of religion. The belief that when a relative died his spirit continues to live a phantom life of its own, and then visits the survivors in visions and dreams, gained a strong hold upon the minds of the earliest savages. It is still a matter of conjecture among Archaeologists as to which is prior- the worship of ancestors or nature worship. Some holding to the former and some to the latter. It is of small import as to priority in point of time. What is of consequence is that out of these earliest Religions were developed the worship of many gods, or the Polytheism of the Greeks and Romans and eventually the Monotheism of the Hebrews.

The development of the Religions of the world from ancestor worship to Theism has been a gradual unfolding or revelation of God to man. Man has had a consciousness of a Divine Being from the beginning, but God was not always a definite object of knowledge. \* "Mythology is the history of God in consciousness." It was impossible for the Great Spirit to reveal himself completely to dawning intelligence. Primitive man after the analogy of a child, had not the power to comprehend God as He is revealed to the <sup>Twentieth</sup> nineteenth century consciousness of an average European or Anglo-Saxon. But gradually, as human intelligence developed, the Deity

\*Schelling, *Idealism*. P. 171.

marvellously made himself known to humanity. We trace the growth of the worship of the stars, which God used as symbols of himself, - though the worshippers regarded them not as symbols, but as actual spirits, - through the Egyptian and Grecian worship of animals which were individualized gods; and in these the Grecian mysteries can be seen a preparation for a more spiritual faith in the religion of Revelation - the absolute monotheism of Israel. *\*\*"What a religion starts with is not any theory of the world, but an unreasoned belief in a being or beings, however conceived of, who shall be in greater or less degree like the worshipper, but raised above him by the addition of power, if not of omnipotence; greatness, if not infinity; wisdom, if not omniscience."*

The foregoing shows the universality of the idea of a God or gods. How the human race came into possession of this idea we shall not attempt to discuss. It is sufficient to say that the fact that the human spirit is in possession of the idea of God is an argument for the existence of God unless it can be shown that certain ideas, though uniformly produced, are unsubstantial pageants of the phantasy. *\*\*"If you will take the pains to travel through the world, you may find cities without walls, without letters, without kings, without houses, without money, without theatres and places of exercise; but there never was seen, nor never shall be seen by man, any city without temples and gods, or without making use of prayers, oaths, divinations, and sacrifices for the obtaining*

*\*Gore, Lux Mundi. P. 55.*

*\*\*Plutarch's Morals. P. 379.*

of blessings and benefits and the averting of curses and calamities. Nay, I am of the opinion that a city might sooner be built without any ground to fix it on, than a commonwealth be constituted altogether void of any religion and opinion of the gods, on being consulted, be preserved." "Look out for a people entirely destitute of religion. If you find them at all, be assured that they are but few degrees removed from brutes."

In the development of the idea of God among all peoples, we notice the complexity of its content. From the lowest forms of Animism have been evolved Polytheism and Monotheism; and even in Animism itself can be traced a belief in one Supreme Power, that controls the lesser powers. Egypt and Greece were the two representative nations of Polytheism. In Egypt Polytheism existed in the nature of things. The elements of the divine were seen dwelling in nature. In Greece, Polytheism had become detached; The Greek deities were not personifications but persons. They were divine men and women, no longer representing the elements of nature, but sitting on Olympus in merry festivity. There was not a great deal of the moral quality attached to the gods of Egypt; they were almost too impersonal for that, nor in the gods of Greece was there much morality, they were simply full of joyous life. Plato banished from the Republic the poets who described the doings of the gods, thus showing that the worship of such gods was injurious to good morals. But Polytheism can be traced in all religions, not

\* Hume's, *Essays*, II. P. 25.

excepting the Jewish. India, Rome, Scandanavia, had their Pantheon-  
their gods many.

The idea of Ditheism can be traced clearly in the Great Religions of the world. Even in Animism some elements were favorably disposed to the worshippers, others maliciously disposed. In the religion of Zoroaster there are two hostile powers of equal authority, one good, the other evil, - engaged constantly in war. The Ormuzd and Ahriman of the Zend Avesta appear in Hinduism as Brahma and Rudra, the creator and destroyer; in Egypt as Osiris and Typhon; in the Scandanavian Religion as Odin and Loke; in Judaism as Jehovah and Satan; and Christianity itself still retains the Satan of the Jews. All thought, religious or philosophic, that fixes its attention upon a distinction between right and wrong, leads toward dualism.

The assertion that the universe is God, and that God is the universe is Pantheism in its extreme development. Atheism says that nothing is God, which statement is the antipodes to Pantheism. \* "There is no religion in which we do not recognize the element of Pantheistic faith." Most apparent is it in the Hindu Religion. In China prosaic as that country is, we see the absolute Tao. Of Tao it is said, \*\* "We look at it and do not see it, listen to it and do not hear it. It cannot be defined. It acts, but without a name. It is the law which rules all things." Pan representing the All, is found among the personal deities of Greece. In the

\*Clark, J. F. Ten Great Religions. P. 118

\*\*Clark, J. F. Ten Great Religions. P. 121.

Mohammedan Religion even, there are Pantheistic sentiments. How significant is the saying of one of their saints of the twelfth century; "When we cry in our prayers, 'O, my Father,' the answer is in the prayer itself; in the 'my Father' lies hidden 'Here my child'." Paul, the representative of christianity, made statements that border on the pantheistic doctrine. How can we interpret the following; "In Him we live and move and have our being. In Him all things consist."? The great apostle thought of God, not as a monstrous Being, who made the world and set it going, allowing secondary causes to work His will; but as a Being immanent in nature, giving life and reality to all things; whose intelligence can be seen in the construction of the universe which is but an expression of Himself, and whose wisdom and love are manifested in the increasing direction and care He exercises over everything His hands have made.

It is a significant fact that a large number of the philosophers, from Plato to the present day, who have delved into the origin and meaning of Reality, have landed on the shores of Pantheism. To many minds, Pantheism seems to be the rational interpretation of the universe. Is it too much to say that these thinkers have been one sided and prejudiced in their speculations? If it could be proved possible for a finite mind to comprehend the Infinite simply by the organ of reason, the Pantheistic argument would have greater weight, but Kant was correct when he assigned to reason a limit, and beyond that limit, which is purely spiritual,

only spiritual discernment is effectual. Without question a great many philosophers lay too great stress on the intellect and do not allow the spiritual intuitions of man their full share in the interpretation. \* "No longer can it be said that because God cannot be touched, or heard or seen; therefore He cannot be known; for my friend is not known in that way either." \*\* "The chief end of man is not knowledge, man has a heart and a soul as well as a mind; and a conception of God that satisfies merely the intellect may crush the emotions and aspirations, paralyze the will and tear from conscience all that is precious, ennobling and supremely worthwhile in the life of humanity." But the Pantheistic theory is far from satisfactory even from a rational standpoint. \*\*\* "It (Pantheism) is unphilosophical because denying the necessary convictions of reason First Laws of Thought. God is Infinite Being, but we are compelled to believe in the reality of finite outward existences, which are therefore not God. We are compelled by the ultimate necessity of reason to believe in the reality of our own existence, which we also know to be finite, limited and dependent, consequently not the infinite and absolute Being. It is also immoral, because, if all things are God, then bad actions as well as good ones are divine, and the distinction between the right and wrong disappears."

\*Schurman, *Belief in God*. P. 17.

\*\**Ibid.* P. 220.

\*\*\**J. F. Clark. Ten Great Religions*. P. 117.

Among all Religions, from the most primitive to the most advanced, there has been a latent tendency towards Monotheism. Pure Polytheism never satisfies the mind. The drift of thought is always toward Unity. Unity is the culmination of all philosophic thought today, whether it is materialistic, Pantheistic, or Theistic. It is related that about Anno Domini 1440, at a great religious council held in Peru, an Inca rose before the assembled multitude and said; "Many tell us that the Sun made all things. But he who makes must remain with what he makes; now many things happen when the sun is absent, therefore he cannot make all things. It is doubtful if he is alive, since he never feels tired. Therefore, he, our Father and Master, the sun, must have another greater than himself, who compells him to go his daily round without peace or rest." In the Jewish religion God is regarded as above all, -as Creator, Ruler, Providence, and Judge; -But Monotheism reached its highest form in Christianity, where God is comprehended as not only above all, but through all and in all, perpetually imparting beauty and life. The part which the Greek, Roman, and Jewish, civilizations played in bringing the world to its highest spiritual position is outlined by Hegel in the following manner; "Greece developed the consciousness of the individual as a spiritual being, and of the spiritual character of the ruling powers of the universe. But the spiritual was known only as in immediate unity with the

\*J. F. Clark. *Ten Great Religions*. P. 122.

\*\*Hegel. *Philosophy of History*. P. 228-238.

natural and sensible. Their eye was directed outwardly to the visible universe, instead of inwardly. Rome developed the principle of personality, or independent individuality, yet here it was purely formal. Nothing was regarded in it respecting the positive and concrete character necessarily involved as a content in all true spiritual reality. This was the work of the Jewish civilization. The empty form was filled and man as a finite spiritual being found his complement in God the absolute spiritual Being."

We have dwelt at length on the early development of the idea of God, showing that the transition from nature to ancestor worship, followed by the Egyptian worship of the gods in the form of animals, which gave place to the more refined religion of Greece, where beautiful personalities in human form were worshipped; and finally out of this almost universal Polytheism developed as universal a Monotheism, which finds its highest expression in Christianity. Marvelous has been the growth of the germinal instinct of religion implanted in human nature. The primitive idea of God was clothed in symbol- the mind of man was too undeveloped to grasp the essential attributes of God. The Deity had to train mankind gradually by various processes adapted to their grade of intellect. But what is of importance is that the true germ has been preserved through the long stretch of time, so that while we speak of God in different terms from our ancestors, the essential principle is the same. The veil is gradually being lifted and the conception of God in

its purity is being revealed. \*If we find in that idea (of God) as conceived by untaught thinkers <sup>in the twilight</sup> of antiquity an element that still survives the widest and deepest generalizations of modern times, we have the strongest possible reason for believing that the idea is permanent and answers to an Eternal Reality. It was to be expected that conceptions of Deity, handed down from primitive men, should undergo serious modification."

We now turn to the conception of God held by the Jews and show its relation to the Christian conception, which developed out of the former. \*\*"The central fact of the Revelation of the Religion of Israel is this, 'Hear, O Israel! the Lord our God is one Lord.' The central utterance of the law is, 'Thou shalt have none other gods but me.'" At first, the Hebrews, like other Semitic clans, had their tribal god, who helped them in times of adversity. He was a war God. So long as they obeyed his wishes, success was sure to attend their battles. Jehovah was the name given unto him. After the settlement of the Israelites in Canaan, there was evidenced a tendency on the part of some to mix the worship of Jehovah with that of the gods of the Canaanites; and a great many of the warnings and denunciations of the prophets were uttered against such practices. But the Jewish religion preserved its identity and came out a pure Monotheism. The chief characteristics of Jehovah were that of sovereignty and morality. He was the moral ruler of the universe.

\*Fiske. *Idea of God*. P. 60-61.

\*\*C. Gore. *Lux Hundi*. P. 59.

The progressive development of morals in the Old Testament, and the gradual unfolding of a perfect character was also for Israel a progressive revelation of the character of God. Herein is seen a distinction between the Polytheism of the surrounding nations and the Monotheism of the Jews. The former laid great stress on power and little on morality, while the latter particularly emphasized the moral element and in addition subordinated power to morals. The conception of the moral nature of Jehovah was kept constantly before the people. The final relation, therefore, which God is conceived as bearing toward the world, is neither that the world is lost in God, nor that He is immanent in it, but that the world, while remaining separate, is externally subordinated to His wisdom and justice.

The New Testament teaches that God is not only above all, as Creator, Ruler and Judge, but that He is through all and in all. To sovereignty is added absolute personality, Unity and Eternity, - besides attributes pertaining to His character and temper. Christianity broke the bonds of nationality and made God universal in His relations. The ethical Monotheism of the Jews must give way to a universal Being immanent in all things and vitally connected with the human spirit. The unity of Monotheism must be preserved and united to the universality of Christianity. Here was the starting point of the new era. \*"Nothing could meet the want of the time but a religion which should unite the immanence of Pantheism

*\*Caird. Ev. of Religion. P. 67.*

with the transcendence of Monotheism; a religion which should rise to a divine principle in all things, and yet be able to conceive that principle as a living God; the inspiring source and eternal realization of the moral idea of man."

The Christian church, from its start to the present, has clung tenaciously to the Jewish idea of God, as a Being apart from nature, who occasionally interferes with that course of nature which He has established, but who has no permanent and vital relations with it. Augustine seemed incapable of comprehending the idea of Immanency, and represents man as cut off from God by original sin; and only through the church could the two be brought together. The church still holds to this view to a great extent. "It is hardly too much to say that three-fourths of the body of doctrine commonly known as Christianity, unwarranted by scripture and never dreamed of by Christ and His apostles, first took mighty shape in the writings of Augustine. The idea of God upon which all this Augustinian doctrine is based is the idea of a Being actuated by human passions and purposes, localizable in space, and utterly removed from that inert machine, the universe in which we live and upon which He acts intermittently through the suspension of what are called natural laws." Clement, Origen, and Athanasius, however, took higher ground. They regarded God as immanent in the universe and externally operating through natural laws. Deity to them was not a localizable personality, removed from the world and acting upon it only occasion-

*\*Fiske. Idea of God. p. 95-96.*

ally. On the contrary, God was the ever present life of the world, and through Him all things exist from moment to moment. Modern science has done much to modify the opinion of Augustine, and on account of these so called encroachments of science, the church has been terrified. So changed have the views of modern theology become, that anything but a universal religion will not be accepted. A God that is partial to one nation is no God at all, and the Divine Power has not only an outward relation to man, but primarily an inward relation. To a great degree Pope's universal prayer expresses the demand of modern thought;—

"Father of all in every age,  
In every clime adored,  
By saint, by savage, and by sage,  
Jehovah, Jove, or Lord."

And in connection with this utterance the following from the lips of Tennyson (Akbar's Dream) is relevant;—

"That Infinite,  
Within us, as without, that All in all,  
And over all, the never-changing One  
And ever changing Many, in praise of Whom  
The Christian bell, the cry from off the mosque,  
And vaguer voices of Polytheism  
Make but one music, harmonizing, 'Pray!'"

The Holy Scriptures contain the data upon which the Christian conception is based. The absolute essence of God is

there conceived of as immanent Spirit and His moral nature as holy love. In both the Old and New Testaments, God is frequently spoken of as Spirit, -invisible, unsearchable, omnipresent, and omniscient.

\*"Spirit is the fundamental essence in the Divine nature. Deity cannot be thought of as confined to a form like a human creature. Such an idea would imply limitation. He is the unlimited, -bound by neither space, or time, and can be everywhere present at the same moment." As a Spirit God cannot be appreciated by the senses - this would not be compatible with Spirit. \*\*"Lo, He goeth by me, and I see Him not." \*\*\*"Will God indeed dwell on earth? Behold the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded." But according to the Christian idea, God is not only Spirit in essence; He is also the cause of all animate and inanimate creation. Apart from Him all material existence would vanish. As the great Quickener, He gives His life and actuality to all existent phenomena, and all things are upheld by His constant contact with the world. Paul on Mar's Hill uttered a truth consonant with Christian Theism, when he said that it is God who gives to all "Life, and breath and all things," and that in Him we live and move and have our being. This conception of God in nature, imparting to it life and beauty, whose will gives it form, is what is called the romantic view of nature, and was unknown to antiquity. Only in very recent times has the view been developed. The chief exponent of this view, who expressed it in poetry, was Wordsworth. He has been

\*W. P. Odell. *Meth. Review*. Sept. & Oct. '96.

\*\* Job.

\*\*\* Solomon: -Chronicles:

called the religious Poet of the nineteenth century; and his power lay in his profound feeling of something divine in nature;

"A sense sublime

Of something far more deeply interfused,

Whose dwelling is in the light of setting suns,

And the round ocean, and the living air;

And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,

A motion and a Spirit, that impells

All thinking things, all objects of all thought,

And rolls through all things."

Jesus taught the same divine idea of immanence when He alluded to the care of His Father over the sparrow, and the glory with which God dressed the common weed on the plain of Sharon.

Paul also expounded the doctrine <sup>in his Epistles</sup> to the Asiatic churches.

God is immanent in the world—as revealing Himself in every blade of grass that grows, in every flower that blooms, as well as in the finite spirit of man; destroys the common sense idea of Deity, which represents Him as the son of man, localizable in space, apart from nature, and governing the universe as a pilot would control a ship. The world has ever been ready to accept this Anthropomorphic conception, because it appeals to ordinary intelligence and seems to satisfy the wants of humanity. But the conception cannot stand the test of logical reasoning. A God who is apart from nature must have that which opposes Him, hence He is not omnipotent. If He is localizable in space, He is not omnipresent; and furthermore, such a

God does not bear that same intimate relation to creation as a God who expresses Himself in the various forms of life. The anthropomorphic idea is a remnant from the primitive conception of Spirits that visit certain places and hold definite intercourse with mankind. The history of the Christian church is an illustration of the tenacity with which man clings to old forms and symbols; and because of this tenacity, Christian Theism has been greatly distorted. \* "The system of Christian Theism was the work of some of the loftiest minds that have ever appeared on the earth, but it was not adopted by millions of men and women of all degrees of knowledge and ignorance, of keenness and dulness, of spirituality and grossness, and these brought to it their various inherited notions and habits of thought."

But does the doctrine of Immanency destroy the personality of God? If we mean by personality what we commonly apply to that term, we reply, it does. If we mean by the term absolute separation from other individuals or things in the universe, we say that God filleth all in all. He is not apart from the rest of the world, but is the cause and support of all existent beings. \*\* "Personality in man is the highest spiritual fact of which we have knowledge. We mean by it that wonderful unity of thought, love and will, out of which center influence radiates in all directions." If we mean by the Personality of God His oneness or unity of Thought and Will

\*Fiske, *Idea of God*. P. 78.

\*\*Clark. *Ten Great Religions*. P. 247.

we affirm His Personality. But can we not say that God is above personality as we conceive it? Personality is the perfection of creation as we know it. If God is impersonal, He is not the highest in the scale of beings. An infinitely mighty power, working blindly, chained by law, would be lower than man. But looking at God as higher in the scale even than personality, and capable of all the expressions of personality, He becomes the very Being we need, - both the Jehovah of the Jews and the Loving Father of the Christian.

\*"We may take it as unquestionable that, if there is a Divine mind, it must differ so essentially from the human mind, that it becomes illogical to designate the two by the same name; the attributes of Eternity and Ubiquity are enough in themselves to place such a mind in a category sui generis." \*\*"In whatever other aspects the Divine personality may differ from ours, or may resemble it, the two are consanguinious at least in this, that both have purposes for which they care, and each can hear the others call." The German Philosopher, Fichte, had a different conception of God from that generally held. He denies consciousness to God, but when he does this, he tells us that he means our own consciousness, such consciousness as we can understand. All the attributes we can ascribe to Deity must fall infinitely short of the actual. We can define in terms that are known to us only, and when we attempt to define Deity, it is the creature assaying to define the creator.

\**Romanes, Thoughts on Religion. P. 78.*

\*\**James, The Will to Believe. P. 122.*

According to the Christian conception, man, as finite spirit, is the expression of the infinite Spirit. In the scale of creation, he is the highest. Unlike any other part of the Revelation, man has a separate entity, capable of originating, and also of volition. It is not too much to affirm that man is used of God for the perfecting of His work in the Universe. But while man is a distinct ego, he is in ultimate relation to God sufficient to permit of communion with each other. \*The union of man with God, according to the Christian conception is not to be superficially conceived, as though man were simply God, - that is, individually identical with Him, or God with man. Man is God, - that is, as a son of God, by a 'new' and 'spiritual' birth, he is a 'partaker of the divine nature' and filled with the divine presence - only so far as he puts off the 'old man', the 'natural man', whose thought and will are limited and engaged by finite things and puts on the 'new man'. \*\*"Man recognizes that his <sup>highest</sup> own life consists in hopeful, trustful, resignation to the Infinite Spirit, with whom he feels himself in union and communion."

Leaving the idea of the personality of God, we turn to the question regarding His character and moral nature. The question presents itself; Can we assign to the Divine nature the conception of morality at all? We are met with the fact that man possesses a moral nature, whence came it? Has it developed by habit - by accustoming himself to certain ways of living in the long struggle for

\*Hegel. *Philosophy of History*. P. 238.

\*\*Schurman. *Belief in God*. P. 145.

existence? Or must its origin be sought in the same source whence started the intelligence and will of the human spirit, viz., in the one Infinite Spirit? We believe the latter is more rational. The moral consciousness of man has its history as well as the intellect. This factor is of much importance in the development of the race that we can look for its ground in no place except the eternal Spirit, from whom we derived our existence. If, as we believe, man is the output, or highest expression of the Divine, and if his relation to Deity is that of permanent communion, whence else could come that characteristic so essential to that communion? What is highest in man must have originated in God. Hence we may conclude that God is a God of Righteousness. \* "It is difficult if not impossible, to think that the everlasting ground of things should be indifferent to those virtues and graces of character that constitute for us the chief end of man." \*\* "Our perception of right and wrong testifies clearly to a moral capacity in the human spirit, which must have its ground in the one Infinite Spirit." George Romanes, during his period of intellectual doubt, came to the conclusion that the moral nature of the Eternal was almost nil. \*\*\* "In short, so far as nature can teach, or observation can extend, it does appear that the scheme, if it is a scheme, is the product of a mind which differs from the more evolved type of human mind in that it is immensely more intellectual without being nearly so

\* *Schurman. Belief in God. P. 240.*

\*\* *Ibid. P. 243.*

\*\*\* *Romanes. Thoughts on Religion. P. 83.*

moral." But later in life, Romanes saw deeper into the mystery of things, and his faith in the Eternal shone and illuminated what before was dark and gloomy. He heard the divine voice in him, which was proof of the spiritual beyond him. Viewing the constitution of human nature and the trend of history from its starting point to the present, we conclude that there is a "power in the world that makes for righteousness." "When from the dawn of life we see all things working together toward the evolution of the highest spiritual attributes of man, we know, however the words may stumble in which we try to say it, that God is in the deepest sense a moral Being."

The New Testament sets forth the moral nature of God as holy love. "Be ye holy, for I am holy." "God is love." The Christian conception combines the other ideas of Deity with that of infinite love. Not only is God the all-perfect being, the moral ruler of the universe, but He is the Being who comes near us by the inspiring idea of love. He bears to us the relation of Father to son. Hence it is perfectly consistent and reasonable that mankind should be the objects of unceasing love and compassion. Love is an essential element in the relations of man with man. It is the common bulwark of the state and nation, and to be destitute of love for our fellow man stamps us as fit companions for the brutes, - nay brutes even are strong in their affection. And this love that is begotten in us for each other and for the Divine Being is but the reflex of His

*\*Riske, Idea of God, P. 168.*

love for us. \*\*"It is highly improbable that the eternal Reality which has brought us forth, and charged us with the duty of loving one another, should itself be a loveless Reality." \*\*\*"For my own part, I think it has been shown that the phenomena both of the universe and of human life require the thinking mind to postulate a Supreme Ground of things which we are entitled to describe as self-conscious Spirit and Loving Father."

When we assert love as a moral attribute of God, it follows as a logical consequence that the Father of finite spirits is capable of extending sympathy toward the whole of His creation—especially that part of creation which is the completest expression of Himself. Pagan philosophers represented God as mere intellect and destitute of affection. It was among the Hebrews that the sympathetic side of the Divine character was vindicated; and the doctrine has passed into the Christian church, and is the well-spring of the highest achievement in the spiritual life. Remove from the conscience of man the belief that God is in sympathy with the perfection of the individual man and all incentives to suffer, to climb, and be victorious in the struggle of life is destroyed. It is this sense of the Divine compassion that buoy's up the faith of the timid and down-trodden, and makes countless saints in the countless ages of the world's history. \*\*\*"The Christian Faith supplies believers with an argument against pessimism and with an insight into the

\*Schurman, *Belief in God*. P. 246

\*\**Ibid.* P. 266.

\*\*\**Romanes, Thoughts on Religion*. P. 152.

Divine character and methods as enables them to bear hopefully the awful perplexities which arise from the spectacle of human suffering."

The question of Divine compassion with human suffering suggests the problem whether or not God suffers. This like all questions pertaining to the Deity cannot be answered by specific investigation. If, however, we turn to the nature of all sentient beings, we find the capacity to suffer universal. Who shall say that the stones even have no feelings? But certainly so sentient being is devoid of suffering. Nor does ascent in the scale of sentiency mean less capacity to suffer, rather from observation we must conclude that the more awakened to sin the individual conscience becomes, and the higher man rises intellectually the keener becomes his suffering; or in other words, the diviner in thought and actions we become, the greater is our capacity to suffer. The foregoing considerations would naturally lead us to postulate the Deity as capable of extreme suffering. If God is conscious (and we believe He is) of the sorrows and struggles of humanity, it cannot be otherwise but that his great heart is pained at every human sorrow and yearns to lend assistance to every struggling spirit. Nor do the scriptures teach us differently. Christ is there represented as the incarnation of God-God in the flesh. If God does not suffer, Christ is not a perfect representative of Deity. He may be the son of man, but He cannot be the Son of God. When we behold Jesus weeping over the doomed city, and grieving

because of the hardness of men's hearts, and hear Him proclaiming His identity with the father;—"I and my Father are one," we say truly He was the "son of man"; verily He is the "Son of God."

It was necessary for Christ to appear as man to show the world the inner and spiritual relations existing between it and God.

\*"Christ appeared as man, who was God; and God who was man, and in this way peace and reconciliation were brought to the world."

The problem of evil as related to the goodness and power of God is a perplexing problem that has never been satisfactorily solved. The Pantheist, who asserts that the universe is God, must admit that evil, which is in actual existence in the world, is Divine. It is not enough to explain evil by saying that it has a relative existence only; that if we could see reality as a whole, what appears at present as evil would no longer exist under that aspect, in other words, that evil is occasioned by finite short-sightedness simply. To the average intelligence, evil is too actual an existence to be dispensed with by such an explanation. Pantheism can never give a satisfactory account of evil.

The world is divided into what are called Optimists and Pessimists depending on the view of life an individual takes. Among the former may be ranked Emerson, Schelling, Hegel, and Browning; as representatives of the latter we have Goethe and Carlyle. The dictum of Schelling is; "Imperfection is perfection itself in the process of becoming." Emerson explains it by saying; "God is  
*\*Hegel. Philosophy of History. P. 243.*

positive, and evil merely negative. All loss, all pain is particular." Browning sings; "God's in his heaven; All's right with the world." To such a nature as Carlyle's sin was too positive-too actual in its relations to humanity to admit of such optimistic reasoning. His contact with the world was so close and his apprehension of the evils of life so vital that he almost despaired of a Divine justice, and the final triumph of the good over evil. To be simply optimistic or simply pessimistic is one sided-neither position is the ideal.

There has lived but one person whose life and conduct was a correct interpretation of the problem. The life of Christ is a rebuke to both one-sided optimism and one-sided pessimism. No man ever recognized the sinfulness of sin as He; No man ever had greater faith in the triumph of the good than He had. So sensitive was His soul to the evil deeds and evil thoughts of men that from no lips ever came sterner expressions of antagonism. Yet so exultant was His faith in the latent good of man, that lay beneath the evil surface, that He could pray; "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." "It is this certainty of ultimate triumph, this combination of the despair of pessimism with an optimism that over-reaches and over-powers it, which constitutes the unique character of the religion of Christ."

We will close this discussion with a statement relative to the adaptability of the Christian Conception of God to the world's

*\*Caird. Evolution of Religion. ", 111.*

needs. We venture to say that the conception of God as conceived by Christianity offers a satisfactory explanation of the world's experience. As compared with this, all pagan notions of God are misleading—being both unappreciable by reason and repugnant to the moral sense. Christianity shows a Being who is the Absolute and Perfect one—a Being immanent in nature, yet transcending nature. A Spirit of infinite intelligence and holy love, who satisfies the demands of the intellect and fills the longings of the human soul. If we test this view by its effect upon the character and progress of humanity in general, we find that it is the only conception that is universal in its application and consequently is destined to endure. Not that other conceptions of God have not a degree of truth in them. There is perhaps no religion nor philosophical conception of life absolutely sterile. But the chief superiority of the Christian conception is that it allies itself with all truth. It is all-embracing. \*"It is indeed precisely in this that the conspicuous greatness of the Christian religion resides; namely, that with all its speculative profundity it is easily apprehended through its historic facts, which at the same time stimulate to and demand the effort to penetrate to their deeper meaning. Thus it is adapted to every stage of civilization, and at the same time satisfies the higher demands."

"O, Thou Eternal One, whose presence bright,

All space doth occupy, all motion guide,

*\*Hegel. Philosophy of History. P. 248.*

Unchanged through Time's all-devastating flight;  
Thou only God; There is no God beside!  
Being above all beings! Mighty One  
Whom none can comprehend and none explore,  
Who fillest existence with Thyself alone,  
Embracing all, supporting, ruling o'er,  
Being whom we call God, and know no more!

God! thus alone my lowly thoughts can soar,  
Midst Thy vast works, admire, obey, adore-  
And when the tongue is eloquent no more,  
The soul shall speak in tears of gratitude."

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