

CHAPTER V

ARTICLE IV.—*Of Creation and Providence.*—We believe that God is the creator, upholder and governor of all things; that He is above all His works and in them all; and that He made man in His own image, meet for fellowship with Him, free and able to choose between good and evil, and responsible to his Maker and Lord.

The theme of this article opens out toward an area of thought, which Philosophy and Science claim as their own. Much has been written of the relation of Christian faith to these two great enterprises of human intellect. The following conclusions seem to be of importance for religion and theology: (a) Faith is not subject to the dictates of either philosophy or science, and is not to be intimidated by them, as though it had to ask permission from them, before making its affirmations. Faith has a knowledge of God and of His redeeming work, as immediate and convincing as philosophy and science have of the objects with which they deal. (b) Faith has no quarrel with philosophy and science, as efforts to discover, and to interpret, the vast complexity of the universe, which constitutes man's environment, and provides him with the conditions of self-realization. Theology cannot afford to despise or ignore the action of that intellectual power with which man has been endowed, which was certainly meant to be employed to the fullest reach of its capacity, in accordance with its own inherent laws and conditions.

(c) Theology must not be identified with one type of philosophical or scientific opinion. Periods in the history of the Church have occurred, when this was done, with disastrous results. Faith has been made difficult, when it has been presented in the garb of a metaphysic long abandoned, and entangled in controversies long extinct. Theology must walk at liberty, freed from the chains of formulæ, which contemporary and transitional thought seeks to bind upon it. (d) Christian faith, however, has a right to its own conception of the world as a whole, and its own interpretation of its religious significance. (See Dr. Orr's well-known volume, "The Christian View of God and the World.") The claim of faith is that its knowledge of God in Christ carries with it a light, which shines upon the whole world, and lets believers see what it means in relation to God. In this religious estimate of the world, the following points are to be noted: (1) The dependence of the world upon God, for its origin, maintenance and governance. First: the origin of the world—God the Creator. What God's *method* of creation has been is not determined for us by the inspired Word of God. A reverent science will lift a little way the veil that hangs over the beginnings and the development of the wonders presented to our enquiring gaze. But the affirmation of faith is independent of such discoveries or hypotheses. God is not confronted by the world as an independent existence. He is the source of all that has being. "In the beginning, God": is true of the universe as it exists in space

and time, and all existent things have the ground of their being in God. The creative act, implying, as it does, transition from the eternal to the temporal, is, indeed, inconceivable by human intelligence. But, that the God, whom we know as Love, should have the impulse to create, i.e., to bring into being a world, in and to which He could reveal Himself, is not inconceivable, but is wholly congruous with our deepest thought of Him, as He pours upon us in Christ the utmost treasures of His grace. Even Plato traced creation to love. And where Divine love operates, it will not lack resources of power and wisdom. Religion may seem to have little interest in cosmology; but the conviction that the world is God's work, that all that exists is created by Him, and has no meaning or value, or place in the realm of being, apart from Him, is essential to Christian theism. Only through such a conviction is it possible to bear the pressure of an environment which so far exceeds our puny power of reaction towards it. It is God's world; otherwise, life would be despair. Creation underlies Redemption. Redemption has cosmic value. The Divine Worker is seen in both these manifestations of His power and glory. The modern co-operative task of theology and science, in their harmonious action, is to work out "a Christian conception of the cosmos," which shall "link Creation, Providence, and Redemption into one whole of thought of which Christ is the centre. (See Dr. Oswald Dykes' "Divine Worker in Creation and Providence,"

ch. 11 specially, pp. 30-38.) *Second*, the maintenance of the world; God the Upholder. As the existence of the world is due "in the beginning" to the act of God, so is its continued existence due to His continued creative action. The idea that God created the world, and then left it to its own resources, to "spin for ever down the ringing grooves of change," belongs, perhaps, to eighteenth century rationalism, but is profoundly anti-Christian, and is, besides, hopelessly out of date. Creative action is not over and done with. God has not withdrawn from His world. The upholding of it, says Dr. Dykes, is at the same time the creation of it stage by stage. If we count the continued existence of the world by millenniums, instead of centuries, and if we discern in these vast periods, the successive uprisal of ever more complex and wonderful forms of being, this is not to lessen, but mightily to enhance, our worship of the Divine power, which has been so marvellously at work in Nature, through all the immeasurable history. *Third*, the governance of the world: God the Governor. The marvel of the world is not merely that it owes its origin and maintenance to God, but that it displays a direction, a movement to a goal, in a word a purpose, which is none other than that will of love, whose supreme expression is the Person and Work of Christ. God does not act spasmodically. We cannot ascend to a time when His purpose was as yet unformed. We cannot descend to some particular instance of His creative work, which is irrelevant to

His great design. Creation, Providence, and Redemption reveal one master mind, one controlling and ordering will, one ruling motive, which will not be denied the issue of the infinite power and the infinite sacrifice of God. This conception of the dependence of the world upon God implies, further, that God stands in a twofold relation to the world, expressed technically in the terms transcendence and immanence. *Transcendence*—God is above all His works, as purpose and power and love and wisdom, are superior in quality of being, and degree of reality, and scale of value, to the created objects in which they are displayed and through which they reach fulfilment. *Immanence*—God is in all His works. The most reverent thought here is the simplest. What is that which is present in all the creatures of God's hand, sustaining them, giving them form and meaning, developing each to the perfection of which it is capable and binding all into the unity of an ordered whole? The answer is God Himself. God indwelling, inworking and outworking, till He gain His end. The universe is to be conceived, not after the analogy of a machine, but of a flower. It is not dead. It is alive; and its life is God. The work of God in creation reaches its climax, as far as Scripture and experience show, in the appearance of man on the earth. The Christian conception of human nature is involved in many problems, and is called upon to defend itself against many adversaries. A creed cannot enter into the discussions, which are the proper task of Apologetic.

It is called upon, however, to state definitely the positions, which cannot be surrendered, without letting go vital interests of the faith. Our article contains the following aspects of human nature, which are presupposed in the preaching of the Gospel, and in the experience of the Christian salvation. (1) Man has been created by God. By the direct intention, and by the operative energy of Him whom we know as Love, man came into being, and has been sustained throughout all the ages of God's unfolding purpose. It is worthy of note that this article says nothing of the method of creation. God is a worker who hideth Himself. We see part only of His ways. Faith is not concerned with details of biological science. But it is concerned to maintain that man, whatever science may have to say of the process by which he came into being, is the direct product of the love and power of God. All the forces resident in nature, apart from the indwelling Spirit of God, were not competent to produce, and they are utterly unable to explain, such a being as man, so wonderful in nature, so marvellously led, and hastening even now to a goal hid amid the dimness of years to come. In a materialistic age, the Church cannot lower its testimony to the dignity of man, linked as he is by indissoluble bonds to God, His Creator, Father and Lord. (2) Man was made in the Divine image. In seeking to know what human nature is, Christian faith does not explain the higher by the lower, and declares man to be a compound of ape and tiger, or

other noxious animals. Man stands at the head of the series of created beings, as we know them. In him the creative purpose has been manifested. This is what God desired—a being who should not be alien from Himself, incapable of knowing Him, or rendering Him effective and willing service. This is what is meant by "the image of God," in which man is made. It involves all the elements of nature, requisite to make possible God's personal self-communication to man, and man's intelligent response to God. It will include what God shows Himself to possess in His Self-revelation, different only by the fact that man is the creation of God, and dependent in Him for life and good and all things. The Image of God in man, accordingly, will imply (a) intellectual powers, by which man is able to form a rational conception of the environment in which he lives; (b) moral powers, by which he is able to discern and appreciate the values, for which and by which, he must live, if his life is to be worthy and great; (c) spiritual power, which in the New Testament is designated faith, "assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen." These powers, it is to be noted, are not to be isolated from one another. They are functions of the man himself, as he reacts toward all things and persons, as they enter into the field of his life. When they all function in harmony, when faith in God is dominant in all the spheres and departments of life, then, and then only, is the image of God depicted truly in man, and man becomes what His Creator

designed him to be, and reaches the fulness of his own complex nature. (3) Man is meet for fellowship with God. What has just been stated is comment on "meet for." As made in the Divine image man is capable of fellowship with God, of knowing Him, receiving communications from Him, responding to His appeals and warnings, loving Him, obeying Him, intelligently appreciating His purposes and becoming their agent and instrument. Now we add, that what man is "meet for," he is "meant for." Fellowship with God is His destined goal, his exalted privilege, his bounden duty.

We must give to "fellowship" here its full significance. It is a personal relationship of beings who are akin in nature. In this relationship, each is for the other, each is pledged to the other; each exchanges with the other that which is deepest and richest in Him. There is nothing greater in God than love; and that He has given in Christ sacrificially for man and "with Him freely all things." There is nothing greater in man than faith, and in that act he gives himself to the God who comes to Him in Christ, "unreservedly, unconditionally, and for ever." In very deed God and man in this fellowship are no longer two but one. There has been mutual self-communication, self-impartment. It is in this connection, and in this only, that the conception of immortality takes on a Christian sense, and stirs a Christian's heart with hope. This fellowship cannot be dissolved by so slight an incident as death. Nay, death becomes, not a fate,

but an opportunity; not disaster, but triumph; not impoverishment, but means of incomparable enrichment. To die is gain. Death ranks among the "all things" which are ours, because we are Christ's. (4) Man is free and responsible. The relation between the infinite and the finite constitutes a problem for which, in the nature of the case, there can be no solution by the intellect of man. The finite would need to be infinite, before such a solution could be reached. The human mind has swayed between the two terms of the problem. Sometimes it has so emphasized the infinite that the finite has been swallowed up and lost; and man has almost been deprived of his personal being. Sometimes it has so emphasized the finite that the infinite has lost reality, and man has become almost a god, the director of his own destinies, the author of his own salvation. In confronting this mystery, it is helpful to remember that we are not contemplating two spatial magnitudes, one very large, and one very small, but two personalities, in comparing whom the analogy of space does not apply. We are not dealing with quantities. We are moving in the region of ethical and spiritual reality. In this region, person enters into communion with person, and neither loses in this relationship fulness of life. This we know, not by philosophical demonstration, but by experimental proof. So it is, in this problem of the relation of the infinite person, God, to the finite person, man. We can and do have an experience, though we can never have an adequate

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philosophy. We know God in His sovereignty, we know man in his freedom. A one-sided intellectualism will affirm one term in a manner so unqualified, as to call into existence another equally one-sided intellectualism, which will affirm the other term in the problem in a manner equally unqualified and misleading. Christian theology must do justice to the fulness of Christian experience. Accordingly, Article III emphasizes the sovereignty of God. In Article IV we are reminded that man is made in the image of God, and so is not a thing, but a person, endowed with the mysterious gift of freedom, according to which he cannot be coerced from without, but is himself responsible for those moral choices, which he is constantly called upon to make, and which, as they are continually being made, give a bent to his character, and may fix his destiny.

There is much modern thought which lifts responsibility from man and lays it on his environment. This article does not deal thus lightly with man's endowment of personality, but does him the honor of recognizing his freedom, and calls upon him to realize his responsibility.