

The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity

by Olin Alfred Curtis

The doctrine of the Trinity is that there is one God in three historical manifestations: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, who express three inner distinctions in the Godhead.

Scripture: Matthew 28:19, John 14:9, John 17:4, Philippians 2:5, 1 John 5:7

Topics: "Trinity Doctrine", "Godhead Unity"

Description

Olin Alfred Curtis preaches on the essential doctrine of the Trinity, rejecting various heretical views and emphasizing the three distinct Persons in the Godhead. He highlights the eternal nature of the distinctions within the Trinity, the necessity of these distinctions for the divine life, and the eternal personal manifestations of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Curtis delves into the problem of harmonizing the unity of God with the Christian concept of redemption, emphasizing the importance of not dividing the substance or confusing the persons within the Trinity.

Transcript

The Doctrine in Essential Statement

The Aim. The aim here is to express the doctrine of the Trinity in bare essentiality. How much is essential to any real Trinitarianism?

Rejected Views. First, let us approach the case negatively. All Trinitarians reject the following views:

1. The Humanitarian view that the Trinity is God the Father, the man Jesus Christ, and a divine influence called the Spirit of God. There are a number of phases of this view, but in every phase Christ is nothing other than a man.
2. The Arian view that the Trinity is God the Father, Christ a highly exalted creature, and the Holy Spirit a less exalted creature. There are variations also of this view, but they have no significance in this connection.
3. The Modalistic view (Sabellian) that there is one God and three successive and peculiar manifestations of him in history. Or, one person with three aspects, modes, relations toward the world.
4. The Swedenborgian view that the Trinity is one God with soul (the Father), body (the Son), and operation (the Holy Spirit).

5. The Tritheistic view that the Trinity consists of three divine individuals. All these five views are regarded as heresy by every man who has the right to call himself a Trinitarian at all.

Essential Points of Belief.

1. There is only one God.

2. Of this one God there are three historical manifestations, namely, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

But these manifestations are not "mere masks." As Dr. Dorner says, "A trinity of Revelation is a misrepresentation if there is not behind it a trinity of Reality.' Therefore,

3. These three historical manifestations express three inner distinctions in the Godhead. "The faces are turned not merely outward toward the world, but inward toward himself, so that they behold themselves in mutual reflection."

4. These distinctions are not only internal, they are so fundamental as to be necessary to the ongoing of the divine life.

5. As these distinctions are thus fundamental, they are eternal. God did not develop into them. They always have been and always must be essential to his existence.

6. These three historical manifestations -- the Father; the Son, and the Holy Ghost -expressing three inner, fundamental, and eternal distinctions in the Godhead, are in the Scriptures treated as personal; and so we name them Persons.

Ways of Meeting the Trinitarian Problem

The Problem. The problem of the Trinity does not come merely from an effort to interpret the command of baptism and other passages of Scripture, but mainly from a larger effort to harmonize with the unity of God the Christian conception of redemption as involving the Father who gave his only -- begotten Son, the absolute deity of Jesus Christ, and the personality of the Holy Spirit. On the one side we must hold fast to monotheism, to the rigid conception of one God, and yet, on the other side, we must protect the three personal manifestations, "the three persons out in history." To bring up the old test, the Trinitarian problem is, "Not to divide the substance and not to confuse the persons."

Ways of Meeting the Problem.

1. The most popular way of meeting this problem is not to meet it at all, but to declare the reality beyond human apprehension. Of the many agnostic statements, I will give only one. Dr. W. L. Alexander says: "What I gather from it [the Bible] is, that there are three manifestations of God in relation to the created universe and the work of human redemption, described severally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and that these three manifestations of God correspond to distinctions in the Godhead for which we have no names, and of the nature of which nothing has been revealed to us; of which, in fact, beyond the simple fact of their existence, we know nothing. What is very plainly made known to us is the economical distinction between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - - a distinction that may be stated in the most intelligible form, and made clear by a reference to the works ascribed in Scripture to these three respectively; and to this we are led to believe that a distinction of some sort in the divine nature corresponds, but of what sort we do not

know and therefore do not pretend to say. This way of stating the doctrine has the advantage of avoiding modalism on the one hand by asserting a real distinction in the divine nature, while on the other it keeps clear of the unintelligible and self-contradictory statements of the Catholic doctrine by simply asserting the fact of a distinction in the divine nature without pronouncing upon the kind of distinction as personal or capable of being described by any term, direct or analogical, in use among men; and by confining the distinction expressed by the words Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to the economical distinctions in the divine manifestations in relation to creation and redemption."

2. Another way of trying to meet the problem is to consider these inner distinctions as less than personal. Whatever the manifestations out in history may be, the distinctions are not actual persons as they exist in the life of the Godhead. For example, to Nitzsch they are ineffable fundamental powers; and to Dorner they are something between an attribute and egoity ("zwischen Eigenschaften und Ichheit oder Pers nlichkeit," ch. Glaubenslehre, i, 368).

3. The most speculative view is a theological dripping out of the German philosophy, a view which is quite often found in American theology. It is stated in several slightly different ways, but essentially amounts to this: In the full self-consciousness of God there are three movements, each movement yielding an eternal reality in being. God the Infinite Person makes himself (Thesis) the object of his own thought (Antithesis), and then identifies subject and object (Synthesis). The Thesis is the Father; the Antithesis is the Son; and the Synthesis is the Holy Spirit.

4. In this, the last view to be mentioned, the divine persons are considered real eternal persons, each one capable of self-consciousness and self-decision, and yet all so bound together as not to be separate individual Gods. In Jonathan Edwards's Observations Concerning the Scripture Economy of the Trinity and Covenant of Redemption we find such a remark as this: "And that there was a consultation among the three Persons about it, as much, doubtless, as about the creation of man (for the work of redemption is a work wherein the distinct concern of each Person is infinitely greater than in the work of creation), and so, that there was a joint agreement of all; but not properly a covenant between them." How strange this sounds over against all the recent timidities of theological utterance on the Trinity! It almost seems as if Athanasius had spoken again!

A Study of Our Lord's Obedience

1. Our Saviour's bearing is ever that of obedience to his Father.

This bearing appears even in Christ's boyhood. "How is it that ye sought me? knew ye not that I must be in my Father's house?" (Saint Luke 2.49.) Again: "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me" (Saint John 4. 34). And yet again, in the Garden: "And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; remove this cup from me: howbeit not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Saint Mark 14.36).

This bearing of our Lord involves a discrimination in his consciousness between himself as a person and his Father as a contemporaneous person; and then a distinct self-decision of obedience toward his Father. Of course, there can be obedience in the sense of doing one's duty under the moral ideal in conscience. But you cannot study the life of Jesus Christ, and conclude that by his Father he meant merely a moral ideal in conscience; for with him the Father had many associations, not precisely moral, but intensely personal.

The significance of our Lord's obedience, then, should in the very nature of the case exclude every form of modalism. Whatever we may come to in our view of the Trinity, that unbiblical idea, found here and there even now in disguised forms, that the Trinity is one God with three successive and exclusive historic attitudes must be cast out of the church, not only in the name of Christian doctrine, but also in the name of sane biblical scholarship. There could be no obedience of our Lord toward his Father, if that Father were a special historic attitude of God no longer in existence. To fairly interpret the Scripture, the Father and Son can only be regarded as real persons, now over against each other, one claiming obedience and the other yielding obedience.

2. The background of our Lord's obedience, as the entire matter is held in his own self-consciousness, is a preexistent personal state which he had with his Father. In Saint John's gospel (17.4, 5) we read: "I glorified thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which thou hast given me to do. And now, Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (compare Saint John 6.62 and 8.58).

Here our Lord is thinking of his finished work of obedience, and he prays that he may again experience the glorious estate which he had given up in carrying out his Father's command. The earthly obedience is to him but a feature of the whole scheme of obedience that first required the giving up of the life in eternal glory. We have in this passage no mere longing for rest, no mere desire such as the saint has "to go home to God"; the scene is too sharply cut to be explained in such a manner; there is every indication of actual personal remembrance.

I am loath to grant the time and space, but there is sure to be a legitimate expectation at this point that some serious reference will be made to Beyschlag's view of our Lord's preexistence. According to Beyschlag, our Saviour's preexistence was not personal, but merely ideal. Jesus, in his own self-consciousness, was but the ideal Son of man come down from heaven. "Jesus thinks of himself as preexistent, not because he knew himself to be a second God, and remembered a former life in heaven, but because he recognized himself in Daniel's image (Dan. 7.13) as the bearer of the kingdom of heaven, and because this Son of man as well as the kingdom which he brings to earth must spring from heaven." This is the ordinary way in which our Saviour regarded his preexistence, but now we come to the extraordinary way. The ideal taken from the Old Testament is, in moments of spiritual exaltation, transformed into seeming personal remembrance! "Especially in the tense final period of his life, in excited moments and conflicts ... and, above all, in the frame of mind of the intercessory prayer, where he is raised above the world and time, it appears quite credible that such a consciousness of eternal existence should at times flash up in him like a mental vision."

In plain terms, this view of Beyschlag means that Jesus Christ could and did delude himself into seeming to remember that he had lived before the world was created and verily shared the glory of the Eternal God! And a man -- of that kind -- actually founded the Christian faith, and gained the following of men like Saint Paul! And now undoubted Christian scholarship finds it easier, finds it more rational, to believe that than to believe that our Lord was God, and that he did share the glory of his Father before the ages began! Surely there are wonders in psychology as well as wonders in grace!

But my main objection to Beyschlag's view is not that it is rationalism, and rationalism almost as irrational as that of Paulus, but that it destroys the peculiar ethical character of our Lord's self-sacrifice in his work of redemption. This brings us to the great utterance of Saint Paul, which we must now look at from a second point of view.

3. "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2.5-11).

We do not need to recall my former exegesis of this passage. I only ask you to read the passage over and over again until its meaning and its majesty fill your soul. Saint Paul traces back the life of Jesus Christ to its preexistent point in the Godhead. Back there in the eternities there was somewhat in God that afterward became the being "found in fashion as a man" and called Jesus Christ. Now I ask every man who is a Trinitarian at all, What was this somewhat? A mere ideal conception? A phase of the one complete self-consciousness of God? Something between attribute and egoity? An ineffable, fundamental power? An agnostic entity which cannot even be named? If you make any one of these answers, then I must insist that when the Son of God became man, in the event of becoming man, there was no obedience. Nothing short of a person can obey. Obedience means self-decision, and self-decision is impossible without self-consciousness. And if there was no obedience there was no self-sacrifice on the part of the Son of God in becoming man. No ideal, no phase of self-consciousness, no something between attribute and egoity, no ineffable, fundamental power, no agnostic entity which cannot be named, could sacrifice itself, could empty itself, could voluntarily give up the glory of God and take on the form of a servant. No impersonal thing, describable or indescribable, could with awful self-cost become man to redeem us from sin. In the presence of all these hesitations and timidities and ingenuities and evasions, I insist in the name of ordinary consistency that every Trinitarian should clearly make choice -either to give up the whole moral content of the Pauline doctrine of the infinite self-sacrifice of the preexistent Son of God in our behalf, or to grant to the preexistent Son of God self-decision, self-consciousness, personality.

4. One more step we need to take. Our Lord's obedience was the obedience of a subordinate Son. He was not obedient to God as an angel might be obedient to God. He was the Son of God, and obedience was the expression of the most fundamental relation of his being. His divine Sonship involved two things in relation to God the Father: first, an equality in nature; second, a subordination in person. And both this equality and this subordination are ever manifest in the spirit and manner of his obedience.

In Saint John's gospel these two things, equality and subordination, are expressed again and again; but there is one remarkable passage (5.25-27) which I wish you especially to note: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour cometh, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself, even so gave he to the Son also to have life in himself: and he gave him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man.

This passage not only teaches subordination and equality as clearly as do those passages which show our Lord's obedience more definitely; but it goes further, it does a profounder thing, for it reveals the fact that our Lord's equality with his Father has been given to him. The Son hath life in himself (that is, he is an absolute source of life) even as God the Father hath life in himself; but the Son's life is not original (no reference here to sequence, merely to causation) with him, it is derived from his Father.

As a result of this brief study of our Lord's obedience we have two conclusions which should have large consideration in our final construction of the doctrine of the Trinity: First, as the preexistent Son of God,

our Lord was a real person, having self-consciousness and making self-decision. Second, our Lord's subordination is so fundamental that his very absolute fullness of life is itself a derived life, a life which is an effect, a life which is caused by his Father. In the profoundest sense, our Lord's obedience is the obedience of a Son who is both personally and essentially subordinate to his Father.

Consistency in Systematic Theology

One very glaring inconsistency is often found in the conventional works in systematic theology. Their teaching in Christology is that Jesus Christ is one person with two natures, a divine nature and a human nature; but the human nature is impersonal, merely a bare nature added to the divine nature of the one Eternal Person. Our Lord is (to quote a typical statement) "a conscious, intelligent Agent, who preserves from eternity into time and onward to eternity his own unbroken identity. And this we not inaptly or unreasonably term his undivided personality." Some of these theologians, indeed, are so anxious to protect the full personality of the Son of God in the event of the Incarnation that they find it necessary to reject every form of the doctrine of the kenosis. Not only so, but in their discussions of our Lord's preexistence these theologians are wont to maintain, and to maintain with commendable energy, that his preexistence was not ideal, but was personal. And yet to these very men, in their cautious, theistic treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity, the eternal Son of God, the second person in the Godhead, is "not what we mean by a person" -- no, he is an agnostic nondescript to remain in mystery until a veritable person is needed in Christology!

Another inconsistency almost equally pronounced is to be found in the work of many defensive theologians, namely, an inconsistency in their teaching concerning the Holy Spirit. In their theology, in the doctrine of God, the Holy Ghost is viewed as something less than a real person; but in every other place, where any reference is made to the nature or to the dispensation or to the activity of the Spirit, he is regarded as having not only functions of his own, but also a will of his own. Indeed, some of the men I have in mind devote precious pages to prove "the proper personality" of the Holy Spirit and look upon the point as essential to genuine orthodoxy. Now, how the Holy Spirit can be a person making actual self-decisions out in the application of redemption to men, and yet nothing but a principle, or potency, or impersonal entity, in the deep life of the Eternal and Immutable God, is "a mystery so boundless that no man can understand it, and I will therefore not pretend to understand it"!

Construction of the Doctrine

Special Points to Be Protected. In constructing the doctrine of the Trinity, under the demands of the Trinitarian problem as already stated, there are certain special points which we must constantly seek to protect. These points are:

1. The Feature of Structural Unity. It is not enough to provide for a "moral unity," or the unity of three persons who are united in moral and personal purpose. Christian theism requires us entirely to avoid tritheism; and we need, in some way, to conceive of God as one individual structure with only one attitude of personal will.
2. The Feature of Subordination. We should protect that profound bearing of subordination which the Son of God ever shows in his obedience to his Father. And we should also protect, at the same time, the subordination of the Holy Spirit to both the Father and the Son, for this is revealed in the Scripture almost as clearly, and the point is fully confirmed in the history of the Christian consciousness.

3. The Feature of Self-sacrifice. Not only are we to protect the moral costliness of Redemption to God the Father, but we must also protect the whole tremendous fact of self-cost to the Son of God in becoming man to carry out the plan of salvation.

4. The Feature of Equality. We must protect the absolute equality of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in every attribute of Deity. It is not enough to construct the doctrine so that the three persons are equal in such attributes as righteousness and love, and leave the matter there: the divine persons are so to be conceived as to be equal in the attribute of omnipotence, in the attribute of eternity, and in every attribute belonging to the absolute nature of God. In yet plainer speech, I mean that the relation of subordination is not to be allowed to impair, in our doctrine, the absolute deity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

5. The Feature of Moral Love. Just as I have emphasized moral love in my entire treatment of the philosophy of the Christian faith, so now we must aim so to construct the doctrine of the Trinity as to exalt the divine attribute of love.

Relation to Athanasius. That no one of you may be misled in even the slightest degree, I will, before going on to more positive work, clearly indicate my relation to Athanasius. For a number of years I was influenced -- yes, I would better say dominated -- by the patristic interpretation of a class of scholars converging in Dr. Dorner; and during those years I supposed that Athanasius, in his mighty struggle with the Arians, had no clear conception of the nature and significance of personality. And I actually came to think that Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity (from which our present perilous Trinitarian situation has largely come) was a normal development out of what Athanasius probably meant at the bottom! But after a long period of doctrinal unrest and search it began to dawn upon me that it was they, my patristic authorities, who had no clear conception of the nature and significance of personality; and that, precisely because of their own lack of fundamental thinking in philosophy, they were, in spite of all their fine, technical scholarship, incapable of a complete mastery of the meaning of Athanasius. Now there is not the touch of a doubt in my own mind but that the view Athanasius held of the Trinity was essentially this: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are three persons, each having personal consciousness and personal will; but the Father is the Supreme Cause, and because of this the other two persons are subordinate to him.

In getting at the bearing of the Christian consciousness upon the interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity, the important man to me is not Augustine, but Athanasius. For this choice I have two reasons: First, Augustine seems to me never to have caught the Christian view of God. In fact, much that he says about God and the ways of God is Christianity so tampered with as to lose the spirit of the New Testament altogether. Second, Athanasius was providentially placed. He stood, in his defense of the Christian faith, in a crisis where he had to grasp the basal import of the Trinity. For, such a grasp was necessary before he could see how to protect in statement the absolute deity of Jesus Christ. In other words, Athanasius was at one of those crucial turning points in the development of doctrine, or, more exactly, in the development of the Christian seizure of doctrine, where the Holy Spirit finds a wise opportunity to deepen one phase of the Christian consciousness. My idea, in truth, of the progress in doctrine is that this progress is seldom or never gradual, but rather zigzag, from crisis to crisis; and that between crises the church may not only make no headway, but even miss the route entirely. Thus, the mere fact that one thinker or leader is later than another in the years does not necessarily mean that the later man has more doctrinal insight. It is quite possible that he can see nothing beyond the indorsements of the Zeitgeist.

While Athanasius is of the greatest importance to me, and is really my point of philosophical departure, I shall not be found clinging to him in a slavish literalism. I will construct the doctrine of the Trinity to satisfy, in Christian freedom, my own heart in its relation to our Lord; and my own judgment in its relation to the entire utterance of Christian men, in so far as that utterance is known to me; and my own mind in its relation to the teaching of the Word of God.

The Use of Terms. My use of terms in this connection is the same that it has been in every other connection; but it may be useful to recall precisely some of the most important of the definitions:

1. A person is any being capable of self-conscious decision. Or, a person is a self-conscious, self-decise agent.
2. An individual is a distinct item of being (or a punctual entity) that cannot be divided without losing identity.
3. The nature of anything is the structural law by which the thing is precisely what it is.
4. An organism is a complex of essential parts; all the parts in dependent reciprocity; and every part making contribution to a common end.

In a spiritual organism of persons there is a further feature, namely, every person is in the organism both means and end. He is a means by which the organism works toward its end, and also a part of the end for which the organism exists. He lives for the entire organism, and the entire organism makes perpetual contribution to his life.

Then there is an absolute organism, by which I mean one that is absolutely self-sufficient as an organism. No feature of the organism is self-sufficient, no feature could exist at all alone; but the organism as a whole is self-sufficient.

The Full and Final Statement

1. God is one individual. Taken as a total, God is an indivisible finality. And so God is an individual in the precise sense that a man or an angel is an individual -- that is, an itemnic being, a punctual entity, an actual existence that cannot be divided without loss of identity.
2. This one divine individual has one nature. There is only one nature, only one complex of attributes, only one structural law of action.
3. In this one individual, with this one nature, or under this one structural law, there are three Persons -- three Agents with self-consciousness and capacity for self-decision. That is, the whole divine individuality is grasped, and estimated, and consciously appropriated, and used as the background of decision, at three personal points and not merely at one.
4. But, while the basal nature is ever one and the same, it is personalized in three very different ways. The First Person is conscious of himself as the Father, and to him every feature of the Godhead is mediated by that peculiarity of self-consciousness. He thinks as the Father, he wills as the Father, he loves as the Father. In like manner, the Second Person is conscious of himself as the Son; and the Third Person is conscious of himself as the Holy Spirit. This is the philosophy of the *idiotes* in general; but this point of personal peculiarity I will consider more definitely and more deeply somewhat later in the statement.

5. Inasmuch, though, as the three Persons have the one individual nature, are under one structural law; inasmuch as they have the same attributes in quality and quantity; and inasmuch as they are ever in the profoundest personal fellowship, there is a constant inter-communion, a currency of personal joys, an exchange of personal experiences. And so each Person is vastly more than his isolated self could be. He lives by augment. He lives in and through the other two Persons. His ineffable experience is the combination of three peculiar divine experiences, of three different ways of personalizing the Godhead. This is that sublime feature of God's life which has been called the *perichoresis*.

6. Interlaced in this infinite interchange of experience, and living under one structural law, the three divine Persons constitute an absolute personal organism. Not only are all three Persons organically essential; not only do they contribute to a common end; not only do they depend upon each other in reciprocity; and not only is each Person both means and end; but there is an eternal self-sufficiency which is due to the organism and to that alone. Not one of the three Persons, not even the Father, could exist at all out of the Organism. He partakes of the attribute of aseity itself only as he is a part of the organism. Thus we make the unity of God fundamental to our entire conception of God.

7. And yet the Father is original in supremacy as to just one thing, namely, causation. All the process in organism originates with the Father. Again and again we are told that to be thus the causal origin the Father must have existed first, and then begun the line of causation. It is not so. The Father lives only as cause. To cause is his method of existence -- his eternal breathing, so to speak. Creation proper, the making of stars and men and all creatures, is a personal matter -- an option under motive and the motive urgent under the law of personal expression; but infinitely beyond all this personal urgency to create is the Father's intrinsic and eternal necessity to be the causal source in the organism of the Godhead. Begetting the Son and causing the Holy Spirit are not at all a matter of optional personal expression; but are the method and means of self-existence. This is but saying in another way that the whole triune organism must exist or none of it can exist.

8. This prepares the way for our bringing out and making emphatic the fact that the fundament of all being is social. In our modern thinking there are two views which are in perpetual clash. In one view the fundament of all being is an impersonal somewhat; in the other view the fundament is a solitary person. Either view, if thoroughly developed, should be a bottomless horror to any man with a warm Christian experience. The fundament of all being is not an impersonal somewhat -- a blind Infinite evolving into heartless and meaningless destiny. Nor is this fundament a solitary person -- an isolated iceberg of self-consciousness -- an omnipotent loneliness. No, no, no, the causal fundament of all being is an actual Father who must be a Father to exist at all.

Nearly every vagary has in it the hint of a great truth toward which the vagary is wandering; and this is the case with that German vagary concerning the divine Antithesis in consciousness. God the Father needs his Son for the fullness of his own self-consciousness. He needs the Son (and they both need the Holy Spirit) precisely as much as the Son needs him. Thus their essential equality reaches into the very structure of the divine organism.

9. We are able now, I think, to deepen our former philosophy of creation, and perhaps to change our sentiment concerning that philosophy. In their effort to protect such Scripture teaching as that found in the third verse of the first chapter of Saint John's gospel ("All things were made by him"), some theologians have seemed to show a tendency to minimize the Father's effectual relation to creation. If there really is such a tendency it is all wrong. The clue to the entire truth lies in the fact that all creation is a social act.

The Father is primarily the Creator; but he creates, under the law of personal expression, through his Son. And the Son confirms the creative will of the Father in the fellowship of moral love. And then this double will is carried out into the event by the Holy Spirit.

Not only so, but the race of man (and all creation that pertains to man) the Father has created for his Son. Whatever men might do to stay it, the Father made a plan that his only Son should have an everlasting kingdom within the vast kingdom of God -- and the Son will have it as an expression of his Father's love!

10. Can we not now see our Lord's obedience in a somewhat larger bearing? The Son of God must obey his Father. The very Organism of the Godhead involves the absolute necessity of such obedience. Did I not tell you that the idea of service under the supreme will of God is a finality in the universe? Every created thing is made to obey. Not even free personality can escape that finality. But where does that final principle of doing the supreme will come from? It comes from the Godhead. The Son of God must obey the supreme will of his Father. The Son, though, does not obey his Father under the motive of necessity. Nor does he obey his Father under the motive of moral obligation even, he obeys him under the motive of moral love. The obedience is thus ethical and yet more than ethical. All the Son's moral concern for the law of holiness is but the central fire of his personal love for his Father, and this love for his Father becomes the total motive of his obedience. What we find here, then, in the case of our Lord, is exactly what will be found in the eternal life of every saint, namely, a necessary service lifted into a service of personal love and moral love.

Probably this is the most fitting place to correct a certain notion which you are likely to meet in crude Christian thinking. God the Father and his Son, our Saviour, are regarded as having two very different attitudes toward the salvation of men. The attitude of the Father is one of holy obstacle, while the attitude of the Son is one of eager mediation between sinners and the angry Father. The same feeling, if not the same notion, is repeated in the Roman Catholic conception of the mediation of the Virgin Mary. As it is in Chaucer's verse, "Gracious maid and mother, help that my Father be not wroth with me." It is exceedingly important that this notion, and especially this feeling, about God the Father should be crushed out of Christian life. For it is false through and through. The moral obstacle to superficial pardon is equally in every Person of the Trinity. Not only so, but the plan of redemption is primarily with the Father. He it was who gave his only -begotten Son. The Father's plan was confirmed by the Son in obedience and self-sacrifice, and again confirmed by the swift and silent redemptional response of the Holy Spirit. Even Jonathan Edwards has not, at this point, quite gained the New Testament accent. It is true, however, that every Christian heart in full health has, must have, a peculiar love for Jesus Christ; but this peculiar love has no necessary relation to the origin of the plan of redemption; rather does the love grow out of the four facts that the Son of God in his self-sacrifice became man to redeem us, that he actually did redeem us by his death, that in conversion we are united to him, and that he remains man, "our Elder Brother," forever.

11. An additional word can now be given concerning the *idiotes*, or personal peculiarity, of each Person in the Trinity. The peculiarity of the Father is that of origination. Not only is he the causal source of the divine organism, but also his will is original and supreme. It is his will that we refer to in the discussions of Christian theism. It is his will that springs the worlds into existence and binds them into harmony in their majestic courses. When we speak of "God" without qualification we always mean the Sovereign Father. His will is confirmed, doubly confirmed, but it is his will that is confirmed. Philosophically a Trinitarian is as rigidly monotheistic as any Unitarian can be, or even as any deist ever was, and as well prepared for any problem in theism.

The peculiarity of the Son of God is that of personal obedience. Here we need to be intensely attentive, or we will not get the idea truly. This obedience is active, personal, self-assertive obedience. It is full of humility, but the humility never flings the Person into effacement. Notice the ring of authority and dominion: "I will draw all men unto me." "Verily, verily, I say unto you." "The Son of man shall come in his glory." The fact is that nothing can be more tremendously aggressive than the will of Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God.

Even more difficult is it to understand perfectly the personal combination of quality in the Holy Spirit. His peculiarity is that of personal self-effacement. His obedience is not obedience merely, not loving obedience merely, but personal effacement in obedience. I despair of making this divine principle of voluntary, eager self-effacement real and sublime to an age which refuses even to try to understand Saint Paul's inspired conception of a Christian home; and I will make no endeavor to do so. An intimation, though, is necessary for the completeness of my Trinitarian message. What we may term the organic peculiarity of the Holy Spirit is that he is as subordinate to the Son of God as he is to the Father; but his personal peculiarity is the wonderful way in which, in moral love, he treats this organic limitation. He takes hold of it with enthusiastic assent, he transfigures it, he turns it into his everlasting rejoicing. Not only so, but also instead of obeying by an aggressive self-assertion, he actually obeys by self-effacement. Of men, for instance, the Holy Spirit wants nothing for himself. He wants us only to belong to Christ, only to serve Christ, only to love Christ supremely. If your consciousness is totally occupied with love for your Saviour, the whole longing of the Holy Spirit is satisfied. He for himself wants nothing, excepting the infinite love of the Father and of the Son. He rejoices not in obedience, but in that particular kind of obedience which never blossoms into personal emolument. He, too, is ever urged on by the law of personal expression, but he expresses all he is, and all he desires, in bare service -- not service and something -- not service and a universe -- not service and a final kingdom -- the Spirit of God expresses himself simply and totally in service. And what a service, what a service it is! Whether God will send a river flowing to the sea, or will set a sunset blazing in the western cloud, or will quiet the fears of a terrified child, or will break the proud heart of a sinner, or will unite a willing man to Jesus Christ, or will add a further grace to the triumphs of a saint, or will pour the surprising consolations of heaven into a hopeless grief, or will take an old man who is timid before the gathering mystery of death and fill his soul with the peace of God and the certainties of faith -- the work, the finishing volition, the efficient eventualization of it all is given over to the Holy Spirit -- he alone is sent!

The Moral Love of the Triune God

This, the moral love of the Triune God, is our last theme, our last work together in this system of doctrine!

First of all, I want you to get the entire force, and the inner spirit, of that conception of the love of God as the love of a solitary Infinite Benevolence, a conception which is now apparent almost everywhere in the Christian church, and which is almost certain to become dominant. I have, therefore, selected two typical passages for quotation, choosing one passage for its spirit and the other passage for its meaning. Professor Ritschl, in his finest *ad hominem* manner, says: "In a certain quarter of theological speculation we are met by the principle that perfect love requires the similar mutual relation of two personal wills. In so far as love is the principle of perfect fellowship between two personal beings, this may be true. But the perfect love, as motive power and guiding principle of the individual will, is independent of responsive love (Matt. 5.46); on the contrary, just there, where it meets with no answering love, perfect love proves in every possible case its peculiar sublimity."

The other passage comes from W. L. Walker's remarkable book, *The Spirit and the Incarnation*, and reads as follows: "It is often argued that the love that God is must eternally produce an object to which it can impart itself, and from which it must be eternally reflected back again. It is thus that some theologians have argued for the existence of a Divine Son of God, and for what has been termed a 'social Trinity'. But this, if the love is not to be a mere self-love, would imply such a distinct and separate person in the Son as would be wholly inconsistent with the unity of the Divine Being, and as would even savor of the mythological. This is not the inference which we seek to draw from the existence of God as love. The scriptural doctrine is that God is love, and 'the Son' must be that same love in one mode of its existence. The love that God is is not merely 'the affection of one person for another,' as of individuals, but that holy, universal, infinite love which forever seeks to impart itself, and which causes all persons to arise. The Son is that love as it goes forth to impart itself to others conceived in the divine image. The Son in God is thus at once the ideal and the potency of the creation. The perfect love that God is, just because it is perfect love, can never keep itself to itself, but must be eternally giving itself and going forth creating."

Professor Ritschl (to take up the less important quotation first), it seems to me, twists the Saviour's meaning out of shape. Our Lord does not mean that the sublimest love has no desire for response, but rather that such love can and should be a motive when there is no response, and even in the face of hatred. There is something lofty in loving an enemy, but there is nothing lofty in being content with the enmity. And, yet deeper, to love an enemy requires a moral love, and, in the very nature of moral love, it craves an answer of moral love. Then, coming to God himself, it is not true that he "maketh his sun to rise on the evil" because he is indifferent to response. He treats his enemies as he does because he wants them to drop their enmity and love him in return. I will deny the whole contention that the highest kind of love is independent of response. On the contrary, I believe that the more nearly perfect, the more nearly divine the love is, the more one suffers, out of sight, if there be no response. How, then, is a love asking for response to be protected from mere selfishness? The answer is ready: By moral quality.

To the teaching (as I grasp it) of the second quotation, I have three objections which are strong and unyielding:

1. Inasmuch as this view of the love of God grants the preexistent Son of God neither self-decision nor self-consciousness, it would in our thinking entirely destroy that ethical quality of self-sacrifice on the part of the Son in his Incarnation, a self-sacrifice which is clearly taught by Saint Paul, and which is vital to any really Christian conception of redemption. Urge and reurge this point I will upon the church, for it concerns the total practical efficiency of Christian preaching.

2. Carried out in consistency, this view of the love of God certainly means either one or the other of two things: Either, first, that an impersonal "seed" or potency of Deity so develops under temporal conditions as to become personal -- in which case there is now personal duality in the Godhead (the Father and the Son Jesus Christ), and the old problem of divine unity must be faced and answered by the very men who object to the Athanasian solution -- or, second, that our Saviour is but a man, or at the most a personal creature, having in his nature a deposit of Deity; in which case the outcome is nothing other than Unitarianism, essentially akin to that kind of Unitarianism (James Freeman Clarke) which regards Christ as "divine by peculiar endowment." That the second theological option is the one likely to be taken I have been convinced by much observation, and especially by a study of the effects of the Ritschlian movement upon American and British theology.

3. A divine love which "can never keep itself to itself, but must be eternally giving itself and going forth creating," amounts, precisely, I think, to that "infinite and eternal craving to create" which so often comes to the fore in the pantheistic philosophy. Under the terms of such a view there could be in creation neither beginning nor end, for the entire motive of creation is love as an unsatisfied attribute. Indeed, the view seems to me to be not only impossible in a rigidly Christian theism, but also out of harmony with all the fundamental Christian doctrines, and even inconsistent in its own structure. Dropping all this negative work of criticism, I will now give you simply and yet positively that conception of the love of God which I look upon as belonging to the philosophical fiber of the Christian faith. In doing this I have an extremely delicate preparatory task, namely, to make you all see and feel the deep difference between the motive of unsatisfied love and the motive of satisfied love. I am far from being sure that my modicum of literary skill is enough for the task; but the matter is so fundamentally important that I must do what I can. There is many a human home where a child has been adopted to meet the inherent craving of a hungry heart. Sometimes such homes are very noble, sometimes they become very happy; but, profoundly regarded, always they are abnormal and very pathetic. Right over against one of these abnormal homes I ask you to imagine another kind of a home, a home of the Bunsen type, where the father and the mother and all the children are tenderly and usefully and unselfishly entangled in a love well-nigh boundless. Now, this home -- all of them -- adopts a waif, let us say. Are any of you able to discover any deep difference between the two cases of adoption? There is a deep difference. In the one case, the motive is an unsatisfied love -- the home needs the child. In the other case, the motive is a satisfied love -- the child needs the home.

Now I will try to gather up into more definite point my entire view of God's relation to creation. Searching for creation -- motive, I find that there are in the divine life three main features which are to be considered: First, there is the feature of personality. As I have said in various ways, personality likes to create, is eager to express the inner secret. Because of this intrinsic personal eagerness, there is divine motive to outplace objects of actual expression. But this motive is purely personal, and very unlike the "unfolding instinct" of pantheism; for the will of God is not driven into creation.

God creates because he would and not because he must. Again let me borrow Martensen's fine thought, the creation is a "superfluity" for God. God has joy in the cosmos, but God does not need the cosmos. Neither personality nor any divine attribute gets, in creation, any new fullness. You cannot do any thoroughly Christian thinking until you lay fast hold of the idea that our God is eternally perfect and so self-sufficient. He is not an infinite craving endlessly striving to satisfy his own nature and fill out the underlying plan of his own being.

Second, there is the feature of moral concern. This second feature must be quickly added to the first. It is inherent for personality to want to get out into expression, but this inherent desire is much more urgent in moral personality. Moral concern mightily longs to spring into cosmic fact. The philosophy of this is partly in the nature of righteousness itself and partly in the way moral concern vitalizes personality. Now, therefore, we have in mind another range of divine motive.

Personality alone is enough to explain a vanishing universe of things, continents, and daffodils tossing in the breeze, and all that; but to explain, to show motive for a final, everlasting universe with men and angels and archangels, we need to begin with personality and come on swiftly to God's moral concern. Third, there is the feature of moral love. But we cannot stop with moral concern. To obtain a Christian conception of the final universe, we must think of personality and moral concern as culminating in the one divine motive of moral love.

In other connections and at differing angles in meaning and emphasis, I have spoken of the final universe, and probably I have left the impression that our extreme point of emphasis should be that the final universe must express the holiness of God as culminating through moral concern in moral love. To correct this impression, I have been waiting for this very place. My full view is that the final universe is to manifest, in finite measure, the entirety of God's life. To do so much, the final universe must express, not merely the fact of God's moral love, but additionally the fact that this divine love is a satisfied moral love.

What do I mean by this? I mean that the final universe will come to climax in perfect sainthood -- in personal moral creatures who have, in their freedom, been made perfect in storm and pain and test. Freedom was granted them simply because there is no other process under which a finite being can become morally like God. Because of this climax of sainthood, every other feature of the final universe takes on its last touch of significance. What, then, is God's relation to this sainthood?

That of Creator with the motive of a satisfied love. Forever will it be evident that these saints were created, not because God needed them to moderate his own craving for love; but because, out of the eternal fullness of a satisfied love, God wanted them to bring their little cups of finite possibility and fill them with everlasting joy out of his shoreless ocean. Thus the very law of expression itself becomes at last more than merely personal, even more than merely personal and moral -- it becomes absolutely altruistic.

One last look at the new race, and our work is done. Not yet, in this immediate discussion, have we provided for the finite expression in the final universe of the entirety of the life of God. For we made no provision for the expression of the absolute personal organism of the Godhead. Do you not see what we need as our ultimate feature? We again need the new race in Jesus Christ. The cosmic sweep of the kingdom of God will manifest the divine holiness as personalized in moral concern. The kingdom of heaven will manifest the satisfied love of God as benevolent motive. But the kingdom of our Lord will express more -- it will express the love of God -- moral and satisfied -- in a personal organism which will be a finite copy of the unity of the Persons of the Trinity, and will have a racial imitation of the glory of their inter-communion.

"Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word; that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us: that the world may believe that thou didst send me. And the glory which thou hast given me I have given unto them; that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one; that the world may know that thou didst send me, and lovedst them, even as thou lovedst me. Father, that which thou hast given me, I will that, where I am, they also may be with me; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world."

And now unto the God of our redemption, unto the Father, and unto the Son, and unto the Holy Ghost, do we ascribe all power and all dominion and all glory, world without end, Amen and Amen.

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