

WHO IS GOD?

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INTRODUCTION

This pamphlet is an attempt to answer difficulties that actually have been brought before the Catholic Truth Society and to meet the questioners upon their own ground. The argument, therefore, has been restricted to the limits of human reason, and even when texts of Scripture have been quoted it is because they express so beautifully truths of the natural order and not to remove the argument to a higher ground. Revelation, however, does in fact reinforce the conclusions of the human intellect and correct the errors to which the history of the mind of man bears such sad witness.

Of the strictly supernatural truths of our share by sanctifying grace in the divine nature and of the right bestowed upon us by Our Redeemer to enjoy one day the beatific vision, we have said nothing, though they afford, to believers, a far more marvellous insight into the amazing love of our God than can be reached by unaided reason.

P. E. H.

WHAT are we to make of this universe in which we live and die? Man's restless intellect must ever search, enquire, speculate, reason about its origin and purpose, and about man's own place and destiny in it. For no man, however bold and fearless he be, can ever imagine himself to be master of creation, and not rather subject to mysterious forces, to laws of growth and decay, to inevitable death. If we take the course of human history, with its succession of empires, of civilizations, of periods of ruin and barbarism, we may well ask whether there is any purpose or sustained design in the whole process, or whether all is haphazard and meaningless, without rhyme or reason. There is no intelligent man, however thoughtless and irresponsible, who does not from time to time, in some quiet hour, or under the shadow of a great sorrow, turn his mind to such deep questionings.

Men have given a variety of answers. Some have imagined that all things were subject to dark inscrutable fate, a power irresponsible and despotic, to whose decrees all had to submit without question. Entreaty and prayer were wasted on such a power, for it was harsh, unyielding, un pitying, and impersonal. A stoic resignation and despair were the only possible attitudes to adopt.

Others have conceived that there were two eternal principles, one good and one bad, neither of which was able to overcome the other, and that all history, whether of the individual man or of the race, was the working out of the essential conflict between the two. Some identified spirit with the good principle and matter with the evil and thus found in the conflict between matter and spirit the key to the world's history.

There have been some, too, who have proclaimed their disbelief in the existence of anything that cannot be apprehended by sight or touch or other sense of man; but such thorough-going materialism is rare, and gives no satisfactory reply to the questions, which must inevitably arise, concerning the origin and the meaning of the world.

Others, less dogmatic, have taken refuge in a position of agnosticism. We neither affirm, they will say, nor deny anything about the powers that rule the universe, we assert simply that we can know nothing about them, and therefore we can take no account of them.

It has been remarked, in criticism of such a position, that though men may say they know nothing about the unseen powers, they must not say that they can never know nor learn anything about them, for that would be to assert some definite fact about them, i.e., that they are unknowable. Surely the reasonable course to take, in a matter of such importance, is to continue the search and never, so long as life lasts, to despair of reaching the truth. It has been well said that agnosticism is an intellectual dug-out where a man may not stay if he does not want to be buried.

The Universe a Work of Intelligence

But surely it is not necessary to adopt so hopeless a position. Our reason cannot know everything, but if we will use it

so far as it will reach, it will teach us much.

Even to the casual eye, the universe is the perfection of order. The succession of the seasons, of day and night, the tides, the movements of the stars, the provision, by the vegetable and animal orders, for the needs of man, the phenomena of reproduction, growth, and development, the very existence of intelligence in man—all point to a mind at work. A complicated machine, such as a watch or a motorcar, argues an intelligent workman; and the vast universe, in which nothing is haphazard, but all in measure and proportion, cannot be a chance conglomeration of atoms, a fortuitous result of unreasoning forces, a blind work of fate, but must needs derive from a purposeful intelligence.

The Universe a Work of Love

Then, too, this intelligent being must also be good. We do not need to be reminded that the world is not a perfect place. Birth, growth, death are attended by pain. The labour needed for the provision of life's needs is wearisome. Sickness, misfortune, accidents, evils, both physical and moral, loom large in human life. Yet there is no question that the good immeasurably exceeds the evil, that happiness and joy are the rule, sadness and pain the exception. It is easy enough to make the test. Men may sigh over the weariness of life, but do they wish to surrender it? G. K. Chesterton in *Manalive* makes his hero offer instant relief, by means of a revolver, to all whom he hears complaining of the miseries of the world; but as immediately these murmurers evidence a very strong attachment to life, he speaks of the revolver as a life-restorer.

There are of course unfortunate creatures who commit suicide, but they are an infinitesimal proportion of the human race. The overwhelming majority proclaim loudly, and even boisterously, that life is sweet and enjoyable, and that the world, in spite of its defects, is not a bad place after all.

Rightly considered, indeed, evil has no independent positive existence, but is simply a limitation of what is good. All that exists is, so far, good. A short life is good, though it is not prolonged. A woman who loses husband and child should be better pleased, and generally is better pleased, to have known the joys of marriage and parenthood, even for a short time, than never to have known them at all. Even to those deformed or stricken with disease or deprived of the use of some of their senses or even of reason, life is usually pleasurable, and death unwelcome. The blind are proverbially cheerful. Suicide is, proportionally, less common among the poor than among the rich. Though a man may not possess much he may yet be happy in what he has. Chesterton, whom we have just quoted, illustrates the same principle apropos of divorce. Instead of grumbling, he writes, that he cannot have two wives, a man should appreciate his amazing good fortune in having had one.

We conclude, then, that the intelligence behind the universe is also good; in other words, the universe is the work of a Person who is good and wise. The name of this Person is God.

How, now, are we to conceive of God? If we take the words of the Catechism as the basis of our explanation, it is not because we wish at this stage to substitute authority for reason, but merely as a matter of convenience. The Catholic Church has ever been the upholder of the right of reason within its proper sphere. Even unaided by revelation human reason rightly used, so the Church teaches us, can reach with certainty the knowledge of the one true God, the Creator and Lord of all (Vatican Council. *De Revelatione*, Can. I). God, then, is described as “the supreme spirit who alone exists of Himself and is infinite in all perfections.”

God is a Spirit

What do we mean when we say that God is a spirit? We mean that He exists, that He knows and that He loves, but that He has no material frame such as is familiar to us in our own bodies. This is impossible for us to imagine, but easy enough to understand. We cannot imagine it, for all our knowledge comes through the senses, and the imagination can do no more than combine or re-arrange the data the senses have provided. As a man blind from birth cannot imagine colour, as a deaf man cannot imagine sound, so we cannot imagine love and knowledge without a material frame to acquire or exercise them. But, in spite of blind and deaf men, colour and sound do exist, and similarly, though we cannot imagine it, beings exist who are independent of a bodily frame.

Love and understanding do not, by any natural necessity, demand a bodily organ. Indeed, if we would conceive things aright, they are freer and more perfect without it. The body, if it is the instrument of the soul, is also its prison. How often do we not, in imagination, rove through time and space, turn our thoughts to the vast spaces beyond the stars and our desires to the ends of the earth! "And I said: Who will give me wings like a dove, and I will fly and be at rest?" (Ps. liv. 7). Our desires outrun our physical powers and chafe at the restrictions of time and space. As the body grows weaker the mind may become more active. It is clear that union with a material body is to a spirit a limitation rather than a furtherance of activity. One who can know and love without the shackles of bodily organs and senses is obviously at an advantage. Thus we cannot ascribe a body or a material frame of any kind to God. He is a spirit.

There are, too, other spirits, other beings who with powers of love, memory, and understanding, exist independently of any bodily frame. Christian tradition speaks of them as angels, that is, messengers of God. Then there are human souls which are for the time of this life bound to a human body which is the temporary organ of their spiritual powers.

God alone exists of Himself

Of all spirits, however, that exist, God is the supreme lord and ruler. All are subject to Him, the sovereign master of all. The reason is given in the words that follow

"Who alone exists of Himself," which introduce us to the all-important fact of creation.

It is inconceivable that any of the persons or things that we see around us could have brought themselves into being. It is always another who acts upon them, whether it be the carpenter who makes a box or a parent who begets a child. The experiments of Pasteur have shown that there is no such thing in animal life as spontaneous generation, but life comes always from preceding life. The very hills and valleys, the rocks and geological strata are the result of prehistoric changes, themselves resulting from still earlier changes. All these visible things, then, do not exist of themselves, but depend upon other things for their existence. So, too, in the spiritual order, neither angels nor human souls can create themselves, but they depend upon another for their being.

Now one cannot have an unending series of dependent beings or things. If the world, according to the Indian fable, is supported by an elephant, and the elephant by a tortoise, it is pertinent to ask how the tortoise is supported. No number of 'have-nots' can ever make up one 'have.' No number, however great, of dependent beings, i.e., those which have not existence of themselves, can ever make up one independent being, any more than a paint brush would paint by itself, provided that we made the handle long enough.

Let us suppose the impossible, namely that all beings were to depend upon one another; then nothing could ever have existed at all, for there would have been no ultimate support for existence. However long we make our series of dependencies, we must at last come to one being whose existence is dependent upon no other, but has the basis and reason of its being in itself. This being who exists not by another, but of Himself, we call God.

God the Creator of all things

Upon God, then, all things else depend. In other words, as we say in our creed, we "believe in God the Almighty Father, Maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible." He made the earth and all that is in it, the sun, the moon, the stars, and all the wonders of the vast universe in which our planet is but as a speck of dust; He made the spiritual world, angels and the souls of men. Of all these things He is, in the strictest sense, the Creator, for He drew them out of nothing. There was nothing which He might have employed in fashioning the first things He created, for, as we have just shown, all things, without exception, depend for their being ultimately upon Him. From the things first created, other things, according to His providence, and the laws His wisdom has ordained, have been developed, or have been fashioned by the hand of man. But even so His power is ever active for His hand must sustain in being all things that He has made. Not only for their origin do they depend upon Him, but for every moment of their continued existence. Without Him they are literally nothing, and did He fail to support them they would fall away at once into nothingness. No act, no word, no mere thought is possible unless by the use of powers which God has not only given, but sustains in action. The

multifarious and pulsating life of the vegetable, the insect, the animal world, depends for every instant of its being upon its Maker who concurs in its every activity. In other words all things in the world depend upon the existence of God as a portrait in a mirror depends on the face of the person who is looking into it; and God's creation of us and our maintenance in existence are one and the same activity on His part.

But this does not mean that God and the universe are identified, as with the pantheists who say that all things are, in the fullest and most literal sense, divine, or with those modern hazy thinkers who say that God is a tendency, or a becoming, or what not. Catholic philosophy, whilst holding that God is in and behind every activity of creation, teaches clearly that He is infinitely beyond and superior to all created things. To use for a moment its technical terms, He is not only immanent in creation, but transcendent: that is to say, not only does He continually maintain all things in existence by His creative activity, but He is altogether other than all these things. He is pure being, essential, absolute, necessary; created things are limited, contingent, utterly dependent on Him. St Paul quoted to the Athenians with approval the words of the pagan poet, "we are also His offspring," adding, "in Him we live and move and have our being." (Acts xvii. 28). "Though He be not far from every one of us," yet He is not identified with us. He is with us yet also infinitely beyond us.

God alone, then, exists of Himself: all other beings exist in, by, and through Him.

God is All perfect

What is meant by saying that He is infinite in all perfections? It is a technical way of saying that He is all-good, all-beautiful, all-loving. All the goodness and beauty that we know and see around us come from Him. He is the unfailing, inexhaustible source of all. The beauty of sea and sky, of flowers and of music, of mountains and valleys, of storm and sunset, all comes from this wonderful, this unique and fascinating Person. The beauty of moral character, the innocence of childhood, the courage of manhood, the patience and love of womanhood, all have their ultimate source in Him, for He has made all. All the love in the world, that love that makes the human heart so noble and so unselfish, all is implanted by Him, and is in Him in unutterable fulness. Creatures may in a far-off way share in His goodness, but their goodness is partial, imperfect, dependent upon His. "None is good but God alone," said Our Lord (Luke xviii; 19): to Him alone belongs absolute, unqualified, essential goodness. One creature has one excellence, another has another, a third has a third, and so on. But the Maker of all has all goodness in Himself; He is infinitely good because His goodness is as unbounded and unlimited as His own Divine Nature.

Even those qualities which seem in man contraries are reconciled in the infinite goodness of God. A good-natured man may be too tolerant of evil: a judge may find it hard to be both just and merciful: a humble man may fail in courage and self-reliance. But in God all the good qualities of creatures are purged of the dross of imperfection and combined in a perfect equilibrium. Each good quality is found in Him to infinity, and one does not interfere with the perfection of each other. Thus God is infinitely merciful, yet infinitely just, the strictest of judges, yet the tenderest of fathers. "Mercy and truth have met each other: justice and peace have kissed. Truth is sprung out of the earth: and justice hath looked down from heaven." (Ps. lxxxiv. ii).

God is Omnipotent

We must consider in greater detail some of the attributes of God. We have already said something of His omnipotence. It is shown most fully in the act of creation, for that is utterly beyond the power of any but Almighty God. There is no limit to His power, but that imposed by His own nature, which is good and wise. He cannot of course do wicked or foolish things: He cannot do anything that involves a contradiction. He cannot, for example, make a square circle. But of all that He has made, He remains the Master. He governs the universe by general laws, but He is not under the power of these laws. He can suspend them or alter them if He should consider it wise and just so to do. Hence arises the possibility of miracles. It must be obvious that God can work miracles or allow His servants under certain conditions to perform them.

We need not enter now into the fact of their occurrence. That is a matter of evidence and its consideration would lead us too far away from our subject.

God is Eternal

Next we may think of the eternity of God. We who are creatures of a day, who pass our lives in what we call time, who can remember the past, live in the present, and anticipate the future, cannot imagine eternity. It implies no succession, but a fulness of possession.* What is to us past, present, and future, is one eternal present to God. His life has always been, is, and for ever will be. It had no beginning; it will have no end. He is neither young nor old. Age has no meaning if we try to apply it to the Eternal God. His life is no fuller than it has ever been, nor can it become fuller, for He is essentially the fulness of eternal life. He has all things, all richness, all perfection, all happiness, all joy, without possibility of alteration or change, in one eternal now. "In the beginning, O Lord, Thou foundedst the earth; and the heavens are the works of Thy hands. They shall perish, but Thou remainest: and all of them shall grow old like a garment: and as a vesture Thou shalt change them, and they shall be changed. But Thou art always the self-same, and Thy years shall not fail " (Ps. ci. 26-28).

God is Unchangeable

Akin to the attribute of which we have been speaking is God's unchangeableness. To change is to move away from some good which one possesses, or towards some good which one does not yet possess. Clearly then, as God is the fulness of being, and possessed of all good, He cannot change. He cannot lose what He has, nor gain what He has not, for He is all.

God is Omnipresent

Another attribute of God is omnipresence. Just as our soul is present in our body and operates everywhere, so that there is no place of which we could say that it is only there, so God is present throughout the whole of creation and in all and every part. No place can be conceived where He is not. He is in all created things by His power, for He has made them all and they remain ever subject to Him. He is in all things by His essence, for He holds all in being nor can any creature continue to exist save in dependence upon Him. All things, too, are present to Him in so far as He sees and knows all things, just as all the objects around me as I write are present to me, though separated from me in space. The psalmist expresses most graphically and beautifully this attribute of God. "Behold, O Lord, Thou hast known all things, the last and those of old: Thou hast formed me, and hast laid Thy hand upon me. Thy knowledge is become wonderful to me: it is high and I cannot reach to it. Whither shall I go from Thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from Thy face? If I ascend into heaven, Thou art there: if I descend into hell, Thou art present. If I take my wings early in the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there also shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me " (Ps. cxxxviii. 5-10).

God knows all things

God's omnipresence thus leads us on to His knowledge of all things, for all His attributes form one harmonious whole. Once more to quote the Catechism: "God sees and knows all things, even our most secret thoughts." If, as we have said, God has created all things and no activity of any kind is possible without His concurrence, the thing is quite clear. To quote the psalmist again: "They have said: The Lord shall not see neither shall the God of Jacob understand. Understand, ye senseless among the people; and, ye fools, be wise at last. He that planted the ear, shall He not hear? Or He that formed the eye, doth He not consider?" (Ps. xciii. 7). God knows all things, present, past, and future. He knows all that is possible, all that may happen in the future, all that might have happened in the past. As an illustration, take the words of Our Lord: "Woe to thee, Corozain. Woe to thee, Bethsaida! For if in Tyre and Sidon had been wrought the miracles that have been wrought in you, they had long ago done penance in sackcloth and ashes " (Matt. xi. 21). Even this is not beyond the scope of God's knowledge. He knows in every detail the whole history of the human race, as it will be unfolded until the end of time, although it will depend in large measure upon acts of free choice on the part of man.

Our own conscience bears witness to the all-seeing eye of God. We know that we cannot hide ourselves from Him. We
* *A musical genius, in playing the theme of his fugue, can grasp its development and conclusion almost simultaneously. This may afford some faint illustration of what we are saying concerning God.*

know, in our heart of hearts, that we have the duty and the moral obligation of doing right and avoiding evil: we have an uncomfortable feeling of guilt if we fail in it. How can we upbraid ourselves?* How can we feel guilty towards ourselves? Man is one, not two beings in one. If we analyse the voice of conscience that speaks within us, we shall see that it is nothing else than a consciousness that God sees and knows even our secret thoughts, and that He will one day call us to give an account of them. Conscience is one way in which God makes Himself known to us.

God is Infinite

Much more could be said of the perfections of God, of His holiness, His justice, His mercy, His wisdom, and so on, just because He is infinite no human thoughts nor words can ever exhaust His greatness. "We shall say much, and yet shall want words: but the sum of our words is, He is all. What shall we be able to do to glorify Him? For the Almighty Himself is above all His works. The Lord is terrible and exceeding great: and His power is admirable. Glorify the Lord as much as ever you can, for He will yet far exceed, and His magnificence is wonderful. Blessing the Lord, exalt Him as much as you can, for He is above all praise. When you exalt Him put forth all your strength and be not weary, for you can never go far enough." (Ecclus. xliii. 29-34).

How does God remain unchanged?

Instead, then, of enumerating further the excellences of God, let us see what can be said in regard to one or two obvious difficulties.

First, as to God's unchangeableness. How, it will be asked, is that consistent with what we have said about creation? God was from eternity before the world began, surely when He created He did something new and had something, that is to say, creatures, that He did not possess before? Then again, do we not pray to God for various favours? Is that not asking change from one whom we have asserted to be unchangeable?

True it is that we distinguish amongst the divine attributes those which are absolute, like eternity and truth, from those which are relative, like mercy and providence. The latter come into play only with creation, for without that they have no object for their exercise. Yet fundamentally they are always in God. Creation means the beginning of existence for beings which had no existence before, but it involves no change in God Himself. If I determine to do something in a year's time and after a year proceed to do it, there is no change in my will, but only in the things affected as the result of my action. So likewise in creation, the whole change is on the part of the things created and not on the part of God. The sun shone upon the earth before the creation of man, and continues to shine now that men people the globe, nor is it altered nor diminished by reason of the many or the few who enjoy its rays. So, too, God is infinite goodness, and goodness of its nature tends always to overflow upon others. That goodness is ever unchanged whether in fact there be others who may benefit by it or not. As it is infinite it can never be lessened, however many the recipients of its bounty.

Reasons for Creation

Why then did God create? First, for His own greater glory, secondly, for the good of His creatures. If we remember that God is infinite riches and the fulness of all being, it is clear that He could not be moved to create by anything outside of Himself. Even creatures, as yet, had no existence, nor, if they were brought into being, could they add anything to the fulness of the happiness or perfection of God. But God's glory could be increased in an external way, i.e., He could be praised and honoured by creatures. Even so, this praise and worship could not add anything to the infinite perfection of God, but it could constitute, as indeed it does, the perfection of man. Man's only real and true happiness is in the worship and possession of His Creator. "Thou hast created us, Lord, for Thyself, and our heart cannot find rest unless it be in Thee." Thus we can see that the two ends for which, as we said, God created man, are in reality identical. God's glory is in the service of man on earth and his worship in eternity, whilst that service and worship are also man's highest and truest happiness. Thus God created man purely out of the abundance of His goodness, for He needed naught that man could

*See Cardinal Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, c. 5, § I.

give. Briefly, God did not create in order to obtain something which He had not, but to manifest that which He already had. In so doing He brings happiness to other beings, and their happiness, in turn, manifests that of God Himself. God did not need us, so to say, but He wanted us.

Answers to Prayer

With regard to answers to prayer, we have said that changes in created things, even that first stupendous change from non-existence to being, do not involve change in God. The difficulty will perhaps be felt rather in connection with the knowledge of God. As we have seen, God knows and sees all things from eternity. No detail of the whole course of human history escapes Him. If, then, the whole picture of human life has been open to the gaze of the infinite knowledge of God for all eternity, how can it avail to pray, say, for recovery from sickness, for fine weather, or even for spiritual favours?

True it is that God knows whether a man will recover his health or not, whether it will be fine or wet on a particular day, whether each man will save his soul or not. But perhaps, too, He from all eternity has made the granting of health or fine weather conditional upon our prayers, so that it is literally true that if we ask we shall receive; if we ask not, we shall not receive. Nor does God's knowledge of what will happen take away man's freedom. We see a man working hard and succeeding in the present time: God from all eternity has seen (we should rather say, "sees") him also, but God's knowledge no more takes away his freedom than does ours. St Jerome rightly says, "Something happens, not because God knows it in advance; but because it happens, He knows it." The weather expert may tell us that there will be rain and so I wear a mackintosh, but it will not rain because I know beforehand that it will.

An interesting story is told, in this connection, of Blessed Duns Scotus. Someone said to him once, "Why do you admonish me to live a good life. If God sees that I am saved, then I shall be saved anyway, whether I am good or wicked. If He sees that I am damned, then nothing can prevent it." The one who made these remarks was a farmer and at work in the fields. Scotus replied "Why do you sow wheat here and toil so hard? If God sees beforehand that wheat will grow here, it will grow whether you sow or not. If He sees beforehand that there will be no wheat here, well, there will not be any, however much you exert yourself." No reply was forthcoming.

The Providence of God

Another difficulty that men feel is based upon the very greatness and infinitude of God, as we have, most inadequately indeed, described it. How can so great a God interest Himself in creatures so insignificant as ourselves? David felt the incongruity. "What is man that Thou art mindful of him or the son of man that Thou visitest him?" (Ps. viii. 5). The difficulty is increased a million-fold with the discoveries of modern astronomy. Instead of being the centre of the universe, as our ancestors seem to have thought, the world we live in is as the tiniest particle of dust in a gigantic system measured in time and space by figures that are to us so vast as to be almost meaningless. Yet after all, the difficulty is one of the imagination rather than of the reason. The God whom we know and love is infinite. That word must be taken absolutely; there is no limit, however vast, to His power; there is no limit, however small, to His knowledge and His love. Whilst the all but infinite spaces and all but innumerable worlds opened to us by the telescope give us a less unworthy idea of the majesty of God (the greatest astronomers were always believers), they in no way detract from the infinite condescension of His love. Though we are so small He loves us, for nothing can exhaust His love. Many have thought that there may be reasonable creatures in other worlds of the starry firmament. Of that we know nothing. Even if there are, we are utterly ignorant whether they are in a state of innocence, or if they have fallen, whether they have been redeemed or not. But it makes not the slightest difference to the infinite love of God for mankind. Whether we are the only race He has created with body and soul, or whether one of countless millions of such races, we are, every one of us, the objects of His love and His care, for He is infinite.

The words in which Our Lord Jesus Christ expressed the sublime truth of the Providence of God, are familiar to us all. "Be not solicitous for your life, what you shall eat, nor for your body, what you shall put on . . . Behold the birds of the

air, for they neither sow, nor do they reap nor gather into barns: and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not you of much more value than they? . . . Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they labour not, neither do they spin. But I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed as one of these . . . Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore, better are you than many sparrows “ (Matt. vi. 25-29, x. 29-30).

As Our Lord shows, the word we can best use to express the love and tenderness of God to His creatures is the word “father.” Human fatherhood is an image of the providence of God, but though it is the best we have, it is a very faint and inadequate image of the unimaginable truth. The love of the best of parents, of the tenderest of mothers, is as nothing compared to the tenderness of the Creator for His creatures. “Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? And if she should forget, yet will I not forget thee.” (Isaias xlix. 15). If we could choose to be judged either by the most loving and indulgent of mothers, or by God, we should do well to choose the latter.

Conclusions

We are now in a position to reply to some of the questions with which we commenced. God's providence is supreme, absolute, unchallengeable. The whole course of human history is the working out of His divine purpose. Men may use, or abuse, that freedom which He has given them, but nothing can occur without His tolerance; all is overruled by His providence. Like the wisdom of which Holy Scripture speaks, “it reaches from end to end mightily, and disposes all things sweetly.” (Wisd. viii. i). Evil is not a rival to God which He cannot overcome. It is a defect in what is good, permitted for adequate reasons, for the ultimate benefit of men. We are not in the clutches of heartless fate or impersonal laws of nature, but in the hands of God who understands the human heart that He has made, who loves man as His child, who guides and controls his life and all that happens to him for his eventual happiness.

We must not expect now to see all the secrets of divine providence, and to know why God permits this or that to occur. We must cling fast to the truth of His love and goodness in the confidence that one day He will show us the explanation of all that now puzzles us. Often enough in life we can see how wise was something which at the time it occurred was most repugnant to us. We have but to extend this principle of trust and faith until God deigns to reveal Himself to us. Then we shall see that “to them that love God all things work together unto good.” (Rom. viii. 28).

God draws Good out of Evil

We cannot now deal adequately with the problem of evil, nor can we now consider the doctrines of the Incarnation and Redemption which shed new light upon it, though it must be admitted that even in the light of those truths the problem is not fully solved. It is one of the mysteries of God for the adequate answer to which we must await that possession of God which we call eternal life. Meanwhile we can call attention to some points which may show us the lines of a possible solution.

First, suffering was not in the scheme of creation as originally devised by God. The first chapters of the Bible show us that God made all things good and that only when man sinned did evils enter into the world. If it is asked why did God permit sin, we answer that He wished man to give Him a nobler service than was rendered by inanimate or irrational creatures. They served Him blindly, necessarily, unconsciously; man was to serve Him freely and knowingly. Freedom is a noble gift, and God thought it wise to bestow it upon man, even though He knew it might be abused. God might, of course, have destroyed the human race after the fall, and so have hindered further sins, with their consequences in suffering, pain, misfortune, and death. That He did not do so does not argue any indifference to human suffering. It means that in His infinite wisdom, He saw good reason for allowing it to continue.

In this life, good and evil are inextricably bound together. If there were no suffering nor sin there could be no such beautiful virtues as courage, patience, sympathy, forgiveness. If persecutors had not been cruel we should not have had in the martyrs such wonderful examples of constancy. If there had been no sin, there would have been no Saviour. “*O felix culpa,*” sings the Church. “O happy fault which merited to have so loving a Redeemer.”

“You thought evil against me,” says the patriarch Joseph, “but God turned it into good.” (Gen. 1. 20) It is God's especial glory to draw good out of evil. In His wisdom He thought it better to do that than utterly to forbid evil to exist. When, by God's grace, we reach heaven we shall understand the reason.
