

VOLUNTAS DEI

BY THE AUTHOR OF

‘PRO CHRISTO ET ECCLESIA

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VOLUNTAS DEI



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TORONTO

"THE thing before men was a human life, entirely native, and unflinchingly complete. Its conditions were those of human simplicity, unadorned and undisguised. And yet it was undeniable that in the texture of human history a new thing had appeared. Perfect stainlessness, perfect sureness of spiritual intuition, and as it seemed of communion with the Unseen, a tone of unique and unfaltering authority, contributed elements in an impression which included, and was greater than, them all.

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"We who look back from such a distance, who have seen so much crumble and alter, who belong to a generation which has changed everything, and which feels itself on the brink of further change, who have seen the outer form and fabric of the religion in which this living truth found body cracked, and shaking, and disfigured, and as it may seem to many awaiting by destruction the end of its decay—we still find that one Name is honoured above every name.

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"Do we ask what explains this wonderful thing, what secret is at the heart of all this? Ah! there we are upon the very threshold of the inner Sanctuary, and it is not for me to-day to enter there. Only we may put to ourselves the question whether it may not be that that old kinship between man and the Being, high and holy, who in Nature is part revealed and part concealed, that kinship which is the secret of man's power to interpret Nature, which makes all his best moral effort seem to him to be but a response and an imitation—whether it may not be that that kinship has found at length some new and full completion, a unity final, and yet infinitely germinal."—"The Fulness of Christ," E. S. Talbot, Bishop of Winchester.

TO
MY BROTHERS
WHO LIVE THE LIFE OF WHICH
I SPEAK

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I WOULD offer my thanks to a friend who, although absorbed in important philosophic work, was generous enough to read the greater part of this book in manuscript and by his suggestions to give me valuable help; also to others who have kindly considered the proof sheets.

SYNOPSIS OF VOLUNTAS DEI

INTRODUCTION

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There are three common hypotheses of the origin of our universe. These three set forth by analogies and examined—

1. The Materialistic hypothesis—that all things mechanically evolve, and are mere combinations of matter.
2. The Psychic hypothesis—that spirit, potential in matter, has been the formative principle and will become more and more dominant.
3. The God hypothesis.

The strong and weak points of each hypothesis considered.

If all three were equally reasonable, the fact that the third satisfies feeling and activity as well as reason is likely to make it always the belief of the greater part of mankind; but there is no moral defect involved in the acceptance of any of these theories by men who honestly find their natures satisfied by them. The theist must whole-heartedly allow that an honest man's intelligent adherence to what seems to him truth cannot be offensive to God; while materialist or psychist must not accuse theist of lack of candour for adhering to the God hypothesis even though his reason may not be wholly satisfied; for it is probably quite as candid to adhere to what satisfies volitional and emotional nature, although reason be not wholly convinced, as to reject a satisfying belief merely because no reasonable proof can be offered.

The fact of the diverse and unnumbered multitude living in what they believe to be consciousness of God is considered as weighing down the scale on the side of the God hypothesis.

CHAPTER I

QUALITIES OF PURPOSE	19
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Belief in creative Intelligence involves belief in creative purpose.

The conditions under which we seek truth require us to make

the facts we know the basis of inference as to the nature of God's purpose.

The qualities of purpose considered in concrete life.

1. Purpose exercised between precise forecast and exact fulfilment. This only possible for the mere mechanic working in inanimate matter.
2. Inventor or artist works out new ideal in inanimate matter. Forecast less precise ; result less accurate.
3. Gardeners and herdsmen work out inward ideals in the material of life. These desire only the perfection of the life they tend, *without forecasting individual variation.*
4. The schoolmaster, parent, or missionary works out inward ideals in a higher form of life. The higher the material in which the purpose must be worked out, the stronger and nobler must be the purpose.

This is the law of purpose ; and we may infer from it that God executes His purpose in the sphere of autonomous life, that the divine Will is not a force that works mechanically between precise forecast and exact fulfilment.

CHAPTER II

CREATIVE PURPOSE 31

When increasing knowledge shatters the traditional pictures of the unknown, it is better to build these up again rather than seek to live by a faith unaided by imagination, always bearing in mind that all words and images are merely symbols of truth.

Assuming God as first cause, we must try to picture His relation to creation.

Metaphysical difficulties notwithstanding, we postulate Creator and creation, and must paint the unknown in analogies from the life we know.

Matter, whether organic or inorganic, is now described in a way that to the plain man implies that it is only a form of energy. Energy may be thought of as the body of life. Let us picture how this creation can have come to be.

We may conceive of creation as the gift of life.

Autonomy is of the essence of life ; for since we insist that man is self-directing, spite of scientific evidence that he is determined, we need not suppose all other things entirely different from him in this respect.

In the beginning we get motion, tension, attraction, repulsion, and by degrees what we call the "inanimate" universe—God exercising in this stage something analogous to mechanical purpose.

When life begins to express itself in organic forms, autonomy becomes more decided ; God's purpose works more intricately,

Along the line of intelligent life we get greater and greater autonomy, which at last calls for what we know as the highest form of purpose—that of the parent or teacher.

Pantheistic thought identifies the life of the universe with God ; but life lends itself both to good and evil, to progress and retrogression. It appears saner to regard life as the not-God, which came from God, and is being trained by Him to form with Himself a new unity.

It is never life that is limited, but the power of the organism to utilise life for its own ends. The perfection of the organism would be its power to utilise life fully for its highest end.

When life at last in man becomes conscious of itself, and able consciously to respond to God, we get "spiritual life," which entails pre-eminently the power to utilise, more and more of the universal life for the highest end.

The speculations of this chapter seem to harmonise with experience.

CHAPTER III

PROVIDENCE AND AUTONOMY 43

Can we detect in world evolution a purpose which tallies with the types of purpose we have found in man?

The order we perceive in inorganic nature tallies with such human purpose as we have called mechanical.

In the earliest stage of life physical strength and adaptation seem to be the aim.

Later on the aim seems to be a balance of physical force and intelligence ; not the strongest body, nor the strongest intelligence, but the best combination of these persists. We therefore get defects in the physical nature and in intelligence handed down along the line of fullest life.

Later, when what we call God consciousness or spiritual life is added, nature again strives for a balance of the three qualities ; again defects in each aspect are handed down along the line of fullest life.

The purpose suggested by the development of human life is health of body and brain, excellence of intelligence, excellence of will power, excellence of extra-regarding impulses which make for the perfection of corporate life. The prevailing desire of nature seems to be to rid itself of defects in all these.

The disease germ or parasite does not belong to the method, but militates against the purpose.

If this tendency to excellence of life indicates God's will, very much must happen in our universe which merely represents the will of the autonomous creature before it is won by the persuasive purpose of God.

If disease and defect were the will of God, God and the life-force would be at war.

But on what grounds do we claim that all that happens—including disease and defect—is “providential”?

Going back to what in man we saw to be the highest sort of purpose, we find that the teaching and training of autonomous life cannot mean the ordering of all its joys and sorrows.

We therefore assume that the supreme purpose of the universe may only be accomplished when the creature co-operates with the life-force, *i.e.* with God.

Bearing of this on the doctrine of prayer.

CHAPTER IV

THE PURPOSE IN HUMANITY 53

Since God gave autonomy to His creation, He must have power to realise His purpose by that method.

As “faithful Creator” He must be related to His creation—(1) by accepting the struggle between right and wrong as His own, (2) by thus ensuring a compensating gain to creation for all the suffering entailed by freedom.

We have found that in organic nature the stream of life discards disease and defect and failure in intelligence, in temperance and courage, in affection for offspring and co-operation with fellows.

In human affairs progress is more complex. Conscience, or satisfaction in virtue, seems to belong to the fullest force of human life. Life—sound, abundant, beautiful—does not flow along the generations of those who break through customs to gratify passion: it flows along the generations of the law-abiding, but also of those who disregard present law in the effort to mould and obey the higher law of the future.

The push of conscience must be seen not only in the will, but in the understanding.

Along this line we get the growth of the hope in social progress or personal immortality, or both.

This is exemplified in the history of the human race. Nations with a religion of pessimism and fear show powers of accurate observation and vivid imagination; but advance in political justice and social amelioration are only found with those who hope in the future.

This hope develops intellect. Thus, intellectual as well as moral force is found necessary to fulness of life. A hopeful intellectual life makes for universal fellowship. Monopolies always yield to the advance of a fuller life.

Perfection of conscious life is to be manifested in physical health and beauty, mental genius and social love.

But the individual dies imperfect.

The perfect fulfilment of every individual life seems involved in any purpose of the universe worthy to be called divine.

As death and desuetude of ideas attach to any divine purpose we can detect here, we are driven to produce the line of hope beyond this world, towards a synthesis of individual and racial immortality.

CHAPTER V

EMERGENCE OF RELIGIOUS LIFE 65

As the senses emerge in biological evolution, the psychic qualities connected with them also evolve. By the same process we see man's consciousness of God evolve within his self-consciousness.

Animal sympathy produces altruism—*e.g.* mother and young ; dog and master. In the same way human sympathy with God produces susceptibility to divine influence.

God-consciousness described in Holy Writ in terms of physical consciousness.

No line can be drawn between man's psychic and spiritual powers.

CHAPTER VI

UNION OF GOD WITH CREATION 77

As the line of tendency in evolution passes through intelligence to consciousness of God and the immortal hope, it points to a destiny that is union with God.

Eternal truth can only be apprehended by a variety of analogies.

The idea of union thus considered. Plant and seedling. Animal and offspring. In the union of herd, hive, flock, unity of purpose is added to unity of kind. Greater difference goes with closer union, as in unity of marriage ; unity of understanding.

Difference, personality, self-hood, are necessary to a high degree of unity. We have no conception of real unity that does not depend on difference.

Four sorts of unity—of kind, of purpose, of feeling, of interpretation. All these exemplified in the brief hour of family life.

But man seeks an abiding union on these lines. Hence—

1. Ancestor worship—identifying kindred with God.
2. Tribal gods—deifying the corporate purpose.
3. Mystery religions, involving unity of feeling—deifying the intuitions of the race.
4. Philosophies, involving unity of interpretation—deifying intellectual conceptions.

The religion which can satisfy humanity must offer all these sorts of unity in one, and the unity must be between different persons—man and God.

It is this to which nature unconsciously tends. It is this which man consciously seeks. It is in this search that God meets man bestowing re-creative love.

CHAPTER VII

NEWNESS OF LIFE

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Susceptibility to God's influence develops with the growing God-consciousness.

Illustration—the sea breaking into a new inlet.

Communion of God and man may be described as “telepathic.”

Union of man with God does not mean identity. True union depends on community of kind and difference of identity.

We rarely see anything perfect after its kind. Degree of perfection in plants or animals depends on environment. Whatever the general level reached by a class or species, it will respond to an improved environment.

So with the human race. Hence the function of the most God-conscious man must be to better the social environment of his fellows.

To describe this function in another way: the highest human work is creative; and the highest material for this work is conscious autonomous life, and the highest product is a new humanity. The greatest men will, therefore, always be working to create new men and a new human environment.

Thus the greatest men have been founders of world religions which, in proportion to their greatness, transcend local and national barriers.

But while any society is still imperfect, human excellence, which must be God's intention, cannot be perfectly realised in it.

The highest development possible to the individual in an imperfect environment can only be perfection of volition.

When this is attained by the founder of a religion the result must be a society that will transcend all human distinctions.

CHAPTER VIII

SON OF MAN

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Man everywhere has the inward conviction that he could do right but does not.

On the basis of this conviction all law and justice rest.

It would seem natural that this sense of ability to do right should find realisation.

The man who attained to perfect volition would be the true Son of the race.

If rightness of will involves compassion manward, such an one must sympathise with the shortcoming of his race.

Such rightness of will involves “singleness of eye,” which is the way of divine illumination.

Illumination—foresight and insight—are to be had by holding the activities steadily directed to the right.

To this end God gives the universe autonomy, but exercises over it fostering care.

Think of the fostering care of a parent, guardian, lover. Such care can only impart illumination when its object sympathises with its aims.

So Creative Intelligence watches over creation, ever ready to give light to each ready recipient.

As in biological evolution we see physical senses coming to different degrees of perfection, so in human history character evolves.

Light is always imparted to the individual as he is able to grasp it.

God will first have full effect on human life when undeviating adherence to right is produced in the human will.

The Incarnation.

Goodness realised reveals lack of goodness in all else. Thus we get the proclamation of the reign of God in contrast to the current world.

CHAPTER IX

SON OF GOD 107

The universal conviction that man can do right but does not, makes it reasonable to expect that a man should some time appear who does right.

But goodness cannot be achieved by individual effort alone; it must be also the gift of destiny, *i.e.* predestination.

Individual man, personal though he be, is indivisible from the stream of life.

Man is thus born into a scheme of things which, if free-will and the sense of sin be realities, as we believe, is not perfectly adjusted to God's will. While it is probable that what works against God's will is self-destructive, which limits possible extent of discord, such discord, when personal, may be the diabolic element which, as well as the divine, environs the spirit of man.

It is certain that every child chooses between ideals determined by forces other than itself.

Every individual is partly made, and wholly environed, by forces other than himself.

This undoubted truth underlay the ancient stories of the divine or regal descent of every great man.

In the Hebrew poem of creation all life originates from the brooding of the Spirit; and Hebrew prophets looked forward to the perfecting of human polity as an act of God, cosmology and eschatology thus alike figuring forth the truth that all that is good is of God.

Again, if we take the "fruits of the Spirit" and their opposite as described by St. Paul, we see that only in a community or family where the fruits exist and their opposites are absent, can the best sort of child be born.

Whether, then, the doctrine of the divine Fatherhood of Jesus be fact, or only a poetic representation of fact, the idea it symbolises is still true.

If the Incarnation was the culmination of the world-process, it could only be the beginning of a saving life; further, that life, if truly human, must go on to develop in the heavens. For true humanity implies much more than a body in human shape inhabited by Divinity; it involves a personal immortality.

This asserted in the Pauline doctrine of the resurrection and mediation of Christ.

The Church now admits she has mistaken crisis for process in her doctrine of the first, and also of the last, things. The Church may also have mistaken crisis for process in her account of the Advent of Christ.

But he who sees truth and mistakes its form lives more wisely than he who fails entirely to see it.

Sun, photosphere, and sunbeam suggested as an analogy for the doctrine of the Trinity.

CHAPTER X

OMNIPOTENCE 123

The simplest idea of omnipotence is analogous to the power of an adult over a child.

This power may be analysed into three sorts in an ascending scale—

1. Power to change the place of matter, *i.e.* to move the child's body.
2. Power to influence the child's behaviour.
3. Power to conceive of the effect desired.

The effect desired may be (*a*) mere acquiescence; or (*b*) intelligent acquiescence; or (*c*) a good balance of spontaneity and acquiescence.

Power may also be reckoned quantitatively. The power that lasts longest and extends over the greatest range is the greatest degree of power.

Government by force can belong only to the infancy of the child or of the race.

A clear conception of a strong character to be moulded, and self-restraint in the process of evoking it, mark the highest degree of power in the adult over a child.

If to this were added the power to create the child, we should get the complete notion of creative and administrative power which we associate with Omnipotence.

To get our simplest conception of creation let us imagine a gardener creating a rose. He must exhibit, first, power to conceive the rose character. His conception must extend to all possible varieties of the rose life.

At the same time, to form the conception is to set its limits.

These limits are twofold—the outward and visible possibilities, and the character of the inner secret life.

If we attribute to such a life any power of self-direction, it follows that the creator-gardener cannot know which possibility will develop and which will fail. His power, after creation, will be of the same nature as that of the adult over the child.

In both cases higher power is strictly regulated in relation to inferior power, its secret being the ability to conceive an end and regulate action toward that end.

Hence this must be our conception of Omnipotence.

The creation of the finite must therefore involve the self-regulation of the Infinite.

If so, how can we assume we understand the degree of self-limitation?

If the end Omnipotence has in view is a form of created life able to freely co-operate with Him, that would seem to involve limiting Himself so far as to give the ability to resist Him.

This resistance in lower nature would mean disease and degeneration; in higher nature, these together with moral disease and moral degeneration.

But it is only the possibility of resistance, not resistance itself, that can be said to be necessary.

We cannot conceive of Omnipotence as able to have all things that seem to us good. Foreknowledge appears to us good, but the supreme good appears to us to be the hope of something better than we have ever experienced.

We cannot conceive God as both having all things at once and as having this supreme joy of expectation. We should remember this when inclined to dogmatise as to what Omnipotence must or must not include.

It appears, however, to require a greater degree of power to create a living existence whose successive attainments would be an ever-varying and glad surprise to the Creative Mind than to create a passive thing whose career would be from the beginning static to the Creative Mind.

The Christian will here remember that our Lord represented God as a Father, and thus gave His authority to the idea that God's happiness is concerned in the choices that men make.

The responsibility felt by the best parents for the careers of their children is something that perhaps comes as near to touching the great Reality as anything we know.

If so, God's prescience must extend to all possibilities of disaster, and against the results of all possible disaster He must provide.

God's re-creating influence on His creatures must be unceasing though not coercive.