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# THE TRINITY

## V

### ONE SUBSTANCE, THREE PERSONS

(Contd. from page 351, Vol. 10, No. 4.)

MUCH of the opposition to the doctrine of the Trinity has arisen because of a misunderstanding of what it really is. We do not assert that one God is three Gods, nor that one person is three persons, nor that three Gods are one God. God is not three in the same sense in which He is one. To assert that He is would, indeed, make the doctrine what the Unitarians are ever fond of declaring it to be, mathematical absurdity. We assert rather that within the one Divine "substance" or "essence" there are three mutually related yet distinct centres of knowledge, consciousness, love and will. "Substance" or "essence" is that which the different members of the Godhead have in common, that in which the attributes and powers of Deity inhere; "person" is that in which they differ.

Yet while there are three centres of knowledge, consciousness, love and will, each of the Persons possesses *in toto* the one indivisible, incorporeal substance of Deity in which the attributes and powers inhere, and therefore possesses the same infinite knowledge, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth. They work together or co-operate with such perfect harmony and unity that we are justified in saying that the Triune God works with one mind and one will. What the one knows, the others know; what the one desires, the others desire; and what the one wills, the others will. Independence and self-existence are not attributes of the individual persons, but of the Triune God; hence there are not three independent wills, but three dependent wills, if we may so speak, each of which is exercised for the honour and glory and happiness of the other two.

We can illustrate the nature of the Trinity partially as follows: a bank or railroad, for instance, is owned and operated not by an individual but by many officials, stock-holders, and

workers, who have a community of interests; yet we have no hesitation in speaking of the corporation in the singular and saying that the First National Bank desires to make this investment, or that the Pennsylvania Railroad is opposed to the passage of a certain piece of legislation by Congress. The decisions reached by the board of directors express the desires and purposes of the corporation as a whole. Similarly, although we believe there are three distinct Persons in the Godhead who co-operate in the most perfect harmony of will and purpose, that does not prevent us from speaking of God in the singular and applying to Him the pronouns He, Him and His.

In thinking of this mystery we are to remember that the processes of our own thinking, feeling and willing in our purely human personalities remain a complete mystery to us. It is also to be pointed out that since the incarnation Christ has also thought and felt and willed in a human manner, although the union of the Divine and the human psychological activity within the Divine-human Person, like the unity of the Persons within the Godhead, is incomprehensible to us.

The error of the Unitarians is that while they construct a doctrine of the Divine unity they do so at the expense of the Divine personality. They look upon the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as but three successive aspects or modes in which God reveals Himself, comparable to that of a man who is known in his own family as father, in the business world as a banker, and in the Church as an elder. Such a view gives us only a modal Trinity. Any statement of the doctrine which fails to set forth both the unity and the tri-personality of the Godhead falls short of the Scripture teaching.

Since the three Persons of the Trinity possess the same identical, numerical substance or essence, and since the attributes are inherent in and inseparable from the substance or essence, it follows that all of the Divine attributes must be possessed alike by each of the three Persons and that the three Persons must be consubstantial, co-equal and co-eternal. Each is truly God, exercising the same power, partaking equally of the Divine glory, and entitled to the same worship. When the word "Father" is used in our prayers, as for example in the Lord's prayer, it does not refer exclusively to the first person of the Trinity, but to the three Persons as one God. The Triune God is our Father.

The doctrine of the Trinity cannot lead to Tritheism; for while there are three Persons in the Godhead, there is but one substance or essence, and therefore but one God. It is rather a case of the one life substance, Deity, existing consciously as three Persons. The three Persons are related to the divine substance not as three individuals to their species, as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to human nature; they are only one God,—not a triad, but a Trinity. In the inmost depths of their being they are inherently and inescapably one.

That each of the Persons of the Trinity does possess *in toto* the numerically same substance is proved by such Scripture verses as the following: "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. ii. 9). "I and the Father are one" (John x. 30). "Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me" (John xiv. 11). "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Cor. v. 19).

It need not surprise us that in the Godhead we find a form of personality entirely unique and different from that found in man. In the ascending scale of life as we know it in this world there are numerous modes of existence as we pass from the simpler to the more complex forms. In the plants we find what is truly called life, although it is so elementary that it does not even come to consciousness. In the insects we find sensitiveness and instinct, two particulars in which they far surpass the plant life. In the birds and animals we find affection between parent and offspring, which in some cases is very strong, together with a much higher type of instinct than is found among the insects. Man in his turn makes a tremendous advance over the animals in that he possesses reasoning power, a deep moral conscience, and an immortal soul. These higher stages in man's nature are of course absolutely incomprehensible to the animals, birds and insects, which can, at best, have only a very vague understanding of his nature, although they fear him and recognize him as their master. Consequently we need not be surprised that the nature of God surpasses our comprehension,—that the one divine substance is conscious in three Persons, in Father, Son and Holy Spirit,—and that no attempt is made to explain that mystery to us, probably for the very reason that our little minds are utterly incapable of grasping such truth. Doubtless we are as incapable of understanding God's nature as the animals and birds are of understanding ours.

Hence it is admitted that our knowledge of the relationships which subsist between the three Persons of the Trinity extends only to the surface. There must be infinite depths in the conscious being of God to which human thought can never penetrate. We are told clearly enough, however, that God has existed from eternity as three self-conscious persons. Certainly we are not prepared to say that this tri-personality which has been revealed to us exhausts the mystery of the Godhead. As Dr. A. A. Hodge has well said:

“For aught we can know, in the depths of the Infinite Being there may be a common consciousness which includes the whole Godhead, and a common personality. This may all be true; but what belongs to us to deal with is the sure and obvious fact of revelation, that God exists from eternity as three self-conscious Persons, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”

How shall we define the term “person”? As it is used in modern Psychology it means an intelligent, free, moral agent. But in setting forth the doctrine of the Trinity the Church has used the term in a sense different from that in which it is used anywhere else. The word “Person” as it is applied to the three subsistences within the Godhead, like the more important word “Trinity”, is not found in Scripture itself; yet the idea which it expresses is Scriptural. In the science of Theology, as in all other sciences, some technical terms are an absolute necessity. When we say there are three distinct persons in the Godhead we do not mean that each one is as separate from the others as one human being is from every other. While they are said to love, to hear, to pray to, to send, and to testify of each other, they are, nevertheless, not independent of each other; for as we have already said, self-existence and independence are properties, not of the individual persons, but of the Triune God. The singular pronouns I, Thou, He and Him are applied to each of the three Persons; yet these same singular pronouns are applied to the Triune God who is composed of these three Persons. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit can be distinguished, but they cannot be separated; for they each possess the same identical numerical substance or essence. They do not merely exist alongside of each other, as did Washington, Jefferson and Franklin, but they permeate and interpenetrate each other, are in and through each other. As Dr. James Orr says in regard to the term “person”:

“Too much stress must not be laid on the mere term. Yet we do not know any other word which would so well express the idea which we wish to convey, and which the titles Father, Son and Spirit seem to imply—the existence in the Divine nature of three mutually related yet distinct centres of knowledge, love and will, not existing apart as human individualities do, but in and through each other as moments in one Divine self-conscious life” (*The Christian View of God and the World*, p. 269).

Consequently, in theological language we would define a person as a mode of subsistence which is marked by intelligence, will, and individual existence. The Church fathers realized, of course, that they were dealing with a doctrine which was far above the comprehension of the human mind, and, in developing the creeds, they did not attempt to explain the mystery of the Trinity, but only to state it as well as they were able with the language at their disposal. We can hope to do no more.

*A Plurality of Persons within the Godhead  
is in Harmony with Reason*

Instead of the doctrine of the Trinity being contrary to reason as charged by Unitarians, a little considered thought should convince us that a plurality of Persons within the Godhead is eminently agreeable to reason. That there should be specifically three Persons does not necessarily follow, but that God might be more than One seems very probable. We shrink from the thought of an eternally lonely God, and take refuge in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. This doctrine, we find, is of such a nature that, on the one hand, it avoids the hard monotheism of the Jews and Mohammedans, and on the other, the crass polytheism of the Greeks and Romans. Through the truth which it presents we are enabled to see that God has always been independent of the entire creation, that within His own nature there is to be found that absolute perfection and self-sufficiency which we instinctively ascribe to Him. Unless there is to be found that plurality of Persons within His own nature, time as well as eternity would seem to be unbearably monotonous to Him. For where among the creatures are there to be found personalities capable of responding fully to His own personality? Men and angels, while created in His image, are infinitely below Him; even the nations, Isaiah tells us, are as a drop in the bucket, and as the small dust of the balance (xl. 15). Only within the fellowship of the Father,

Son and Holy Spirit is there to be found that full interplay of personality which the nature of God demands. And when once we have conceived of God as Trinity we can never again be satisfied with a modalistic or Unitarian conception of Him.

It has long been customary to say that the attribute of love in God proves a plurality of Persons within the Godhead,—that love is necessarily self-communicative, and that with a unitary God it could have existed only as a craving, unsatisfied, under the category of the possible rather than of the actual. This reasoning further asserts that since God is infinite His love must be infinite, and that it therefore demands an infinite object. It is usually further asserted that these two infinite Persons demand a third through whom their love is communicated and to whom it is also given. This line of reasoning, however, does not seem fully conclusive. It at least seems possible that God's own all-perfect Being could have supplied a satisfying object for His love. To say that love, in its very nature, is self-communicative, and that it therefore demands an object other than itself, seems to be merely a play on words. If we may imagine a lonely Robinson Crusoe, for instance, shipwrecked on an island for the remainder of his life, and imagine further that the storm which shipwrecked him also killed all the other persons with whom he was acquainted, would that, even as regards a limited human being, mean that the remainder of his life would be abnormal in the sense that he would be destitute of the attribute of love? Might there not be, even within his own limited nature, a kind of love based on good conscience and moral uprightness? The attribute of love need not disappear just because a person is alone. But while love in itself does not prove that there must be a plurality of Persons in the Godhead, yet what added richness, fulness and force is given to this love in either God or man when there is fellowship with others! Only thus is personality seen at its best. Hence while reason does not give us the doctrine of the Trinity in the first place, i.e. apart from revelation, it does render the negative service of showing that the doctrine is not inconsistent with other known truth, and also the positive service of showing that only on the basis of the Trinity do we have a fully adequate conception of God as self-conscious Spirit and living love.

There are, of course, elements of truth even in polytheism, distorted and perverted though they may be, and present-day

men of letters, as well as philosophers in all ages and the pagan people in all nations, have found relief in speaking of "the gods."

"The most widely diffused of all religious systems," says Dr. J. Ritchie Smith, "polytheism is the perversion of a great truth, the truth of the variety and fulness of the divine nature. Lacking the conception of a God everywhere present and active, men were forced to assume a host of divinities, between whom the attributes and energies of the Deity may be distributed, and who in virtue of their numbers may accomplish the works of creation and providence. . . . It is the distinctive mark of polytheism that it sacrifices the unity to the variety of the divine nature. Against this error the Old Testament everywhere contends. Not until it was extirpated from the minds of the chosen people, and the taint of idolatry purged away in the furnace of affliction, was the truth revealed in its fulness that polytheism strove so vainly to express. The Old Testament overthrows the error, the New Testament brings to light the truth, of polytheism. . . . The fulness and variety that men seek in many gods are found in one. The doctrine of the Trinity at once preserves the unity and discloses the fulness of the divine nature. God is one, is the message of the Old Testament; God is one in three Persons, is the message of the New; and the revelation is complete" *The Holy Spirit in the Gospels*, p. 19).

## VI

### MEANING OF THE TERMS "FATHER", "SON", AND "SPIRIT"

To our occidental type of mind the terms "Father" and "Son" carry with them, on the one hand, the ideas of source of being and superiority, and on the other, subordination and dependence. In theological language, however, they are used in the Semitic or Oriental sense of *sameness of nature*. It is, of course, the Semitic consciousness which underlies the phraseology of Scripture, and wherever the Scriptures call Christ the "Son" of God they assert His true and proper Deity. The term "Son" is applied to Christ, not merely as an official title in connection with the work of redemption, nor because of His incarnation or supernatural birth, nor because of His resurrection,—although in these regards He is pre-eminently the Son of God,—but primarily to designate an inherent trinitarian relationship. In its deepest sense it is a unique sonship which cannot be predicated of, nor shared with, any creature. Father and Son are co-eternal and co-equal in power and glory, partaking of the same nature and substance, and have always existed as distinct Persons. The Father is, and always has been, as much dependent on the Son as the Son is upon the Father, for, as we need to keep in mind, self-existence and independence are properties not of the Persons within the Godhead, but of the Triune God.



In Hebrews i. 5-8, for instance, the writer sets forth the superiority of Christ as a Divine Person. Being Divine, or Deity, the express image of the invisible God, He is called the "Son" of God, which means precisely the same thing. He came into the world as the Son, and had existed from eternity as such. Being the Son, the One through whom the worlds were created and the heir of all things, He is declared by the writer to be God and to reign upon an everlasting throne. During the public ministry the Jews, in accordance with the Hebrew usage of the term, correctly understood Jesus' claim to be the "Son" of God as equivalent to asserting that He was "equal with God", or, simply "God" (John v. 18; x. 33); and it was for claiming to be "the Christ, the Son of God", that He was accused of blasphemy by the high priest and sentenced by the Sanhedrin to be crucified (Matt. xxvi. 63-66).

This idea has perhaps been more clearly expressed by Dr. Warfield than by any other. Says he:

"What underlies the conception of sonship in Scriptural speech is just 'likeness'; whatever the father is that the son is also. The emphatic application of the term 'Son' to one of the Trinitarian Persons, accordingly, asserts rather His equality with the Father than His subordination to the Father; and if there is any implication of derivation in it, it would appear to be very distant. The adjunction of the adjective 'only begotten' (John i. 14; iii. 16-18; I John iv. 9) need add only the idea of uniqueness, not of derivation (Ps. xxii. 20; xxv. 16; xxxv. 17); and even such a phrase as 'God only begotten' (John i. 18) may contain no implication of derivation, but only of absolutely unique consubstantiality; as also such a phrase as 'the first-begotten of all creation' (Col. i. 15) may convey no intimation of coming into being, but merely assert priority of existence. In like manner, the designation 'Spirit of God' or 'Spirit of Jehovah', which meets us frequently in the Old Testament, certainly does not convey the idea there either of derivation or of subordination, but is just the executive name of God—the designation of God from the point of view of His activity—and imports accordingly identity with God; and there is no reason to suppose that, in passing from the Old Testament to the New Testament, the term has taken on an essentially different meaning. It happens, oddly enough, moreover, that we have in the New Testament itself what amounts almost to formal definitions of the two terms 'Son' and 'Spirit', and in both cases the stress is laid on the notion of equality or sameness. In John v. 18 we read: 'On this account, therefore, the Jews sought the more to kill him, because, not only did he break the Sabbath, but also called God his own Father, making himself equal with God.' The point lies, of course, in the adjective 'own'. Jesus was, rightly, understood to call God 'his own Father', that is, to use the terms 'Father' and 'Son' not in a merely figurative sense, as when Israel was called God's son, but in the real sense. And this was understood to be claiming to be all that God is. To be the Son of God in any sense was to be like God in that sense; and to be God's *own* Son was to be exactly like God, to be 'equal with God'. Similarly, we read in I Corinthians ii. 10, 11: 'For the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For who of men knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God'. Here the Spirit appears as the substrate

of the Divine self-consciousness, the principle of God's knowledge of Himself: He is, in a word, just God Himself in the innermost essence of His Being. As the spirit of man is the seat of human life, the very life of man itself, so the Spirit of God is His very life-element. How can He be supposed, then, to be subordinate to God, or to derive His Being from God? If, however, the subordination of the Son and Spirit to the Father in modes of subsistence and their derivation from the Father are not implicates of their designation as Son and Spirit, it will be hard to find in the New Testament compelling evidence of their subordination and derivation" (*Biblical Doctrines*, p. 163).

Thus we find that the divine and original idea of fatherhood and sonship is *sameness of nature*. In the Godhead this is, of course, a purely spiritual relationship, and is in accordance with the transcendence of Deity. In the finite human sphere, where man is but a faint and imperfect pattern of God, the ideas of fatherhood and sonship, besides implying sameness of nature, imply also the ideas of origination and subordination, as well as a material nature which is mediated by sex. In the divine sphere sonship is absolute, while in the human it is relative, very much as the attributes of wisdom, power, holiness, justice and love are absolute in God but relative in man. Hence while the limitations of human language are such that we are not able to express these ideas fully, the relationship which subsists between the first and second Persons of the Trinity finds its closest analogy in the relationship which an earthly father bears to his son.

And in like manner the third Person of the Trinity, partaking of the same life substance and equal with the Father and the Son in power and glory, is called the Spirit. As the everywhere-present executive of the Trinity, immaterial and invisible, He is Spirit in the truest sense of the word. He is called the "Holy" Spirit because He is absolutely holy in His own nature, and is the source and cause of holiness in the creatures.

In the broad sense God is the Father of all men since He has created them, but in a narrower and far more important sense He is the Father only of those who have been regenerated and who are therefore "in Christ" in such a sense that to some extent they partake of His holiness. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (Rom. viii. 14). All true Christians are "sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus" (Gal. iii. 26). "If ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise" (Gal. iii. 29). Outside of the sphere of redemption the term "Father" can have only a very

shallow meaning, for it is only through Christ that we can really know God: "Neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him" (Matt. xi. 27). Those who are still in sin, unregenerate worldlings, are said to be sons of the Devil, because they partake of his evil nature. To His Jewish hearers Jesus said, "Ye are of your father the Devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do" (John viii. 44); "I speak the things which I have seen with my Father: and ye also do the things which ye heard from your father. . . . If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I came forth and am come from God" (John viii. 38, 42) Paul's words to the sorcerer Elymas were, "O full of all guile and all villainy, thou son of the Devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" (Acts xiii. 10).

God is Father primarily because of the relation which He sustains to Christ the Son; and only as we are spiritually united to Christ do we become children of God in the true sense: "God sent forth his Son . . . that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. iv. 4, 6); "Having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto himself" (Eph. i. 5). The Scriptures do not teach a doctrine of the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of men,—that is one of the doctrines of present-day Modernism. They teach, not a sonship based on the natural relationship which God bears to all men because of creation, but, a sonship based on a spiritual re-creation, a sonship into which man comes through faith in Christ.

We have seen that the terms "Father" and "Son" are not at all adequate to express the full relationship which exists between the first and second Persons of the Godhead. They are, however, the best that we have. They are the terms used in Scripture, and besides expressing the idea of sameness of nature, they are found to be reciprocal, expressing the ideas of love, affection, trust, honour, unity and harmony,—ideas of endearment and preciousness. When we are told that God "gave" His Son for the redemption of the world we are led to understand that the situation was in some ways analogous to that of a human father who gives his son for missionary service or for the defence of his country. It is something which involves sacrifice on the part of the father as well as privation

and suffering on the part of the son. And, similarly, when the term " Spirit " is applied to the third Person of the Trinity it is not implied that He is in any way inferior to the Father or the Son, nor that His nature is in any way different from theirs, for they each partake of the numerically same substance, and are all equally spirit. He is so called, however, because He is the very life element of Deity, and because so far as our relation to God is concerned God comes to us in a spiritual way pre-eminently through this Person, His Spirit communes with our spirits, speaks to our consciences, cleanses our hearts, and leads us in right paths.

That the terms " Father " and " Son " are used in a peculiar sense as applied to the first and second Persons of the Trinity might easily be inferred from their varied usage in other parts of Scripture and in everyday speech. We read, for instance, that Jabal was the father of such as dwell in tents and have cattle, and that Jubal was the father of all such as handle the harp and the pipe (Gen. iv. 20, 21). Abraham was given the promise that he should be the father of a multitude of nations (Gen. xvii. 4); and to-day every Jew regards himself as a son of Abraham. Jehovah said of the nation, " Israel is my son, my first-born " (Exod. iv. 22). Of a king whose position before God is one of special honour and authority, as was that of Solomon, the Lord could say, " I will be his father, and he shall be my son " (2 Sam. vii. 14). Judas was a " son of perdition " (John xvii. 12). We are familiar with the early Church " fathers," and we speak of one who has shown us the way of righteousness as our father in the faith. George Washington is said to have been the father of his country. The Germans speak of the fatherland, and the English of the mother country. We say that Mr. So-and-so is a loyal son of Calvin, or Luther or Wesley, and we have groups of people who call themselves Daughters of the American Revolution, or Sons of the American Legion. Hence it is quite clear that in religious as well as in secular affairs the terms father and son are used in a variety of senses.

And beyond this, although in perfect harmony with it, we find that much Scripture teaching is given in figurative language. Christ is called the Lamb of God (John i. 29; Rev. vii. 14); the good shepherd (John x. 10); the door (John x. 7). He is the true vine, and His disciples are the

branches (John xv. 1. 5); He is the true light (John i. 9); His disciples are the light of the world (Matt. v. 14), and the salt of the earth (Matt. v. 13). Similarly, God is declared to be love (1 John iv. 8); light (1 John i. 5); a consuming fire (Heb. xii. 29). The psalmist declares that Jehovah is his rock, his fortress, his shield and high tower (xviii. 2), and that the righteous take refuge under His wings (xc. 4). When we are told that God is angry, or that He repents, or forgets, or laughs, the writer is, of course, using figurative language. Such expressions are known as anthropomorphisms, instances in which the divine action as seen from the human view point is likened to that of a man who is actuated by these states of mind. These are instances in which God adjusts Himself to human language, "talking down" to us, in much the same way that human parents find it necessary to talk down to their children. We know that as a matter of fact God is altogether free from the passions and failings of human nature.

Hence in accordance with this general method of procedure it was only most fitting that the terms "Father", "Son" and "Spirit" should have been chosen to express the relationship which the first and second Persons of the Trinity bear to each other, which the third bears to the first and second, and which the first bears to us. Our language contains no terms better fitted to convey the desired meaning.

Similarly, the term "person", as we have indicated before, is but an imperfect and inadequate expression of a truth that transcends our experience and comprehension. When applied to the different members of the Godhead it only approximates the truth. It is, if you please, a make-shift, and is employed in Scripture in this sense. Yet it expresses more clearly than any other word we know the conception which the Scriptures give of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is used to express an idea of personality within the Godhead which lies, we may say, approximately half-way between that of a mere form of manifestation, or personification, which would lead to Unitarianism, and the idea of fully separate, independent personalities such as is found in human beings, which would lead to Tritheism. It expresses a distinction not identical with, but in some respects analogous to, that subsisting between three different men. If there were three Gods, they would, of course, limit each other and deprive each other of Deity, since it would be impossible

for each to be infinite. There is room for many finite beings, but room for only one infinite Being. The merit of the statement of this doctrine in the Athanasian Creed was that it preserved the distinct personalities and also the unity of the Godhead: "The Father is God, The Son is God, the Holy Ghost is God; and yet there are not three Gods but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Ghost is Lord; yet there are not three Lords but one Lord. For as we are compelled by Christian truth to acknowledge each person by Himself to be God and Lord, so we are forbidden by the same truth to say that there are three Gods or three Lords." Hence in view of the defects of human language, the very limited revelation which God has seen fit to give us concerning this subject, and the fact that the nature of this distinction must be incomprehensible to us, we are ready not only to admit, but to point out precisely, the imperfection of the language which we are obliged to employ in setting forth this doctrine.

## VII

### SUBORDINATION OF THE SON AND SPIRIT TO THE FATHER

In discussing the doctrine of the Trinity we must distinguish between what is technically known as the "immanent" and the "economic" Trinity. By the "Immanent" Trinity we mean the Trinity as it has subsisted in the Godhead from all eternity. In their essential, innate life we say that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the same in substance, possessing identical attributes and powers, and therefore equal in glory. This relates to God's essential existence apart from the creation. By the "economic" Trinity we mean the Trinity as manifested in the world, particularly in the redemption of sinful men. There are three *opera ad extra*, additional works, if we may so describe them, which are ascribed to the Trinity, namely, Creation, Redemption and Sanctification. These are works which are outside of the necessary activities of the Trinity, works which God was under no obligation or compulsion to perform.

In the Scriptures we find that the plan of redemption takes the form of a covenant, not merely between God and His people but between the different Persons within the Trinity, so that there is, as it were, a division of labour, each Person voluntarily assuming a particular part of the work.

1st,—To the Father is ascribed primarily the work of Creation, together with the election of a certain number of individuals whom He has given to the Son. The Father is in general the Author of the plan of redemption. 2nd,—To the Son is ascribed the work of redemption, to accomplish which He became incarnate, assuming human nature in order that, as the federal head and representative of His people, He might, as their substitute, assume the guilt of their sin and suffer a full equivalent for the penalty of eternal death which rested upon them. He thus made full satisfaction to the demands of justice, which demands are expressed in the words, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die”, and, “The wages of sin is death”. Also, in His capacity as the federal head and representative of His people, He covenanted to keep the law of perfect obedience which was originally given to their forefather Adam in his representative capacity, which law Adam had broken and had thereby plunged the race into a state of guilt and ruin. Identifying Himself thus with His people, He paid the penalty which rested on them and earned their salvation. Acting as their King and Saviour, and also as Head of the Church which He thus forms, He directs the advancing kingdom and is ever present with His people. 3rd,—To the Holy Spirit is ascribed the works of Regeneration and Sanctification, or the application to the hearts of individuals of the objective atonement which has been wrought out by Christ. This He does by spiritually renewing their hearts, working in them faith and repentance, cleansing them of every taint of sin, and eventually glorifying them in heaven. Redemption, in the broad sense, is thus a matter of *pure grace*, being planned by the Father, purchased by the Son, and applied by the Holy Spirit.

If we may be so bold as to draw an analogy with our federal government, where theoretically we have three equal and co-ordinated branches, we may say that the Father, in planning and creating the world, in ordaining its laws, and in giving to the Son a people to be redeemed by Him, corresponds to the Legislative branch; the Holy Spirit, through His regenerating and cleansing power and through His control of the minds of men and of the forces of nature, corresponds to the Executive branch; and the Son, giving Himself in the satisfaction of divine justice, and then acting as Judge of the entire world, corresponds to the Judicial branch.

Yet while particular works are ascribed pre-eminently to each of the Persons, so intimate is the unity which exists within the Trinity, there being but one substance and "one God", that each of the Persons participates to some extent in the work of the others. "I am in the Father, and the Father in me," said Jesus (John xiv. 11). "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John xiv. 9). "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor. xiv. 11). "I will not leave you desolate: I come unto you" (through the Holy Spirit) (John xiv. 18). Hence, as Dr. Charles Hodge says:

"According to the Scriptures, the Father created the world, the Son created the world, and the Spirit created the world. The Father preserves all things: the Son upholds all things; and the Spirit is the source of all life. These facts are expressed by saying that the persons of the Trinity concur in all acts *ad extra*. Nevertheless there are some acts which are predominantly referred to the Father, others to the Son, and others to the Spirit. The Father creates, elects, and calls; the Son redeems; and the Spirit sanctifies" (*Systematic Theology*, I, p. 445).

Hence we say that while the spheres and functions of the three persons of the Trinity are different, they are not exclusive. That which is done by one is participated in by the others with varying degrees of prominence. The fact of the matter is that there have been three great epochs or dispensations in the history of redemption, corresponding to and successively manifesting the three Persons of the Godhead. That of the Father began at the creation and continued until the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus; that of the Son, embracing a comparatively short period of time, but the important period in which redemption was worked out objectively, began with the public ministry of Jesus and continued until the day of Pentecost; and that of the Holy Spirit began with the descent of the Holy Spirit on the disciples on the day of Pentecost and continues until the end of the age.

In regard to the work of the economic Trinity we find there is a definite procedure in the work of redemption and also in the government of the world in general, the work of the Father in creation and in the general plan for the world being primary, that of the Son in redeeming the world being subordinate to and dependent on that of the Father, and that of the Holy Spirit in applying redemption coming later in time and being subordinate to and dependent on that of the Father and of the Son. Hence in regard to the work of redemption particularly, which is the great and all-important work that



God does for man in this world, there is a logical order, that of the Father being first, that of the Son second, and that of the Spirit third. And when the Persons of the Trinity are mentioned it is always in this order in our theological statements.

The Father sends the Son and works through Him (John xvii. 8; Rom. viii. 3; 1 Thess. v. 9; Rom. v. 1), and the Father and Son work through the agency of the Holy Spirit (Rom. v. 5; Gal. v. 22, 23; Titus iii. 5; Acts xv. 8, 9). In Christ's own words He that is sent is not greater than he that hath sent him (John xiii. 16); and in His state of humiliation, speaking from the standpoint of His human nature, He could say, "The Father is greater than I" (John xiv. 28). Paul tells us that we are Christ's, and that Christ is God's (1 Cor. iii. 23); also, that as Christ is the head of every man, so God is the head of Christ (1 Cor. xi. 3). Numerous things are predicated of the incarnate Son which cannot be predicated of the second Person of the Trinity as such,—Jesus, in His human nature, advanced in wisdom (Luke ii. 52), and even late in His public ministry did not know when the end of the world was to come (Matt. xxiv. 36). In the work of redemption, which we may term a work of supererogation since it is undertaken through pure grace and love and not through obligation, the Son who is equal with the Father becomes as it were officially subject to Him. And in turn the Spirit is sent by, acts for, and reveals both the Father and the Son, glorifies not Himself but Christ, and works in the hearts of His people faith, love, holiness and spiritual enlightenment. This subordination of the Son to the Father, and of the Spirit to the Father and the Son, relates not to their essential life within the Godhead, but only to their modes of operation or their division of labour in creation and redemption.

This subordination of the Son to the Father, and of the Spirit to the Father and the Son, is not in any way inconsistent with true equality. We have an analogy of such priority and subordination, for instance, in the relationship which exists between husband and wife in the human family. Paul tells us that that relationship is one of equality in Christ Jesus, in whom "there can be no male and female" (Gal. iii. 28),—woman's soul being of as much value as man's,—yet one of personal priority and subordination in which in the home and the State the husband is the acknowledged spokesman and leader. As Dr. W. Brenton Greene says:

“ In the sight of God husband and wife are, and in the eye of the law ought to be, halves of one whole and neither better than the other. But while this is so and cannot be emphasized too strongly, the relationship of husband and wife, nevertheless, is such that the position of the wife is distinct from and dependent on that of the husband. This does not imply that the wife as a person is of inferior worth to her husband: in this respect there is neither male nor female; for they are both ‘one in Christ Jesus’. Neither does it mean that the mission of the wife is of less importance than that of the husband. There are certain functions, moral and intellectual as well as physical, which she fulfils far better than her husband; and there are certain other functions of supreme necessity which only she can fulfil at all. What is meant, however, is that as there are some things of primary importance that only the wife can do; so there are other indispensable functions that only the husband ought to discharge, and chief among these is the direction of their *common* life. He, therefore, should be the ‘head’ of the ‘one body’ that husband and wife together form. Whether we can understand it or not, such a relationship is not inconsistent with perfect equality. It is not in the case of the Trinity. Father, Son and Spirit are equal in power and glory. Yet the Son is second to the Father, and the Spirit is second to both the Father and the Son, as to their ‘mode of subsistence and operation’. Whatever, therefore, the secondary position of the wife as regards her husband may imply, it need not imply even the least inferiority” (Notes on *Christian Sociology*).

In the political realm we may say that the president of the United States is officially first, the governor of a state officially second, and the private citizen officially third. Yet they are each equally possessed of human nature, and in fact the private citizen may be a better man morally and spiritually than either the governor or the president. Also, two men of equal rank in private life may join the army, one to become a captain, the other to become a private soldier in the ranks of this captain. Officially, and for a limited time, one becomes subordinate to the other, yet during that time they may be equals in the sight of God. In the work of redemption the situation is somewhat analogous to this,—through a covenant voluntarily entered into, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit each undertake a specific work in such a manner that, during the time this work is in progress, the Father becomes officially first, the Son officially second, and the Spirit officially third. Yet within the essential and inherent life of the Trinity the full equality of the persons is preserved.

## VIII

### THE GENERATION OF THE SON AND THE PROCESSION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The kindred doctrines of the Eternal Generation of the Son and of the Eternal Procession of the Holy Spirit are ad-

mittedly doctrines which are but very obscurely understood by the best of theologians. Certainly the present writer, with his limited study and experience, is not under the delusion that he shall be able to give a fully satisfactory explanation of them. He proposes only to define the doctrines and to offer a few brief comments.

The Eternal Generation of the Son, as stated by a representative theologian, is defined as:

“an eternal personal act of the Father, wherein, by necessity of nature, not by choice of will, He generates the person (not the essence) of the Son, by communicating to Him the whole indivisible substance of the Godhead, without division, alienation, or change, so that the Son is the express image of His Father’s person, and eternally continues, not from the Father, but in the Father, and the Father in the Son” (Dr. A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, p. 182).

The following Scripture verses are commonly given as the principal support of this doctrine: “For as the Father hath life in himself, even so gave He to the Son also to have life in himself” (John v. 25); “Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me” (John xiv. 11); “Even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee” (John xvii. 21); “That ye may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father” (John x. 38); Christ is declared to be “the effulgence of his glory, and the very image of his substance” (Heb. i. 3); “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John iii. 16).

The present writer feels constrained to say, however, that in his opinion the verses quoted do not teach the doctrine in question. He feels that the primary purpose of these and similar verses is to teach that Christ is intimately associated with the Father, that He is equal with the Father in power and glory, that He is, in short, full Deity, rather than to teach that His Person is generated by or originates in an eternal process which is going on within the Godhead. Even though the attempt is made to safeguard the essential equality of the Son by saying that the process by which the Son is generated is eternal and necessary, he does not feel that the attempt is successful. If, as even Augustine, for instance, asserts, the Father is the *Fons Trinitatis*—the fountain or source of the Trinity—from whom both the Son and the Spirit are derived, it seems that in spite of all else we may say we have made the Son and the

Spirit dependent upon another as their principal cause, and have destroyed the true and essential equality between the Persons of the Trinity. As we have stated before, when the Scriptures tell us that one Person within the Trinity is known as the "Father", and another as the "Son", they intend to teach, not that the Son is originated by the Father, nor that the Father existed prior to the Son, but that they are the same in nature.

This, apparently, was also the position held by Calvin, for at the conclusion of his chapter on the Trinity he says:

"But, studying the edification of the Church, I have thought it better not to touch upon many things, which would be unnecessarily burdensome to the reader, without yielding him any profit. For to what purpose is it to dispute, whether the Father is always begetting? For it is foolish to imagine a continual act of generation, since it is evident that three Persons have subsisted in God from all eternity" (*Institutes*, Book I, Ch. 13).

### *Procession of the Holy Spirit*

The Procession of the Holy Spirit has commonly been understood to designate:

"the relation which the third person sustains to the first and second, wherein by an eternal and necessary, i.e. not voluntary, act of the Father and the Son, their whole identical divine essence, without alienation, division, or change, is communicated to the Holy Ghost" (Dr. A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, p. 189).

"Procession" is a more general term than "Generation", although in each case the process is admittedly inscrutable. Procession is said to differ from Generation in that the Son is generated by the Father only, while the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son at the same time,—or as some have put it, proceeds from the Father, through the Son.

What we have said concerning the alleged Scripture proof for the doctrine of the generation of the Son is even more applicable to that which is advanced to prove the procession of the Spirit. There is, in fact, only one verse in Scripture which is commonly put forward to prove this doctrine, and it is found in John xv. 26: "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall bear witness of me." Again, the best Bible scholars are divided as to whether or not this verse teaches the "procession" of the Spirit in the sense that His Person originates as the result of an inscrutable although eternal and necessary process within the Godhead, or

whether the verse merely has reference to His mission in this world as He comes to apply the redemption which Christ purchased. Jesus uses a similar form of expression when of His own redemptive mission He says, "I came out from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go unto the Father" (John xvi. 28). In the original Greek the phrase, "came out from", which is here used of Jesus, is stronger than the "proceedeth from", which is used of the Spirit; yet the context of John xvi. 28 makes it perfectly clear that what Jesus said of Himself had reference to His mission and not to what is commonly termed His eternal generation; for His coming forth from the Father into the world is contrasted with His leaving the world and going back to the Father. We are, of course, told that the Holy Spirit is sent by the Father and by the Son; but the mission as He comes to apply redemption is an entirely different thing from the procession. It seems much more natural to assume that the words of John xv. 26, which were a part of the Farewell Discourse, and which were, therefore, spoken within the very shadow of the cross, were not philosophical but practical, designed to meet a present and urgent need, namely, to comfort and strengthen the disciples for the ordeal through which they too were soon to pass. This was His method of teaching on other occasions, and it is at least difficult to see why He would have departed from it on this occasion. He was soon to leave the disciples, and He simply gave them the promise that another Helper, who likewise comes from the Father, shall take His place and be to them what He has been and do for them what He has done. It would seem that, since they hardly knew of the Spirit as yet, this would not at all have been an appropriate occasion to instruct them concerning the metaphysical relation which subsists between the Father and the Spirit. They are taught rather that the Spirit comes with divine authority, and that He is continually going forth from the Father to fulfil His purposes of Grace.

Hence John xv. 26, at best, carried no decisive weight concerning the doctrine of the procession of the Spirit, if, indeed, it is not quite clearly designed to serve an entirely different purpose. We prefer to say, as previously stated, that within the essential life of the Trinity no one Person is prior to, nor generated by, nor proceeds from, another, and that such priority and

subordination as we find revealed in the works of creation, redemption and sanctification, relate not to the immanent but to the economic Trinity.

Historically, the doctrine of the Procession of the Holy Spirit, which supposedly is of lesser consequence than that of the Generation of the Son, has been perverted and exaggerated out of all proportion to its real importance, and has been made the object of bitter and prolonged controversy between the Eastern and Western churches. It was, in fact, the immediate occasion of the split in Christendom in the eleventh century, and to this day it constitutes the main difference in doctrine between the Greek Orthodox and the Roman Catholic churches. The Greek church has maintained that the Spirit proceeds from the Father only, while the Latin church, and also the Protestant churches generally, have maintained that He proceeds from both the Father and the Son. But certainly the evidence for the doctrine is too scanty, and its meaning too obscure, to justify the hard feeling and the ecclesiastical division which has resulted from it.

## IX

### THE TRINITY PRESENTS A MYSTERY BUT NOT A CONTRADICTION

To expect that we who do not understand ourselves nor the forces of nature about us should understand the deep mysteries of the Godhead would certainly be to the last degree unreasonable. Of all the Christian doctrines this is perhaps the most difficult to understand or to explain. That God exists as a Trinity has been clearly revealed in Scripture; but the particular mode in which the three Persons exist has not been revealed. When we behold the Triune God we feel like one who gazes upon the midday sun. The finite is not able to comprehend the infinite; and the marvellous personality of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit remains and must ever remain a profound mystery regardless of all the study that the greatest theologians of the Church have expended upon it. When we try to grasp its meaning the words in Job come to mind, "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" The question answers itself.

In every sphere we are called upon to believe many truths which we cannot explain. What, for instance, is light? What gives the force of gravity its pull, and through what medium

does it act? How does the mind make contact with the physical brain?

“There are many things in the world which are true but which cannot be understood,” says Dr. Floyd E. Hamilton. “What is the real nature of electricity? What is life? What enables a human body to turn the same food into bone, teeth, flesh, and hair? These are but a few of the questions which man has never been able to answer, and probably never will, but that fact does not affect their truth. They exist, and their existence does not depend upon their understanding them. In the same way, the Triune God exists and His existence does not depend upon our understanding the mysteries of His nature” (*The Basis of Christian Faith*, p. 278).

And Dr. David S. Clark remarks:

“We must distinguish between apprehension and comprehension. We can know what God is, without knowing all He is. We can touch the earth while not able to embrace it in our arms. The child can know God while the philosopher cannot find out the Almighty unto perfection” (*A Syllabus of Systematic Theology*, p. 59).

“It is a mystery indeed,” says Professor Flint,

“yet one which explains many other mysteries, and which sheds a marvellous light on God, on nature, and on man” (*Anti-Theistic Theories*, p. 439).

Most people will admit, for instance, that they do not understand Einstein’s theory of relativity; yet few will be so bold as to declare it irrational. Unless God were too great for our full intellectual comprehension, He would surely be too small to satisfy our spiritual needs.

But while the doctrine of the Trinity presents a mystery, it does not present a contradiction. It asserts that God is one in one respect—in substance or essence—and that He is three in an entirely different respect—in personal distinctions; and the charge of anti-trinitarians, that there is no middle ground between the Unitarian position (which asserts the unity of God but denies the Deity of Christ and the personality of the Holy Spirit) and Tritheism (which asserts that there are three Gods) is easily refuted by this fact. The doctrine of the Trinity is above reason, and could never have been discovered by man apart from divine revelation; yet it cannot be proved contrary to reason, nor inconsistent with any other truth which we know concerning God.

Furthermore, we hardly see how any one can insist that the doctrine of the Trinity strikes the average person as unreasonable when as a matter of fact Pantheism (which holds

that every person and every thing which exists is but one of the innumerable forms in which God exists) is the form of philosophy which has been the most widely diffused and the most persistently held by the various peoples down through the ages. If the human mind has been able to conceive of God as existing in such an infinite number of forms, surely the statement that He exists in three Persons should not be hard to believe. The fact is that the doctrine as presented in Scripture is found to be eminently agreeable to reason. The historic Christian Church in all its branches has held tenaciously to this doctrine; and on the part of individuals the deepest and truest and most fruitful Christian faith has been found in those who have had an experimental knowledge and fellowship not only with God the Father, but also with Christ the Son and with the Holy Spirit,—that is, in Evangelicals as distinguished from Unitarians and rationalists.

Let it be remembered that we are under no obligation to explain all the mysteries connected with this doctrine. We are only under obligation to set forth what the Scriptures teach concerning it, and to vindicate that teaching as far as possible from the objections that are alleged against it. It is a doctrine which should never be presented to an unbeliever as a subject for argumentative proof, for it can be accepted only by faith, and that only after the person is convinced that God has spoken and that He has revealed this as a truth concerning Himself. With the Psalmist we are compelled to say, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it" (cxxxix. 6); and with Athanasius, "Man can perceive only the hem of the garment of God; the cherubim cover the rest with their wings". But though we are not able to give a full explanation of our faith we may know, and should know, what we believe and what we do not believe, and should be acquainted with the facts and truth on which our faith rests.

Many analogies have been given down through the ages to illustrate this doctrine, but we had as well admit that none of them have been of any special value and that some of them have been positively misleading. Some of the more common are: body, soul and spirit, or intellect, emotion and will in man; stem, flower and seed in the plant; egg, larva and butterfly in the insect; solid, liquid and gas in matter; light, heat and radiance in the sun, etc. None of these, however, are true



analogies. All of them fail to do justice to the personal element, particularly to the tri-personal element, in the Godhead. The best of them, that of intellect, emotion and will in man, presents three functions in one person, but not three persons in one substance. Those of the solid, liquid and gas, or of the egg, larva and butter-fly, are not Christian, but Unitarian; for they represent the same substance as going through three successive stages.

Since there is none like God,—for “to whom will ye liken God, or what likeness will ye compare unto Him”,—we shall look in vain for any explanation of the Trinity either in the structure of our own minds or in nature about us. As the Trinity is not discoverable by reason in the first place, so it is not capable of proof by reason in the second place. We receive it only because it is taught in Scripture, and just as it is taught there. As Luther said concerning this doctrine:

“We should, like the little children, stammer out what the Scriptures teach: that the Father is truly God, that Christ is truly God, that the Holy Ghost is truly God, and yet that there are not three Gods, or three Beings, as there are three men, three angels, or three windows.”

## X

### HISTORICAL ASPECTS OF THE DOCTRINE

During the first three centuries of the Christian era, theological discussion was centred almost entirely on the relationship subsisting between the Father and the Son, to the almost complete neglect of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. In the nature of the case the development of a formal statement of the doctrine of the Trinity was a slow process. During the second and third centuries the influence of Stoic and Platonic thought caused some to deny the full Deity of Christ and to attempt to reduce Him to such dimensions as were considered commensurate with a world of time and space. Then against this tendency there arose a reaction, known as Monarchianism, which identified the Father, Son and Spirit so completely that they were held to be only one Person who manifested Himself in different capacities.

We are not to infer that the doctrine of the Deity of Christ was a deduction from that of the Trinity, but rather the reverse. Because of the claims which Christ made, the authority which

He assumed, the miracles which He worked, and the glory which He displayed, particularly in His resurrection, the early Christians were practically unanimous in their recognition of Him as truly God. This conviction, together with the inferential statement of the doctrine of the Trinity in the Baptismal Formula and in the Apostolic Benediction, served as their basis in the formulation of the doctrine. But since they were equally convinced that there was but one true God, the difficulty arose as to how to reconcile these two fundamental articles of the faith. There were some who attempted to solve the difficulty by denying the Deity of Christ, but their numbers were so few during the first two centuries that they had little influence.

The controversy was brought to a head in the early part of the fourth century by the teaching of Arius, a presbyter in the Church at Alexandria, Egypt. Because of the widespread difference of opinion concerning the Person of Christ an Ecumenical Council was called by the first Christian Emperor, Constantine, for the purpose of formulating a general doctrine which should be accepted by the whole Church. The council met in the year 325, at Nicaea, in Asia Minor, and was attended by bishops and presbyters from practically all parts of the empire. The real controversy centred around the question as to whether Christ was to be considered as truly God, or as only the first and greatest creature. The Arians maintained that Christ was not eternal, that He was created by the Father out of nothing and was therefore the first and highest of all creatures, that He in turn created the world, and that because of the power delegated to Him He is to be looked upon as God and is to be worshipped. He was, therefore, to be called God only by courtesy, in much the same way that we give a Lieutenant Governor the title of Governor. His pre-eminence was due to the fact that He alone was created immediately by God and that supernatural power was given to Him, while all other creatures were created by Him. Most of the Arians also held that the Holy Spirit was the first and greatest of the creatures called into existence by His power. All of this meant, of course, a God who had a beginning, and who might therefore have an end; for a creature, no matter how highly exalted, must ever remain finite. Hence the Arians, in demanding worship for Christ, were in fact asserting the central principle of heathenism and idolatry, the worship of a creature.

The Arians asserted that Christ was not of the same substance (homo-ousia) with the Father, but of similar substance (homoiousia). We may be tempted to-day to wonder how the whole Christian world could have been convulsed over the insertion or rejection of a single letter of the alphabet; but in reality the absence or the presence of the *iota* signified the difference between a Saviour who is truly God and one who is only a creature,—between a Christianity which is able to save the souls of men and one which can not. In the council of Nicaea the Church faced what we believe to have been the greatest crisis in the entire history of doctrine. It was, however, in effect, although in a slightly different form, the same question that it faces in the twentieth century dispute between the Evangelical Faith and Modernism.

The noble champion of the orthodox cause was Athanasius, who later became Bishop of Alexandria. Under his influence the Council declared for the full and eternal Deity of Christ, who was declared to be “God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, being of one substance with the Father”. Opposition continued strong for some time after the Council had made its pronouncement, but under the zealous and skilful leadership of Athanasius the doctrine gradually won official acceptance by the entire Church. It was seen that a created Christ was not the Christ of the New Testament, nor could He be the Christ who, by His death and resurrection, became the Author of eternal salvation.

But so absorbed had the Council been in working out the doctrine concerning the Person of Christ that it omitted to make any definite statement concerning the Holy Spirit. Athanasius had taught the true Deity of the Spirit, but many of the writers of the period identified Him with the Logos or Son, while others regarded Him as but the impersonal power or efficacy of God. It was but natural that until the question concerning the Person and nature of the Son was settled not much progress could be made in the development of the doctrine of the Spirit. The defect of the Nicene Creed was remedied, however, by the Second Ecumenical Council, which met at Constantinople in 381, and included in its creed the statement: “We believe in the Holy Ghost, who is the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father, who, with the Father and Son, together is worshipped and glorified, who spake by the prophets.”

Another heresy which arose was that of Sabellianism. This view held that there was but one Person in the Godhead, and that the terms Father, Son and Spirit simply denoted this one Person in different capacities. As Creator of the world He was known as Father; as Redeemer of the race He was known as the Son; and when working in the hearts of men He was known as the Spirit. Some chose to say that it was the same God who in Old Testament times was known as Father, who afterward became incarnate as the Son, and who reveals Himself in the Church as the Holy Spirit. These different manifestations of the same Person were considered analogous to that of a man who is known in his home as a father, in the Church as an elder, and in the community as a doctor.

But this view satisfied the religious consciousness of Christians in only one regard, namely, in recognizing the true Deity of Christ. Its defects were glaring; for if the phases were successive, then God ceased to be the Father when He became the Son, and ceased to be the Son when He became the Spirit. The incarnation was reduced to a temporary union of the Divine and the human nature in the man Jesus Christ. This view was so out of harmony with the Scriptures that it was soon rejected, and the Church doctrine, which is neither Tritheism nor Sabellianism but the true mean between these errors, was maintained.

One other trinitarian heresy that we should notice was that of the Socinians. They held that Christ was only a man, a very good man to be sure, in fact the best of men because more fully animated and controlled by the power of God than any other had ever been, but who had no existence until he was born by ordinary generation of Joseph and Mary. They acknowledged that he possessed a more advanced revelation from God than had been given to any of the earlier prophets or teachers. They perceived the impropriety of worshipping a creature as the Arians had done, regardless of how high he might be exalted; and while less orthodox than the Arians, they were at this point more consistent. This view was, of course, condemned by the Church, but it has continued as a heresy on the outskirts of true religion down through the ages. To-day its clearest expression is found in Unitarianism. Present-day Modernism, which is essentially a denial of the supernatural in religion, also carries on the Socinian tradition with more or less consistency.

To Augustine belongs the credit for having made a considerable advance in the development of the doctrine, and for centuries his book, *On The Trinity*, remained the standard work on the subject. While Athanasius had secured the acceptance by the Church of the true personality and Deity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, he did allow that the Son and the Holy Spirit were subordinate to the Father in order and dignity. Augustine did away with the idea of subordination by stressing the numerical unity of their essence, and through his powerful influence the doctrine was accepted by the Church in fact as well as in theory. Although the Reformation was a time of great advances in the development of doctrine, that of the Trinity had been wrought out so clearly at the earlier period that there was no tendency to enter into speculation concerning it. Both Luther and Calvin refused to go beyond the simple statements of Scripture, although it did fall to Calvin to reassert the self-existence and the full equality of the Son and the Spirit with the Father against those who taught that the generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit denoted perpetual communication of essence from the Father and therefore dependence. In Calvin's statement the idea of the equalization of the persons took the place of the ideas of generation and procession.

The Church of the scriptures and of the creeds is, of course, Trinitarian, not Unitarian. Up until a century ago every denomination and practically every local church taught the doctrine of the Trinity as a matter of course. But with the passing of the years a change has taken place, and even in many of the so-called evangelical churches this doctrine, which sets forth eternal and unchanging truth, is scarcely mentioned, while in others it, like many other essential truths, is challenged, doubted or denied. The truth has not changed, but the attitude of many in our generation toward that truth has changed; and to-day the controversy rages with new vigour, not only against the foe without, but also against the fleece-clad foe within.

In an excellent article on *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, Dr. Clarence E. Macartney has the following to say about the present-day controversy.

“What Athanasius contended against in his day was the effort to give the world a damaged Christ. He knew that a damaged Christ was no Christ. He knew that a redemption wrought out by any other save the God of redemption,

God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, was no redemption at all. Under different names and forms there appears from time to time that same subtle effort of unbelief to persuade the world to accept a damaged Christ instead of the Christ who is the eternal Son of God. Not since the days of Arius has there been so widespread and warmly propagated a movement to substitute for the New Testament Christ, the Christ of redemption, a lesser Christ, a damaged Christ. The leaders of this movement either openly deny the New Testament accounts of the miraculous entry of Christ into the world, or hold that the acceptance or the rejection of those accounts of how Christ came has nothing to do with Christianity. This new Christ probably did not work miracles. He did not die on the cross as a substitute for man, taking his place, and bearing his sins before the law of God. He did not rise from the dead with the same body in which He was entombed in Joseph's sepulchre, nor in that body did He ascend into the heavens to intercede at the right hand of God the Father Almighty: and the repeated statements of the New Testament about His glorious and triumphant return to the earth mean only that truth and right are at length to prevail upon the earth. Yet the men who hold these views still talk, and some of them still preach, about Christ. What Christ? 'Who is this?' the people exclaimed when Jesus rode into Jerusalem amid the plaudits of the multitude. To-day the Christian Church may well exclaim concerning this new, this damaged Christ, 'Who is this?'

It may be of interest to give a brief summary of the credal statements of the Church concerning this doctrine. We have said that during the first three centuries there were no important councils and that the formulation of a credal statement was a slow process. The early Christians held the doctrine, as it were, in solution; time and controversy were destined to precipitate it out. Because of the bitterness of the Jews, the mockery of the pagans, and the inevitable confusion and contradiction in the mode of statement even by those within the Church who honestly intended to hold what the Scriptures taught concerning it, the Church was compelled to analyse the doctrine and to set it forth in clear-cut, formal statements.

The best summary of the teaching of the various creeds, so far as we know, is found in the above-mentioned article by Dr. Macartney, and is prefaced by the following remarks:

"As we read these statements let us remember that they represent no idle and airy speculations, but a noble effort of trained minds to define and explain the truth of the Trinity as they had found it in the pages of the Bible and in the traditions of believing Christians. Let us remember, too, that these statements, especially the earlier ones, were formulated in times when Christianity was being fiercely assailed by unbelief. At Pittsburg, St. Louis, Chicago, Detroit, and other cities of the United States, the visitor is taken to see an old fort, or the site of an old fort, where the first settlers established themselves and defended themselves. These log forts, with loophole and outlook, standing now in the midst of great cities, mark the growth and progress of the nation, for without the enterprise, heroism and sacrifice which are associated with these forts, there would not have been a nation. These ancient confessions are like venerable fortresses. They mark the crises in the history of Christianity and recall the heroism and daring of

men who refused to have their Christian heritage taken from them, and in the face of a world of unbelief cried out, 'Credo! I believe!' There is no cant so ignorant, so wretched, so worthy of immeasurable scorn, as that so popular to-day, which belittles creeds and the men who gave them to us, and the men who defend them, and say that they have nothing to do with practical Christianity. Without these creeds, and the courage and love and faith which they represent, Christianity would long ago have perished from off the face of the earth."

1. The Nicene Creed (325):

"We believe in one God—And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, light of light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father—And in the Holy Ghost."

2. The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (381).

In this creed the clauses concerning the Father and the Son are practically the same as in the Nicene Creed. But the article concerning the Holy Ghost is changed to the following: "And in the Holy Ghost, who is the Lord and giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father, who, with the Father and Son, is worshipped and glorified, who spake by the prophets."

3. The Athanasian Creed (origin and time uncertain, but the most logical and elaborate of the creeds):

"And the Catholic Faith is this: that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the Substance; for there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is all one; the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by Himself to be God and Lord, so we are forbidden by the Catholic Religion to say, There are three Gods, or three Lords."

4. The Augsburg Confession (1530),—the oldest Protestant creed and the accepted standard of Lutheranism:

"There is one Divine essence which is called and is God, eternal, without body, indivisible, of infinite power, wisdom, goodness, the Creator and Preserver of all things, visible and invisible. And yet there are three Persons of the same essence and power, who also are co-eternal, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

5. The Thirty-Nine Articles (1571),—the creed of the Church of England and of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States:

“ There is but one living and true God. And in the unity of this Godhead there are three Persons, of one substance, power and eternity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.”

6. The Westminster Confession (1647),—the creed of the Presbyterian Church, with which the Canon of the Synod of Dort, the symbol of the Reformed Church, agrees quite closely:

“ There is but one living and true God. In the unity of the Godhead there are three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is one, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.”

## XI

### PRACTICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE DOCTRINE

The doctrine of the Trinity is not to be looked upon as an abstract metaphysical speculation, nor as an unnatural theory which has no bearing on the practical affairs of life. It is rather a most important revelation concerning the nature of the only living and true God, and of His works in the salvation of men. The very purpose of the Gospel is, of course, to bring us to the knowledge of God precisely in the way in which He has revealed Himself. And as Calvin tells us in the introductory sentence in his *Institutes* :

“ True and substantial wisdom principally consists of two parts, the knowledge of God, and the knowledge of ourselves.”

And then he adds that

“ no man can take a survey of himself but he must immediately turn to the contemplation of God in whom he lives and moves: since it is evident that our very existence is nothing but a subsistence in God alone.”

The knowledge of God the Father who is the source of redemption, of God the Son who achieves redemption, and of God the Holy Spirit who applies redemption, is declared in Scripture to be eternal life. Every other conception of God presents a false god to the mind and conscience. So different is the system of theology developed, and the manner of life which flows from it, that for all practical purposes we may say that Unitarians and Trinitarians worship different Gods.



This is an advanced doctrine which was not made known in Old Testament times, and that for the very reason that it could not be understood until the objective work of redemption had been completed. But in the New Testament it is interwoven with the whole Christian economy, not in terms of speculative philosophy but in those of practical religion.

"The doctrine of the Trinity," says Dr. Bartlett, "lies at the very heart of Christian truth. It is the centre from which all other tenets of our faith radiate. If we entertain wrong views of the nature of the Supreme Being our entire theology is imperilled" (*The Triune God*, p. 13).

Inscrutable, yet not self-contradictory, this doctrine furnishes the key to all of the other doctrines which have to do with the redemption of man. Apart from it doctrines such as the Deity of Christ, the incarnation, the personality of the Holy Spirit, regeneration, justification, sanctification, the meaning of the crucifixion and the resurrection, etc., cannot be understood. It thus underlies the whole plan of salvation. As Dr. Henry B. Smith tells us:

"For the Trinity there is a strong, preliminary argument in the fact that in some form it has always been confessed by the Christian Church, and that all that has opposed it has been thrown off. When it has been abandoned, other chief articles, as the atonement, regeneration, etc., have almost always followed it, by logical necessity; as when one draws the wire from a necklace of gems, the gems all fall asunder" (*System of Christian Theology*, p. 49).

"The idea of the Trinity," says Dr. Warfield, "illuminates, enriches and elevates all our thoughts of God. It has become a commonplace to say that Christian theism is the only stable theism. That is as much as to say that theism requires the enriching conception of the Trinity to give it permanent hold upon the human mind—the mind finds it difficult to rest in the idea of an abstract unity for its God: and that the human heart cries out for the living God in whose Being there is that fulness of life for which the conception of the Trinity alone provides."

And again:

"If he (the believer) could not construct the doctrine of the Trinity out of his consciousness of salvation, yet the elements of his consciousness of salvation are interpreted to him and reduced to order only by the doctrine of the Trinity which he finds underlying and giving their significance and consistency to the teaching of the Scriptures as to the processes of salvation. By means of this doctrine he is able to think clearly and consequently of his threefold relation to the saving God, experienced by him as fatherly love sending a Redeemer, as redeeming love executing redemption, as saving love applying redemption. . . . Without the doctrine of the Trinity, his conscious Christian life would be thrown into confusion and left in disorganisation if not, indeed, given an air of unreality; with the doctrine of the Trinity, order, significance and reality are brought to every element of it. Accordingly, the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of redemption, historically, stand or fall together. A unitarian theology is commonly associated with a Pelagian anthropology and a Socinian soteriology. It is a striking testimony which is borne

by F. E. Koenig: 'I have learned that many cast off the whole history of redemption for no other reason than because they have not attained to a conception of the Triune God' ( *Biblical Doctrines*, pp. 139, 167).

The doctrine of the Trinity gives us a *theocentric* system of theology, and thus places in true proportion the work of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. This system alone gives us the proper approach to the study of theology, showing that it must be from the standpoint of the triune God rather than from that of the second or third Person of the Trinity, or from man,—that is, theocentric rather than Christocentric or anthropocentric. It should be unnecessary for us to have to say that theocentric theology (by which we mean that which is generally known as the Reformed or Calvinistic faith) gives Christ a very high place in the system. He is the God-man, the centre and source of salvation; but while soteriology has a prominent place, it is not made the organizing principle, but rather one of the subdivisions in the theological system. The history of doctrine shows quite clearly that those who have attempted to organize the system of theology around the person of Christ, regardless of their good intentions, have tended to slight other vital truths and to drift into a superficial system. Their system is unstable and tends to gravitate downward, relinquishing one doctrine after another until it becomes anthropocentric.

The third system, quite common in our day and generally known as Modernism or Humanism, is anthropocentric,—that is, it attempts to understand the nature of God by reconstructing Him from what we know of man. This system allows man to cast his own shadow over God, limiting His Lordship and darkening His might. It means that Christ is to be looked upon primarily as a man, and that, as expressed by an outstanding Modernist of our day, nobody should go to Jesus "to his manger and his cross to find the omnipotence that swings Orion and the Pleiades". All such errors are to be avoided by placing God in His triune nature at the centre of our theological system. Only thus shall we arrive at a true knowledge of Him. This is the biblical order: first, the Father, who is the Creator and the Author of salvation; then the Son, who provides redemption objectively; and then the Holy Spirit, who applies redemption.

One cause of the strength of the Trinitarian theology has

been the appeal which it makes to the inward sense of sin,—that sad weight which rests so heavily upon every serious soul,—while the great weakness of Unitarianism has been its insensibility to the reality and consequences of sin. Trinitarians have seen sin not merely as misfortune or incomplete development, but as awful and heinous crime, repulsive to God, and deserving His just wrath and punishment. They have held that it could not merely be pardoned without an atonement (that is, without any one suffering the consequences), but that God is under as much obligation to punish sin as He is to reward righteousness. On the other hand Pelagians, Socinians, and present-day Modernists and Unitarians have taken a superficial and minimizing view of sin, with the inevitable result that their faith has been superficial, their religious feelings have been deadened, and the sinews of all evangelistic and missionary effort have been cut. Having given up the doctrine of the Trinity, they naturally take a low view of the person of Christ. Even according to their own admission the great literature to which a Christian would turn for faith, hope, love and inspiration has been almost exclusively the product of trinitarian writers. Hence the best method to use in dealing with Modernists and Unitarians is to arouse in them the sense of sin; for once a person realizes the hideous and ghastly nature of his sin he also realizes that none other than a Divine Redeemer can save him from it.

And this brings us to another point: If there were no trinity, there could be no incarnation, no objective redemption, and therefore no salvation; for there would then be no one capable of acting as Mediator between God and man. In his fallen condition man has neither the inclination nor the ability to redeem himself. All merely human works are defective and incapable of redeeming a single soul. Between the Holy God and sinful man there is an infinite gulf; and only through One who is Deity, who takes man's nature upon Himself and suffers and dies in his stead, thus giving infinite value and dignity to that suffering and death, can man's debt be paid. Nor could a Holy Spirit who comes short of Deity apply that redemption to human souls. Hence if salvation is to be had at all it must be of divine origin. If God were only unity, but not plurality, He might be our Judge, but, so far as we can see, could not be our Saviour and sanctifier. The fact of the matter is that

God is the way back to Himself, and that all of the hopes of our fallen race are centred in the truth of the Trinity.

It is difficult to maintain the independence and self-sufficiency of God on any other than the Trinitarian basis. Those who believe in a uni-personal God almost instinctively posit the eternity of matter or an eternal and necessary creation in order to preserve a subjective-objective relationship. Even many Trinitarian theologians have held—whether correctly or not there is difference of opinion—that the Divine nature demands either an eternal Christ or an eternal creation. It is felt that apart from a creation a unitary God would be a most lonely and solitary Being, limited in companionship, love, mercy, justice, etc., and hence not self-sufficient. The Unitarian conception of God is unstable, and these considerations to quite a large extent account for its distinct tendency toward Pantheism. In the New England theology, for instance, we find that the high Unitarianism of Channing degenerated into the half-fledged Pantheism of Theodore Parker, and then into the full-fledged Pantheism of Ralph Waldo Emerson. As Trinitarians we feel that a God who is necessarily bound to the universe is not truly infinite, independent and free.

“A Unitarian, one-personed God,” says Dr. Charles Hodge, “might possibly have existed, and if revealed as such, it would have been our duty to have acknowledged His lordship. But, nevertheless, He would have always remained utterly inconceivable to us—one lone, fellowless conscious being; subject without object; conscious person without environment; righteous being without fellowship or moral relation or sphere of right action. Where would there be to Him a sphere of love, truth, trust, or sympathetic feeling? Before creation, eternal darkness; after creation, only an endless game of solitaire, with worlds for pawns” (*Systematic Theology*, I, p. 127).

The Unitarian idea of God over-emphasizes His power at the expense of His other attributes, and tends to identify Him with abstract cause and thought. On the other hand the doctrine of the Trinity shows us that in His relations with us His love is primary, and that His power is exercised in the interests of His love rather than that His love is exercised in the interests of His power. The words, “God is love” (1 John iv. 8) are not a rhetorical exaggeration, but an expression of truth concerning the Divine nature. We are convinced that the trinitarian conception of God, as judged by its piety and morality at home and its missionary zeal abroad, is by all odds the highest; and once we have thus conceived of God and felt the new fullness,

richness and force given through the divine fellowship we can never again be satisfied with a modalistic or Unitarian conception.

Something of the invaluable service rendered by the doctrine of the Trinity is brought out when we see how it embraces, combines and reconciles in itself all the half-truths of the various religions and heresies that have held sway over the minds of men. There have been in the main three outstanding false systems, namely, Polytheism, Pantheism, and Deism. That these systems embrace elements of important truth cannot be denied; yet upon the whole they are false and injurious.

The truth in Polytheism, which is that God exists in a plurality of persons and powers, abundantly sufficient within His own nature to allow free play to all of the moral and social qualities or personality, is embraced in the doctrine of the Trinity; but its errors, that it destroys the unity of God, and that it separates and personifies these various powers and worships them in isolation or under some visible manifestation such as the sun, moon, rivers, trees, animals, images, etc., is rejected.

The truth of Pantheism, which is that God is everywhere present and active, the irresistible current of force which flows through all movements and all life,—a truth which, as Dr. A. A. Hodge says,

“is realized in the Holy Ghost, who, while of the same substance as the Father, is revealed to us as immanent in all things, the basis of all existence, the tide of all life, springing up like a well of water from within us, giving form to chaos and inspiration to reason, the ever-present executive of God, the Author of all beauty in the physical world, of all true philosophy, science and theology in the world of thought, and of holiness in the world of the Spirit”,—

is embraced in the doctrine of the Trinity; but the errors of Pantheism, which are that God has no personal existence except as He comes to consciousness in man, that His only life is the sum of all creature life, and that His immediate participation in every thought and act of the creatures makes Him the author of sin, is rejected. Furthermore, in the incarnation of Christ the eternal Son God has stooped to a real and permanent incarnation, and has done sublimely what the incarnations of the heathen mythology have only caricatured.

The truth of Deism, which is that God is the Creator of the universe, the ultimate source of all power, enthroned in the

highest heaven, and that His power is manifested through second causes, namely through the unchanging order of natural law, is embraced in the doctrine of the Trinity; but the errors of Deism, which are that God is an absentee God, that He works only through second causes, that He is not in personal and loving contact with His people, and that He is therefore not concerned with their prayers and desires, is rejected.

Similarly, too, in regard to the heresies which have arisen within the Christian Church. The doctrine of the Trinity acknowledges the truth of Arianism, which is that Christ existed before the creation of the world and that He was possessed of supernatural power; but it rejects the errors of Arianism, which is that Christ was not co-eternal and co-equal with the Father, that He was in the final analysis only a creature and hence far short of Deity. With Sabellianism it acknowledges the full Deity and power of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, but denies its error, which is that it makes no proper distinctions between the Persons within the Godhead. With Nestorianism it acknowledges both the true Deity and the true humanity of Christ, but denies its error, which is that it separates the Divine and human natures in such a way as to render Him a dual personality.

Wherever the doctrine of the Trinity has been abandoned, with Christ as the connecting link between Deity and humanity, the tendency has been toward an abstract and immobile form of monotheism, toward the far-off God of Deism, or, recoiling from that, to lose God in the world of Pantheism. To identify God with nature is to attribute evil as well as good to Him; and this kind of religion had its logical outcome in the old worship of Baal, the supreme male divinity of the ancient Phoenicians, and of Ashtaroth, the goddess of love and fruitfulness, with all of their attendant and unmentionable abominations. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity supplies us with safeguards against both these errors, and at the same time provides us with the link between God and man, the link which philosophical speculation has striven so vainly to find. It is the true protection of a living Theism, which otherwise oscillates uncertainly between the two extremes of Deism and Pantheism, either of which is fatal to it.

This doctrine should, of course, be preached in every Christian Church. It is a mistake to say that people will no

longer listen to doctrinal preaching. Let the minister believe his doctrines; let him present them with conviction and as living issues, and he will find sympathetic audiences. To-day we see thousands of people turning away from pulpit discussions of current events, social topics, political issues, and merely ethical questions, and trying to fill themselves with the husks of occult and puerile philosophies. In many ways we are spiritually poorer than we should be, because in our theological confusion and bewilderment we have failed to do justice to these great doctrinal principles. If rightly preached these doctrines are most interesting and profitable, and are in fact indispensable if the congregation is to be well grounded in the Faith. We are convinced that the chief need of the present age is great theology, and that only the emergence and dominance of great theology will produce great philosophy on the one hand and great religion on the other.

It is certain that no merely speculative theory, and especially none so mysterious and so out of analogy with all other objects of human knowledge as is that of the Trinity, could ever have held such a prominent place and been so emphasized by all of the churches of Christendom as has this doctrine unless its controlling principle were vital. In the nature of the case Anti-trinitarianism inevitably leads to a radically different system of religion. Historically the Church has always refused to recognize as Christians those who rejected the doctrine of the Trinity. Also, historically, every great revival of Christianity down through the ages has been a revival of adherence to fullest Trinitarianism. It is not too much to say, therefore, that the Trinity is the point on which all Christian ideas and interests focus, at once the beginning and the end of all true insight into Christianity.

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