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## VESTIGIA TRINITATIS

### I

SOME theologians have shortened and even distorted their perspective by straining to discern in the sphere of nature and in the various presentations of philosophy and science pointers which, it is imagined, will conduct them to a clearer understanding of the Three-in-One. The suggestive results of such a quest have held out much fascination to the inquisitive mind. Thus indications of a triune concept have been seen in the contemplation of man as a tripartite being, in whom body, soul, and spirit are closely combined and interrelated; in our world, which is compounded of animal, vegetable, and mineral; in the three states, solid, fluid, and vaporous, in which a single substance may exist at different times under suitable circumstances of temperature and pressure; in the perfect triad of music, consisting of tonic, mediant, and dominant; and in numerous other aspects of man's environment. The philosophers, too, have descried a certain triplicity of associated ideas in the various fields which have engaged their thought.

Undoubtedly in examples such as the above there is an interconnection and even an interdependence between each of the three units of each concept. But it can scarcely be maintained that there is any convincing demonstration of trinity, that is, of threeness in oneness and oneness in threeness or identification of each of the three members simultaneously with each other, such as is taught in the Christian doctrine of the Triune God. There is, however, another line of thought which has appeared to some to be much nearer the mark. I refer here to the relationships involved in the state of being known as *self-consciousness*. Augustine's analogue of *amans, id quod amatur*, and *amor* is to be included here, the allusion being to the *self-love* which arises when the mind in a certain manner of detachment contemplates itself. Thus I am the "lover", myself the "loved", and "love" the essential connecting principle. Clearly here lover and loved are to be identified, and with them perhaps even love as an all-pervading attribute

of the self. Shedd finds just such an analogical illustration in the contemplation of man as a self-conscious being:

"In order to self-consciousness in man [he says], the unity, viz, the human spirit, must first become distinguished, but not divided, into two *distinctions*; one of which is the contemplating subject, and the other the contemplated object. The *I* must behold itself as an objective thing. In this first step in the process of becoming self-conscious, the finite spirit sets itself off over against itself, in order that it may see itself. . . . There is now a subject-ego and an object-ego. . . . But this is not the end of the process. We have not yet reached full self-consciousness. In order to the complete self-conscious intuition, the finite spirit must, yet further, perceive that this subject-ego and object-ego, this contemplant and contemplated, arrived at in the first stage of the process, are one and the same *essence* or *being*. This second act of perception completes the circle of self-consciousness. . . . The essence of the object must be seen to be the essence of the subject, or else self-knowledge is both incomplete and impossible. . . . There is now *full* self-consciousness. In and by the two acts of perception, and the three resulting *distinctions*, the human spirit has made itself its own object, and has perceived that it has done so. There is real triplicity in the unity" (*History of Christian Doctrine*, i. pp. 368, seq.).

More recently still Schlatter has written:

"Since we are in possession of our image, there continually arises in us a kind of three-in-oneness; to the knower comes the person known, but not in the way of both standing side by side, but straightway the third appears, the knower who knows himself in the person known" (quoted by Karl Barth, *Doctrine of the Word of God*, p. 388).

This differs in no way from the observations of Shedd or Augustine. Yet, despite the curious interest attaching to this sort of inquiry and the persuasiveness of these arguments, we are still very far removed from any really satisfactory *analogia* or *vestigium trinitatis*. Whether we talk of lover, loved, and love, or of subject-ego, object-ego, and the essential interlinking perception of recognition, or (what is the same) of the knower who knows himself in the person known, even so we are not dealing with *three* persons in one substance, but only with *one* person in one substance. The *distinctions* remarked are by no means *actual*, but purely intellectual. Indeed, such concepts are not even the result, as at first they seem to be, of thinking in a circle, but in a dot! And it may further be inquired, can there be such a thing as self-consciousness outside of a community, that is to say, apart from the deductions resulting from the comparisons made by an individual self with other surrounding similar individual selves? Must there not be a "You" as well as an "I" before true human self-consciousness is possible? But God is alone, one, and unique. There is none other. The

idea of a community of Gods is entirely absurd and pagan, for there cannot be more than a single infinite Being. Hence there is no "You" in the consciousness of the Godhead, nor can there be unless we have sunk into the mud of tritheism. It is always "*I will come*", or "*Let us make*"; and there is no disunity or detachment in the threefoldness of the essence of the one God. At all costs anthropomorphic conceptions of the Trinity must be shunned, and to argue from man to God is a perilous exercise. It is possible to maintain in a philosophical manner that the three-in-oneness of the Godhead is essential to the Divine self-consciousness, as numbers of excellent men have done; but to do so is a futile and finite attempt to embrace Him who Himself is infinite and embraces all.

Augustine fell into a trap when he argued that, because man was created in the image of God, therefore we are to expect to find in man an image of the Trinity. On this premiss he then commences to argue from man to God. Starting from a similar premiss the proponents of so-called "Christian Science" argue that, God being spirit, impassible, etc., and man being created in God's image, therefore man is spirit, impassible, etc., and it is well known to what impious ends such sophistry has led them. In this case the argument is from God to man. We must learn, then, that all such speculative excursions into those unknown regions which lie beyond the bounds of the Scriptural revelation (and which therefore are unknowable regions) may lead us in one direction or in another opposite direction, but certainly will not lead us to the truth. That the Divine self-consciousness (if we may be so bold as to assign to the Infinite what is known to us purely as a human state of experience) is intimately connected with the hypostatic differentiations of the Deity we do not wish for a moment to dispute. But what we do assert is that the hypostatic distinctions in the Godhead are not to be explained or exposed, or even half explained or half exposed, after a humanistic analogy, as a form of self-consciousness or as a necessity to self-consciousness in the Divine experience. Here we are confronted with that which is so utterly and unapproachably beyond and above the comprehension of our closely confined human understanding, that we cannot even attempt to make a commencement in the elucidation and exegesis of the Divine experience. Here we find ourselves on the road of speculation, which is the road which

always leads on to heresy. After all, the Trinity is the supreme *mystery* of theology. We may as soon expect the bottle to contain the ocean, as hope to embrace the incomprehensible, be wise about the transcendent, or reconcile what is mathematically irreducible. When God reveals Himself to us as Three-in-One and One-in-Three, by the stupendous nature of the revelation He at one and the same time veils and hides Himself from our gaze. In effect He says, "Thus far and no further". No possible analogy to this mystery is to be hoped for in all the affairs and relationships of nature and humanity. The veil will not be lifted until our redemption is complete, that is, until the glorification of all believers has taken place. Then we shall see face to face, and we shall know even as we are known. Then we shall hear Him say, "Said I not unto thee that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" Meanwhile we are to live by faith.

We conclude, therefore, that such-like supposed traces of trinity in nature and in thought, while exhibiting an intercommunicating threefoldness, all completely fail to show forth a picture of the one that is three and of the same three that are at the same time one, and that, in dealing with so mystical and sacred a matter as the character of the infinite Godhead, they are more likely to confuse and mislead than to edify and enlighten the inquirer. Indeed, the more clear-sighted scholars have been unable not to notice the inadequacies of such *vestigia*, but, notwithstanding, charmed by the prettiness of such conceits, have been unwilling to discard them. Consequently, for the purpose of retaining them in their systems, they have necessarily added qualifications and reservations so crippling, that in effect such seekings after comparisons have been rendered nugatory and unprofitable. There is a grave danger of trifling with those holy things which, being unseen, are meant to be apprehended by faith and not by speculation. Nor is it a worthy belief that these "vestigies" are of value as a sort of prop to bolster up and approve the scripturally revealed doctrine of the Trinity. Calvin wisely mistrusted investigations of this kind.

"I am not sure [he says], whether it is expedient to borrow analogies from human affairs to express the nature of this distinction. The ancient fathers sometimes do so, but they at the same time admit that what they bring forward as analogous is very widely different. And hence it is that I have a great dread of anything like presumption here, lest some rash saying may furnish an occasion of calumny to the malicious, or of delusion to the unlearned" (*Inst.* I, xiii. 18).

Karl Barth also speaks of "the thoroughgoing inconsistencies of the *vestigia*".

"We shall find [he continues] that the decisive proportions of this doctrine, that of the indissoluble unity and that of the indestructible variety of the three elements, cannot be carried through in any of these *vestigia*, but that the proof that may be led from them can never be more than the proof either of three divine beings standing side by side, or of a single divine monad without hypostatic differentiation, that, therefore, even if the divine being therein presupposed were worth calling God, the three-in-oneness of this God in the sense of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity could not be proved from these *vestigia*" (*Doctrine of the Word of God*, p. 395).

Where then, if there be such a thing, is the real *vestigium Trinitatis* to be sought? Barth asserts that

"it consists of the form which God Himself in His revelation has assumed in our language, world, and humanity. What we hear when with our human ears and concepts we listen to God's revelation, what we apprehend in Scripture (and can apprehend as men), what the proclamation of the Word of God actually is in our life, is the triply one voice of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. In this way God is present for us in His revelation. In this way He manifestly creates Himself a *vestigium* of Himself and so of His three-in-oneness" (*ibid.*, p. 399).

In an earlier passage he writes:

"The doctrine of the Word of God in its threefold form is itself the sole analogy to . . . the doctrine of the three-in-oneness of God. In the facts that for revelation, Scripture, and proclamation we can substitute the divine 'Person'-names of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and *vice versa*, that in the one case as in the other we shall encounter the same fundamental determinations and mutual relationships, that moreover the decisive difficulty, like the decisive clarity, is the same in both cases, in these facts we may see a certain support for the inner necessity and rightness of the present exposition of the Word of God" (*ibid.*, pp. 136f.).

Now just what is this *analogia Trinitatis* which Barth finds so fascinating and so completely satisfying? In this conception of the Word of God in its threefold form as revealed, written, and proclaimed, are we not once more confronted with one of those distractingly attractive intellectual subtleties by which we are tempted to imagine that we can somehow attain to an understanding of the mystery of the Trinity? Do we not here encounter Barth in his favourite rôle of religious philosopher?

## II

Christians to-day need to be reminded forcefully of the absolutely fundamental supremacy of the *Written* Word of God; that is to say, of the Bible as God's ever true and ever present

Word: not as verbiage which at one moment is the Word of God and at another moment is not the Word of God, depending upon the effect produced upon the hearer, or upon the recognition of it by the hearer as the Word of God. He who, because of the dulness through sin of his faculty of perception, does not recognise the Bible as the very Word of God, nor heed its plainly spoken message of warning and hope, will none the less at the day of judgment be without excuse simply because he has refused to receive this message of the Written Word. "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. . . . If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luke xvi. 29, 31). "There is one that accuseth you, even Moses. . . . For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed Me: for he *wrote* of Me. But if ye believe not his *writings*, how shall ye believe My words?" (John v. 45-47). Thus it is the *Written* Word that will accuse. If Scripture is now the Word of God, and now not the Word of God but a mere word of man, according as it is heard by the elect or by the lost, then the actual words *spoken* by Jesus Christ when He was on earth must to one hearer have been the Word of God and to another have been not the Word of God, as for instance in the dispute recorded in John viii. But evidently, whatever the response from different hearers, the word spoken by our Lord was *always* and to *every* hearer the Word of God, not only and solely because He Himself is God, but also and particularly because the words He uttered were words given Him by the Father. "He that rejecteth Me, and receiveth not My words, hath one that judgeth Him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken of Myself; but the Father which sent Me, He gave Me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. . . . Whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto Me, so I speak" (John xii. 48-50). And this spoken Word is now for us the written Word. Never is God's Word powerless, but always powerful to produce faith unto salvation or condemnation unto perdition. This view of the Bible as the eternal, basic, critical Word of God is beyond question not only the view of the great Reformers, but also the distinctive claim of the Bible itself.

We are faced then with the conclusion that *Biblical* theology is the great need of this hour, and of every hour; not religious

philosophy. For us of the present day the revelation of the nature of the Godhead is to be found alone in Scripture; and again for us of the present day all proclamation of the nature of the Godhead is to be founded upon and provable by Scripture. It is true that, before the volume of Scripture was completed, God revealed Himself by other ways than by the Written Word; for example, by visions, by direct speech as in the burning bush and as at Sinai, and by visitations of the Angel of the Lord. But all such revelatory interventions, as they were recorded, contributed to the compilation of the Written Word and would be quite unknown to us to-day apart from the Written Word. It is true moreover that of old prophets and men of God proclaimed their message as God, without the mediation of a Written Word, gave them utterance and as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. But in this case, too, such proclamation by human lips, as it was recorded, contributed towards the compilation of the Written Word and would be quite unknown to us to-day apart from the Written Word. Even Jesus Christ, who is the Living Word of God, would, apart from the Written Word, be unknown to us to-day, for pagan and secular literature has nothing to reveal about Him. We can only hear Him speaking to us to-day as He speaks to our hearts through the pages of His Written Word; and we can only proclaim the Living Word as we proclaim what is revealed to us about Him in the Written Word. How are we to know the perfection of the Person of Christ but by His own deeds and words, and by the marvel of the Virgin Birth, the Transfiguration, the Resurrection, and the Ascension? But these things are only to be learnt as we read what has been written of Him in the Scriptures. How are we to preach Christ as Saviour, as humbled and exalted, and as the great Judge of all men, unless we turn to the Scriptures for light and understanding? To what other source can we turn? Once the Written Word is removed we are in ignorance and darkness, possessing neither revelation from God nor proclamation concerning God. It is by the proclamation of the message of the Scriptures that Almighty God is pleased to grant a revelation of Himself to every believing heart. Thus we assert that the Written Word is the central, fundamental, and supreme source and authority of revelation from God and of proclamation about God. All must be sought there, and in this *all* we include even the *vestigia Trinitatis*.

Hence it is that the seeker after the real *vestigia Trinitatis* must search for and locate them in the Written Word of God. Indeed, he who has eyes to see must descry the true tracks of the Trinity, mysterious and interrupted though they frequently may be, in the pages of the Old Testament, which, when followed up with spiritual discernment, lead unerringly on to the New Testament itself with its fuller disclosure.

If the God of our day is a Triune God, then He must always have been a Triune God; if the doctrine of the Trinity is true for the New Testament, then it must also be true for the Old Testament, and every good Christian in approaching the latter should expect to find a belief in this doctrine not denied, or made difficult, but confirmed. It is an elementary necessity that the nature of the Godhead is from everlasting to everlasting *the same, unchanging, and unchangeable*. Thus the New Testament bears witness to the truth that with God the *Father* there is "no variableness neither shadow of turning" (James i. 17); that God the *Son* is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever" (Heb. xiii. 8); and that God the *Holy Ghost* is "the eternal Spirit" (Heb. ix. 14), who was at work not only in the believers in the Christian Church, but also in the prophets long before Christ appeared (cf. 1 Pet. i. 11, 2 Pet. i. 21). The doctrine of the Triune God, then, was not a doctrine newly evolved and exhibited to man in the early days of the Christian era; it is a doctrine which has been true at all times and which was revealed in some measure to man from the very beginning of creation. God has never left man at any period in human history in ignorance of His true nature. The knowledge of the plurality as well as of the unity of the true God was communicated to mankind from the commencement of things, though it was not fully to be apprehended by the human heart until God's Living Word was heard in the Person of Jesus Christ and God's Holy Spirit was sent in fulness on the day of Pentecost.

I affirm that this knowledge of the nature of the true God was *revealed* and *communicated* to man because it is by no means possible that man, as is supposed by some to-day, arrived at this cognition of the Deity as the result of his own independent thought and philosophy. It is highly absurd to imagine that the finite creature could come at a correct and adequate comprehension of his Infinite Creator. That the puny and unstable

human intellect should have achieved so great and so obviously impossible an end is a fancy not for a moment to be entertained by any reasonable man. Nor is it to be credited, as some would teach us, that originally man worshipped or felt out after a God who was unknown to him. When St. Paul visited Athens he found it to be a city “*wholly given over to idolatry*” in whose pantheon a shrine was devoted to the worship of the *Unknown God*. To adore an unknown deity is soon to invest such a deity with erroneous and anthropomorphic, or even bestial, ideas of his nature, so that the worship of that which is unknown is not to be distinguished from the worship of that which is false, and both are to be classified under the single heading of idolatry. It could never have been the design of God to allow men in the early stages of human history to flounder about in ignorant and pitiable idolatry without any known and commanded Object of Faith. That the Creator cannot be charged with any such cruel improvidence is made plain by the Written Word itself. In dealing with this very subject of crassly ignorant idolatry, the Holy Ghost speaking through Isaiah says: “To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto Him? The workman melteth a graven image, and the goldsmith spreadeth it over with gold, and casteth silver chains. He that is so impoverished that he hath no oblation chooseth a tree that will not rot: he seeketh unto him a cunning workman to prepare a graven image, that shall not be moved. Have ye not *known*? have ye not *heard*? hath it not been *told* you *from the beginning*? have ye not understood *from the foundations of the earth*? . . . the EVERLASTING GOD, the LORD, the CREATOR of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary; there is no searching of His understanding” (Isa. xl. 18–28). Zacharias, “filled with the Holy Ghost”, blessed the Lord God of Israel, who “spake by the mouth of His holy prophets *which have been since the world began*” (Luke i. 67, 70). Peter employs terms similar to these when speaking under the full impulse of the same Spirit (Acts iii. 21). But, lest anyone should pretend to find cause for cavil even in such clear Scriptures as these, we are expressly told that *by faith* Abel obtained witness that he was *righteous* (Heb. xi. 3). In other words, he was, like Abraham in a subsequent day, and like all true Christians, *justified by faith* (Gen. xv. 6, Rom. iv. 3, v. 1). But Abel was the son of Adam, the first man, and of Eve, the first woman,

and his faith was manifested while his parents were yet alive (cf. Gen. iv. 2, 25), that is, at the very commencement of man's history. Thus it is abundantly evident that *ab initio* there was *faith* which was pleasing to God, which can and must only be faith *in* God, which again can and must only be faith in the one true God who had *revealed* and *made known* Himself and His real nature to the human heart.

In the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans Paul demonstrates with great clarity and force how men from the very beginning have had no excuse for ignorance of the true nature of God. All ungodliness and unrighteousness of men commences with the holding down (*κατέχευ*) of the *truth* (v. 18), and *not*, as many have imagined, from the unfortunate circumstance that originally man was left to grope in ignorance and darkness of soul after the truth, of which as yet he had no knowledge. That is to say, all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men is consequent upon a wilful, envious and rebellious turning of the back on the truth manifested to them by a merciful God. "That which is knowable about God (*τὸ γνωστόν τοῦ θεοῦ*) is manifest (*φανερὸν*) amongst them; for God gave them a manifestation (*ἐφανερώσεν*). For the unseen things of Him *from the creation of the world are clearly seen*, being understood by the things that are made, namely His eternal power and Godhead; with the result that they are without excuse, because that, when they *knew* God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their speculations (*διαλογισμοί*) and their foolish heart was darkened" (vv. 19-21). Here we cannot escape the conclusion that, in the first place, they had a knowledge of God, they had a reliable light by which to walk, but that the wanton suppression and corruption of this knowledge, coeval as it was with the creation of the world, resulted in darkness of heart, gross idolatry, and unmentionable vice. There we have the true sequence: from knowledge to ignorance, from light to darkness, from life to death.

### III

As, then, we turn to the very first chapter of the Bible, describing the creation of our present world, and embodying a record of the earliest of all written accounts, we should not be surprised to find that indications of the Trinitarian idea are

by no means lacking. For instance, we read that "in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. i. 1). But the word for "God" is *Elohim* (אלהים), a noun plural in form; while its verb "created" (ברא) is in the singular number. Surely, in spite of quibbles to the contrary, this plural noun suggests some sort of plurality in the Godhead, and the singular verb points to the unity and indivisibility of that same Godhead. This induction is further confirmed when we study the twenty-sixth verse, where we read: "And God (plural) said (singular), Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness." Now I am aware that some commentators follow Philo in contending that by this first person plural we are to understand that God was addressing and associating with Himself the angels or heavenly creatures. But, apart from the error of connecting mere creatures with so essentially godlike an act as creation, nowhere does Scripture offer us any possible excuse for thinking that man was created in the angelic likeness and not solely after the image of God. Indeed, for those who are not bent upon snatching isolated fragments out of their contexts, the matter is clinched in the very next verse, which tells us that "God created man in *His own* image" (cf. Gen. v. 1, ix. 6, 1 Cor. xi. 7, James iii. 9). Hence in these two contiguous verses, where the word "image" is qualified by both a plural and a singular pronoun, the idea of *plurality* side by side with *unity* is very effectively set forth, and no attempt at rationalisation can escape the implication of such evidence. In view of the above, it is far more satisfactory, and far truer to the revelation which God has vouchsafed of Himself, to understand that, when God says, "Let *us* make", we are granted a glimpse of the ever blessed Trinity communing over the eternal purposes of Creation. And so the most scholarly and the most saintly of the ancient fathers interpret it.

Furthermore, that the very title *Elohim* is meant to convey the thought of a plurality of Persons in the one Essence of the Godhead, is not to be disputed. It is, in fact, by no means improbable that the apostate families of mankind must originally in the blindness of their arrogance have corrupted the true and revealed import of this divinely communicated Name of the One God, and wickedly have degraded it into a pretext for the licentious polytheistic cults into which they so wantonly lapsed. The fact that the plural "*Elohim*" was almost invariably used with a singular verb should have served to deter them from

such a falling away from the truth. The other principal title of God in the Old Testament is "Jehovah" (יהוה), a singular noun derived from the verb "to be", indicating the eternal and incommunicable *Essence* of the Godhead, which is past all human comprehension. In this respect it is noteworthy that in no single place is this Name qualified by an adjective or a pronoun, thereby emphasising the unapproachable and all-sufficient subsistence of God, which it is vain for the intellect of man even to attempt to describe. This title stresses the indivisible oneness of the Godhead. Were the Names "Elohim" and "Jehovah" identical or similar in connotation, the admonition in Deuteronomy vi. 4 would be inexpedient and senseless. But it was because of the idolatry and polytheism of the surrounding peoples that it became imperative for the Israelites to be warned that "*Jehovah our Elohim is ONE Jehovah*" (יהוה אלהינו יהוה אחד). Hence God's self-revealed and self-revealing titles teach the great mystery that there is a plurality in the unity of the Divine Essence.

An interesting *vestigium* is found in the account of the building of the Tower of Babel as recorded in the eleventh chapter of Genesis. "And Jehovah said, . . . Go ye to, let us go down, and let us confound. . . ." (vv. 6, 7). The Hebrew הִכָּה, signifying "go ye to" or "come ye" (LXX δεῦτε; Vulgate, *venite*) must necessarily have been addressed by someone to at least two others. To whom then was this invitation spoken? Many commentators say, to the angels or seraphim of heaven. But this cannot be, for God never requests or orders the angels to act in union with Himself. He only *sends* them as His messengers (for that is the precise meaning of the term "angel") "that do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word". They are "ministers of His that do His pleasure" (Ps. ciii. 20, 21). It is reasonable to conclude that the words, "Go ye to, let us go down, and let us confound . . .", are meant to indicate the secret deliberations of the blessed Holy Trinity; just as in the third verse we are told that men said to one another, that is to their *equals* or *fellow-men*, "Go ye to, let us make . . . and let us burn. . . ."

Not a few expositors have cited the narrative in Genesis xviii as an instance of the revelation of the Trinity in the Old Testament. "Jehovah," we read, "appeared unto Abraham . . .; and he lift up his eyes and looked, and lo, *three* men stood by

him, etc. . . ." Now at first sight it would seem that Abraham is spoken of as entertaining *three* persons at one moment, and *one* person at the next. The changes are rung upon the singular and plural numbers when reference is made to Abraham's guests, so that the *three* and the *one* appear to be interchangeable. If this is really the case we have here the most remarkable *vestigium Trinitatis* in the whole of the Old Testament, for we have then an actual instance in the sacred record of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, appearing visibly to a human creature. But the following considerations should incline us to regard the exegesis just defined as at least doubtful.

Firstly, we do not favour the idea that all three Persons of the Godhead have been seen by any man at one time or separately at different times. St. Basil is undoubtedly correct when he remarks, "It is evident that wherever the same Person is entitled Angel and God, the Only-begotten Son of God is manifested" (*Adv. Eun.* ii. 18). And the learned Jonathan Edwards speaks to the same effect in his *History of Redemption*, where he says:

"When we read in sacred history what God did, from time to time, towards his church and people, and how he revealed himself to them, we are to understand it especially of the second person of the Trinity. When we read of God appearing after the fall, in some visible form or outward symbol of his presence, we are ordinarily, if not universally, to understand it of the second person of the Trinity."

Thus we are to understand every theophany of the Old Testament as a visitation of Christ, "who is the image of the invisible God" (Col. i. 15), and never as an immediate manifestation of the Father or of the Holy Spirit. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him" (John i. 18).

Secondly, when Abraham's guests are described as three *men*, we should be guilty of entertaining gravely erroneous notions were we to imagine that God the Father and God the Holy Spirit have ever assumed a human form, let alone been gazed upon by man in that guise. There is no passage in Scripture to support such a view. It is Christ alone who has ever appeared to man "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom. viii. 3). The "*man*" who, as Captain of the host of the Lord, stood over against Joshua, whom Joshua worshipped, and to stand in whose presence was to stand on holy ground, was

none other than Christ. The same it was who sat under the oak in Ophrah and commissioned Gideon as a saviour of Israel. The "*man of God*" who appeared to Manoah, and of whom Manoah could say, "We have seen *God*", was once more the Second Person of the Trinity. Even Nebuchadnezzar, for all his heathen darkness, saw this same Person walking in the midst of the furnace with the three Israelites whom he had cast in; so that in his amazement he could not help exclaiming: "Lo, I see four *men* loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God" (Dan. iii. 25). Just as the Son is "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world", so He has *ever* been the *One Mediator* between God and men (1 Tim. ii. 5), and we must regard every theophany of the Old Testament as a direct act of mediation performed by Christ Himself.

Thirdly, a careful reading of the narrative under discussion seems to suggest that the three men who appeared to Abraham were Christ and two angels, and that when Abraham used the title "My Lord", he was addressing the One who was plainly the Leader of the three, namely the Second Person of the Trinity. One cannot help recalling another occasion when the Son of God was seen in the company of two of His creatures, that is on the mount of transfiguration, where Moses and Elijah shared the glory of His presence. They, of course, were men, and not angels; but it is also a common custom for angels to be spoken of as men. As examples of this it is sufficient to refer to the "two angels" in white, mentioned in John xx. 12, who are described as "two men" in shining garments by Luke (xxiv. 4); and to the "two men" in white apparel who stood by the Apostles at the time of our Lord's ascension into heaven (Acts i. 10). When we read (Gen. xviii. 22) that "*the men* turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before Jehovah", it would appear to mean that the two angels departed from the place, while Christ remained with Abraham and listened to his supplications on behalf of the city of Sodom. That this is so is borne out by the opening statement of the next chapter which informs us that "the *two* angels came to Sodom at even". Here, besides limiting the number of the messengers to two, the sacred history designates them more distinctly by the use of the definite article in the original Hebrew (המלאכים). Moreover, a little

further down they explain to Lot that Jehovah had *sent* them to destroy the city (xix. 13).

For these reasons then it seems preferable not to regard this passage as a *vestigium Trinitatis*, but rather as a manifestation of Christ in the company of two angels.

We may, however, discern an example in the blessing pronounced by Jacob upon the sons of Joseph (Gen. xlviii. 15, 16). "And he blessed Joseph and said: (1) The Elohim before whose face my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, (2) the Elohim who fed me all my life long unto this day, (3) the Angel who redeemed me from all evil,—bless the lads." It is noteworthy that, despite the triple subject (including a repetition of the plural noun *Elohim*), the verb "bless" is singular in number: בָּרַךְ. The Angel and God are invoked conjointly, and therefore are to be regarded as on an equality, and for that reason, and also because of the use of a singular verb, they are to be identified with each other. This conclusion is corroborated in Hosea xii. 3-5, where we are informed that Jacob "by his strength had power with *God* yea, he had power over the *Angel*, . . . even *Jehovah Elohim of Hosts*". That the Angel who redeemed Jacob from all evil is to be recognised as none other than Christ is not to be doubted; for, as we have previously seen, any such manifestation of God was always in and through the Second Person of the Trinity, who is the Redeemer from the foundation of the world. This threefold blessing may be ascribed then as follows: (1) To God the Father, before whose face Abraham and Isaac walked; (2) to God the Holy Spirit, the Giver and Sustainer of life; (3) to God the Son, the Redeemer, sent (מַלְאָךְ, ἄγγελος) from heaven. And the singular number of the verb indicates that a *unity*, that is to say a *trinity*, is here spoken of. That Jacob should have pronounced these words and Moses have recorded them, and the fact that subsequent generations have left them unaltered, is, to say the least, a strong indication that in early times there was a definite perception of the truth that in the essence of the Godhead there is to be distinguished a plurality which is yet contained in an indivisible unity. And this knowledge could never have been held had it not originally been revealed to man by God Himself.

Another noticeable instance is to be observed in the so-called Aaronic blessing (Num. vi. 24-26): "The Lord bless thee and keep thee; the Lord make His face shine upon thee,

and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." Here again it is evident that this benediction is triple in form. (1) "Jehovah bless thee and keep thee":—We may connect this first portion with God the Father, for among the Patriarchs it was the father's special prerogative to bless his children, and also, of course, to keep and protect them. (2) "Jehovah make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee":—This is referable to God the Son, who is "the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John i. 9). Moreover, "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give *the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*" (2 Cor. iv. 6). And who could more appropriately be gracious unto us than our Lord Jesus Christ, who is Himself the source of all grace (2 Cor. xiii. 14)? (3) "Jehovah lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace": This last section may fittingly be applied to God the Holy Ghost, for it is solely through His operation that the human heart can enjoy peace, which is one of the precious and delectable fruits of the Spirit (Gal. v. 22). Yet, though this is a threefold benediction, it is only *one* God that blesses, as is shown by the very next verse: "They shall put *My Name* upon the children of Israel; and *I* will bless them."

The last words of David, "the sweet psalmist of Israel", are introduced by a threefold statement which indicates that he had some understanding of the triune nature of the Godhead: "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His word was in my tongue: the God of Israel said; the Rock of Israel spake to me . . ." (2 Sam. xxiii. 1-3). "The Spirit of the Lord" clearly denotes the Third Person of the Trinity. "The Rock of Israel" is to be identified with the Second Person of the Trinity, for Paul expressly states that "that Rock was Christ" (1 Cor. x. 4). And by "the God of Israel" the First Person of the Trinity is here to be understood. Though these three spoke, yet they spoke with but *one* voice. The *three* spoke as *one*, for they are *three in one*.

The only other *vestigium Trinitatis* to which I wish to draw attention is found in that wellknown passage where Isaiah describes his vision of the glory of the Lord (Isa. vi). It was not the Trinity he saw, as some have thought, but King Christ "sitting on a throne, high and lifted up" (cf. John xii. 41).

Similar visions were granted to the prophet Micaiah (1 Kings xxii. 19 = 2 Chron. xviii. 18) and to John at Patmos (Rev. iv. 2). The first trace of the Triune God in this account is to be noticed in the third verse, where we are told that the seraphim cry to one another, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory". The triple utterance of the word "holy" may be taken to denote that they are worshipping the thrice holy One; that is, in effect they are saying, "Holy is the Father; Holy is the Son; Holy is the Spirit". However, the suggestion that in the essence of the Godhead there is unity in plurality, and plurality in unity, is unmistakably conveyed in the ensuing challenge issued by the voice of Jehovah: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" These were the *ipsissima verba* heard by the prophet, and, inasmuch as subsequent preservers of the sacred text remarked no grammatical inconsistency in this place, it is just to conclude that Almighty God by no means withheld from the ancients the light of the doctrine of the eternal Trinity.

I am aware that there are other passages that might be brought forward, but the above instances are sufficient to show that in the pages of the Old Testament we are to seek and find the true *vestigia Trinitatis*. There is also, of course, a great number of places where Christ is referred to as the Angel of the Lord, and equally many where allusion is plainly made to the Holy Spirit. These we may perhaps regard as partial *vestigia*, which play a very real part in the cumulative evidence of the whole. In fine, the Christian who peruses the writings of the Old Testament studiously and with understanding will discover abundant proof to convince him that the God of the pre-Christian era is in no way other than the eternal, unchanging, Triune God of the New Testament revelation.

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