

The Relation of the Spirit to the Trinity

by G. Campbell Morgan

The Trinity is a declared fact of Holy Scripture, referring to the one Godhead in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father through the mediation of the Son.

Scripture: Genesis 1:26, Numbers 6:24-26, Isaiah 6:3, Matthew 28:19, John 1:3, John 3:34, John 14:26, John 15:26, 1 Corinthians 2:10-12, 1 John 5:7

Topics: "The Holy Spirit", "The Trinity"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan explores the profound mystery of the Trinity, emphasizing that while the doctrine is a declared fact in Scripture, it remains beyond human comprehension. He discusses various analogies that attempt to illustrate the Trinity but ultimately concludes that they fall short of capturing its essence. Morgan highlights the roles of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in creation and revelation, asserting that the Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity, proceeding from the Father and revealing the divine consciousness. He stresses that the relationship among the Trinity is a mystery that cannot be fully explained but is essential for understanding God's nature and work in the world.

Transcript

THE doctrine of the Trinity is one of the declared facts of Holy Scripture of which no perfect explanation is possible to minds that are finite. The idea of one Essence subsisting after a threefold manner, and in a Trinity of relationships, finds nothing in the phenomena of nature upon which it can fasten as a sufficient symbol. There have been many attempts to give the mind of man an understanding of this mystery by some such symbol. The mystics attempted, by analogy, to reconcile the doctrine to human reason. They made use of such figures as those of the light, the radiance, and the heat of the sun; the fountain, the flux, and the stream of the river; the root, the stem, and the flower of the plant; the intellect, the will, and the feeling of man; or, perhaps most familiar of all, the human being, consisting of spirit, soul, and body. They declared that in all these things, and indeed throughout nature, there is a perpetual reproduction of that which is the essence of the Divine--Trinity in Unity.

All these illustrations suggest a Trinitarian possibility; but if employed as final symbols, they only serve to mystify. They are insufficient, and differ from the declared facts so radically, that the impression they create, as to the great underlying fact of Divinity--One in Three and Three in One--is vague and evanescent. As in the case of the personality of the Spirit, so here; the things which are evident are faint and incomplete suggestions of the facts concerning the Infinite. The Scriptures contain a progressive

revelation of the doctrine; but when the last word has been said, there is no attempt made to explain the mystery. All that they give is a declaration of the fact, without attempting to give that which would be incomprehensible, a definition or explanation that is final.

The first hint of plurality in the unity of the Godhead is found in the words: And God said, Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness. To claim that as a definite and final statement of the doctrine of Trinity in Unity would be false. It is the privilege of those who live in the light of the New Testament to view the Old Testament therein. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that hath been made. This refers to the work of the Word, the eternal Son, in creation. It was by His intermeditation that the worlds were formed in the beginning.

Thus the Bible story of creation reflects the presence of the three Persons in the Trinity,--the Father, as original Source; the Son, as Intermediary; the Spirit, as the Medium through which creation came into being.

The truth is still further developed in the words: So shall they put My name upon the children of Israel. The emphasis should be laid upon the word so,--SO shall they put My name upon the children of Israel. The method indicated is to be found in the three preceding verses.

The Lord bless thee, and keep thee:

The Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee:

The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

This is the trinity of benediction in unity, My name in threefold repetition. It is not probable that the priest of the old dispensation, in pronouncing that benediction, had a clear understanding of the truth of the Trinity in Unity, but a hint was enshrined therein which prepared the way for future development. Thus in the priestly benediction of Numbers, there is an advance upon the suggestion of Genesis.

The messages of the prophets contain suggestions on the subject: In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. Around Him stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts."

Isaiah was permitted to have a vision of the King, high and lifted up. He heard the doxology of the hidden place, the cherubim and seraphim chanting the praise of the Eternal, and they sang Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts, a threefold ascription of praise to the one Person.

In this prophecy also is to be found perhaps the most clear statement of the doctrine of the Trinity that the Old Testament contains: Come ye near unto Me, hear ye this; from the beginning I have not spoken in secret; from the time that it was, there am I: and now the Lord God hath sent Me, and His Spirit. There is an important alteration in this passage from the Authorized Version, which reads: The Lord God, and His Spirit, hath sent Me. The Me here is the coming One of Whom the prophets wrote and spoke--the great Deliverer, the Messiah, Jesus. The Authorized Version makes it appear as though Christ was sent by God and the Spirit; but in the Scriptures He is never so spoken of. This change in the Revised Version is of the utmost importance; for it contains a prophecy of the coming of Christ and the dawning of the dispensation of the Spirit. God hath sent Me, and His Spirit. Here the Trinity is distinctly revealed, not as a doctrine, but incidentally in the midst of prophecy. All that the New Testament unfolds in its beauty is suggested in this

prophecy, uttered centuries before the coming of the Messiah--God sending Son and Spirit.

The New Testament takes up the suggestion of the Old, making it clear and plain: And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway from the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him; and lo, a voice out of the heavens, saying, This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased. The voice of the Father is heard from the heavens, announcing His pleasure in the Son, while the anointing Spirit descends upon Him. This is a manifestation of the one God in His threefold personality. Thus, at the outset of Christ's public ministry, the truth of the Trinity was declared by a solemn manifestation, though the men around did not then comprehend the deep significance of the event.

The Paschal discourses contain the Lord's full teaching on the subject of the Spirit. This is of sufficient importance to demand special attention, and a subsequent chapter will be devoted to it.

One more reference claims attention in this section. The Master having finished His work on Calvary; the Resurrection being accomplished; and the Ascension imminent; He gave to His disciples the commission under which they were to serve. In connection with this, He committed to them the great baptismal formula, which contains the most simple and concise statement of the Trinity that is to be found in the whole of Scripture: Baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The phrase of the, in each case clearly marks the separation of personality, but the singular number of the name, by which these are prefaced, marks the unity of the Godhead. That baptismal formula is the consummation of all previous suggestion, and the standard of all subsequent teaching concerning the Trinity.

The declarations of Scripture, then, may be summarized thus:--In one essential Godhead there coexist three Persons, consubstantial, coequal, and coeternal. This mystery cannot be explained nor defined, because it is beyond the grasp of the finite; and no explanation is attempted in the inspired Book.

Accepting the doctrine of the Trinity, it is now competent most reverently to enquire what Scripture teaches concerning the relation of the Holy Spirit to the Trinity.

The Holy Spirit is always spoken of as the third Person in the Trinity.

In the historical revelation the last personality revealed is that of the Spirit. That of the Father was the supreme point in the creation and history of the Jewish people: The Lord our God is one Lord. Then there came the revelation of the Son; and lastly, as the consummation of His mission, came the revelation of the personality of the Spirit.

Again, in the actual facts of the awe-inspiring mystery of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is not first.

It is distinctly stated that the Spirit is sent; and Christ declared that the Spirit proceedeth from the Father. This order can never be reversed. The Father cannot be spoken of as being sent of the Spirit, neither can He be said to proceed from the Spirit; therefore, in a sense hard to understand, but distinctly announced, the Holy Spirit cannot be the first Person in this mystery of the Trinity.

Nor can He be the second Person therein. The Son is spoken of as sending the Spirit from the Father, and as Himself sending the Spirit. Within the realm of Divinity the Son is never said to be sent by the Spirit. It is said of Jesus that the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness; but that was in His representative capacity as a Man. In His Divinity He is sent by the Father, for the accomplishment of the Father's work; but He is never

spoken of as being sent by the Spirit. Consequently, the Spirit, sent by the Son is the third Person within the Trinity, in the order in which these Persons move in the mighty majesty of their wondrous activities. The great creeds of the Church have caught up the idea of the Spirit proceeding from the Father and from the Son. While there is no direct and positive statement of the kind, still the very argument of the Lord's own teaching, as recorded in the Gospel of John, coincides with that expression of the truth.

The term third must be used with most careful limitations. As used with reference to the Persons in the Godhead, it does not imply inferiority. Once in the writings of Paul he reverses the order, and names the Spirit first: One Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. Upon another occasion he changes the order again, and places the Spirit in the second place: Now I beseech you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me. The word third is not used in the sense of inferiority. Perhaps that fact will most surely be understood by remembering that the term third has here no reference to time. The time element must be eliminated from all consideration of Divine things. It is very difficult to do this. Speaking of the Father, and of the Spirit proceeding from the Father, unconsciously, but none the less certainly, the time element enters into the conception. It may be argued that there can be no procession save that which has a beginning. If that be true, neither can there be a Source from which procession is made, which has no beginning. When dealing with the things of God, time is not; it finds no place in the boundless Being of the Eternal. The procession of the Spirit from the Father is as eternal as is the Father from Whom the Spirit proceeds.

The relation of the Spirit to the Father is declared in the words: The Spirit proceedeth from the Father. He is the gift and outmoving of the Divine Essence, the Eternal Spirit. This defies analysis. It is a truth declared, which remains an impenetrable mystery. Men have no right to make any attempt to discover that which is not revealed. It is the simple declaration of the Word of God, that the Spirit proceedeth from the Father; and there the matter must be left.

The relation of the Spirit to the Son is indicated in the words of Jesus in which He declared that the Son receives from the Father, and the Spirit therefore proceedeth through the Son. Professor Swete, in a paper read before the Church Congress several years ago, in well-chosen words stated, with as much clearness as is possible, the great mystery of the Spirit's relationship to the Son. These are his words: The Son is thus the Intermediary of the self-communication of God. His -mediation in creation and in grace rests ultimately on His mediation in the mystery of the Holy Trinity. The mediation in creation, and the mediation in redemption are based upon the fact, that Scripture declares, that in an inscrutable manner, in a way that defies definition, the Son is intermediary between Father and Spirit, in that great and sublime and magnificent mystery of the Trinity itself.

Here, again, the fact of limitation of language must be borne in mind. These statements refer to eternal attitudes, and consequently they are dateless.

With great reverence and solemnity the question of the function of the Holy Spirit within the Trinity may now be considered.

No such consideration would be possible or proper if it were not based upon the fact that a statement is made with regard thereto in Scripture: For who among men knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, 'which is in him? This is the apostle's analogy. There immediately follows the statement of a truth of the utmost importance: Even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God. These words

clearly reveal the fact within the mystery of the Trinity--the Spirit is the seat of the Divine consciousness. The eternal Spirit knows the things of the eternal Godhead: The Spirit searcheth . . . the deep things of God.

That statement leads to the inner heart of this great mystery; and from it a most important deduction is drawn. Seeing that the Spirit of God is the seat of Divine consciousness, He is also the Spirit of revelation. As it is the Spirit of God Who knows the things of God, it must of necessity be the Spirit Who unveils and reveals those things, as much as is necessary and possible, to those outside the marvellous and mysterious circle of the Deity. In that great fact, beyond perfect comprehension, lies the secret of the inspiration of Scripture, and of the presence and work of the Spirit in the Church and in the world.

If any person should accept this attempt to examine one of the greatest mysteries of our most holy religion, feeling that now all is clear, then the attempt has sadly and awfully failed. This subject must be left where God has left it--a revealed mystery, not the revelation of a mystery. That is to say, revelation has declared a mystery; revelation has not given the explanation of that mystery. The mind of man could never understand, even if the most simple language were used, the Trinity in the Unity of the Godhead, or the relation of the Persons in the Godhead to each other. But, so far as it is necessary and possible for man to see it, things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man . . . unto us God revealed them through the Spirit.

The statement may thus be made in brief words. There is one God. There are three Persons within the Unity. The Holy Spirit is third in position, for ever proceeding from the Father, through the mediation of the Son. That Holy Spirit is the Consciousness of God, and therefore the Revealer of God.

While these things are too high and too wonderful for perfect exposition, yet, so far as is necessary for redemption and life and final perfecting, God has allowed the light of the glory of the inner facts of His own Being to fall upon the human mind.

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