

A Statement of Reasons for Not Believing the Doctrines of the Trinitarians: Section Two*

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Andrews Norton (1786-1853), unitarian scholar and theologian, graduated from Harvard at the age of seventeen. He was tutor at Bowdoin College (1809-1811) and then tutor in mathematics at Harvard (1811-1813). He was Dexter Professor of Sacred Literature at the Harvard Divinity School (1819-1830). Dr. Norton was, after Dr. Channing, the most distinguished exponent of unitarian theology, maintaining against the school of Theodore Parker a firm belief in miracles as central to Christian belief. Norton's most significant work was his Statement of Reasons For Not Believing the Doctrines of Trinitarians, Concerning the Nature of God and the Person of Christ, first published in 1833 (Boston, Hilliard, Gray, and Co.). In this work Norton recognized Jesus as the unique teacher from God. Jesus' authority, however, did not make him ontologically one with God. Norton considered the traditional doctrine of the union of two natures in Christ more incredible than the Trinity itself: "No words can be more destitute of meaning . . . than such language as we sometimes find used, in which Christ is declared to be at once the Creator of the universe, and a man of sorrows; God omniscient and omnipotent, and a feeble man of imperfect knowledge" (Statement, 58). He was equally skeptical of a Christology which implied that: "Christ prays to that being who he himself was. He declares himself to be ignorant

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of what (being God) he knew, and unable to perform what (being God) he could perform” (Statement, 60).

We reprint below section two of Norton’s discussion of the Trinity in his Statement of Reasons. Small editorial changes have been made in punctuation, spelling and paragraphing to facilitate reading.

The proper modern doctrine of the Trinity, as it appears in the creeds of latter times, is that there are three persons in the Divinity, who equally possess all divine attributes; and the doctrine is connected with an explicit statement that there is but one God. Now, this doctrine is to be rejected, because, taken in connection with that of the unity of God, it is essentially incredible; one which no man, who has compared the two doctrines together with right conceptions of both, ever did or could believe. Three persons, each equally possessing divine attributes, are three Gods. A person is a being. No one who has any correct notion of the meaning of words will deny this. And the being who possesses divine attributes must be God or a God. The doctrine of the Trinity, then, affirms that there are three Gods. It is affirmed at the same time that there is but one God. But no one can believe that there are three Gods, and that there is but one God.

This statement is as plain and obvious as any which can be made. But it is not the less forcible because it is perfectly plain and obvious. Some Trinitarians have indeed remonstrated against charging those who hold the doctrine with the “ABSURDITIES consequent upon the language of their creed”;¹ and have asserted that in this creed the word *person* is not used in its proper sense. I do not answer to this that, if men will talk absurdity, and insist that they are teaching truths of infinite importance, it is unreasonable for them to expect to be understood as meaning something wholly different from what their words express. The true answer is that these complaints are unfounded; and that the proper doctrine of the Trinity, as it has existed in latter times, is that which is expressed by the language used taken in its obvious sense. By *person*, says Waterland, than whom no writer in defense of the Trinity has a higher reputation, “I certainly mean a *real* Person, an *Hypostasis*, no *Mode*, *Attribute*, or *Property*. . . . Each divine Person is an individual, intelligent Agent; but as subsisting in one undivided substance, they are all together, in that respect, but one undivided intelligent Agent. . . . The church never professed three *Hypostases* in any other sense, but as

¹ The words quoted are from Professor Stuart’s Letters to the Rev. W.E. Channing, 2nd ed., 23.

they mean *three Persons*.”² There is, indeed, no reasonable pretense for saying that *the great body of Trinitarians*, when they have used the word *person*, have not meant to express proper personality. He who asserts the contrary asserts a mere extravagance. He closes his eyes upon an obvious fact, and then affirms what he may fancy ought to have been, instead of what there is no doubt really has been maintained. But on this subject there is something more to be said; and I shall remark particularly not only upon this, but upon the other evasions which have been resorted to, in order to escape the force of the statement which has just been urged.

I wish, however, first to observe that the ancient opinions concerning the Trinity, before the Council of Nice (A.D. 325), were VERY DIFFERENT from the modern doctrine, and had this great advantage over it, that, when viewed simply in connection with the unity of God, they were not *essentially* incredible. According to that form of faith which approached nearest to the modern Orthodox doctrine, the Father alone was the Supreme God, and the Son and Spirit were beings deriving their existence from Him, and far inferior, to whom the title of God could be properly applied only in an inferior sense. The subject has been so thoroughly examined that the correctness of this statement will not, I think, be questioned, at the present day, by any respectable writer. The theological student, who wishes to see in a small compass the authorities on which it is founded, may consult one or more of the works mentioned in the note below.³ I have stated that form of the doctrine which approached nearest to modern Orthodoxy. But the subject of the personality and divinity of the Holy Spirit, it may be observed, was in a very unsettled state before the Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381). Gregory Nazianzen, in his Eulogy of Athanasius, has the following passage respecting that great father of Trinitarian Orthodoxy:

² Vindication of Christ's Divinity, 3rd ed., 350, 351.

³ Petavii Dogmata Theologica, Tom. II. De Trinitate; *particularly* Lib. I. cc. 3, 4, 5. — Huetii Origeniana [appended to Tom. IV. of De la Rue's edition of Origen], Lib. II. Quaest. 2. — Jackson's edition of Novatian, with his annotations. — Whitby, Disquisitiones Modestae in Cl. Bulli Defensionem Fidei Nicaenae. — Whiston's Primitive Christianity, Vol. IV. — Clarke's Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity. — Priestley's History of Early Opinions, Vol. II. — Münscher's Dogmengeschichte, I. 85-111. (Martini, Versuch einer pragmatischen Geschichte des Dogma von der Gottheit Christi in den vier ersten Jahrhunderten. — Christian Examiner, Jan. 1830, Vol. VII. 303ff.; Sept. 1831, Vol. XI. 22ff.; July, 1832, Vol. XII. 298ff.; and July, 1836, Vol. XX. 343ff. The articles referred to were written by the Rev. Alvan Lamson, D.D.)

For when all others who held our doctrine were divided into three classes, the faith of many being unsound respecting the Son, that of still more concerning the Holy Spirit (on which subject to be least impious was thought to be piety), and a small number being sound in both respects; he first and alone, or with a very few, had the courage to profess in writing, clearly and explicitly, the true doctrine of the one Godhead and nature of the three persons. Thus that truth, a knowledge of which, as far as regards the Son, had been vouchsafed to most of the Fathers before, he was fully inspired to maintain in respect to the Holy Spirit.⁴

So much for the original doctrine of the Trinity. I shall now proceed to state the different forms which the modern doctrine has been made to assume, and in which its language has been explained, by those who have attempted to conceal or remove the direct opposition between this and the doctrine of the unity of God.

I. Many Trinitarian writers have maintained a modification of the doctrine, in some respects similar to what has just been stated to be its most ancient form. They have considered the Father as the “fountain of divinity,” whose existence alone is underived, and have regarded the Son and Spirit as deriving their existence from Him and subordinate to Him; but, at the same time, as equally with the Father possessing all divine attributes. Every well-informed Trinitarian has at least heard of the Orthodoxy and learning of Bishop Bull. His *Defense of the Nicene Creed* is the standard work as regards the argument in support of the doctrine of the Trinity from Ecclesiastical History. But one whole division of this famous book is employed in maintaining the *subordination* of the Son. “No one can doubt,” he says, “that the Fathers who lived before the Nicene Council acknowledged this subordination. It remains to show that the Fathers who wrote after this Council taught the same doctrine.”⁵ Having given various quotations from different writers to this effect, he proceeds:

The ancients, as they regarded the Father as the beginning, cause, author, fountain, of the Son, have not feared to call Him the one and only God. For thus the Nicene Fathers themselves begin their creed: *We believe in one God, the Father omnipotent*; afterwards

⁴ Orat. XXI. Opp. I. 394.

⁵ *Defensio Fidei Nicaenae*, Sect. IV. c. 1. 3.

subjoining: *and in one [Lord] Jesus Christ — God of God.* And the great Athanasius himself concedes that the Father is justly called the only God, because He alone is without origin, and is alone the fountain of divinity.”⁶

Bishop Bull next proceeds to maintain as the catholic doctrine that though the Son is equal to the Father in nature and every essential perfection, yet the Father is greater than the Son even as regards his divinity; because the Father is the origin of the Son; the Son being from the Father, and not the Father from the Son. Upon this foundation, he appears to think that the doctrine of the divine unity may be preserved inviolate, though at the same time he contends that the Son, as a real person, distinct from the Father, is equally God, possessing equally all divine perfections, the only difference being that the perfections as they exist in the Son are derived, and as they exist in the Father are underived. The same likewise, according to him, is true of the Spirit.⁷

But in regard to all such accounts of the doctrine, it is an obvious remark that the existence of the Son, and of the Spirit, is either *necessary*, or it is *not*. If their existence be necessary, we have then three beings *necessarily existing*, each possessing divine attributes; and consequently we have three Gods. If it be not necessary, but dependent on the will of the Father, then we say that the distance is infinite between underived and independent existence, and derived and dependent; between the supremacy of God, the Father, and the subordination of beings who exist only through His will. In the latter view of the doctrine, therefore, we clearly have but one God; but at the same time the modern doctrine of the Trinity disappears. The form of statement too, just mentioned, must be abandoned; for it can hardly be pretended that these derived and dependent beings possess an equality in divine attributes, or are equal in nature to the Father. Beings whose existence is dependent on the will of another cannot be equal in power to the being on whom they depend. The doctrine, therefore, however disguised by the mode of statement which we are considering, must, in fact, resolve itself into an assertion of three Gods; or must, on the other hand, amount to nothing more than a form of Unitarianism. In the latter case, however objectionable and unfounded I may think it, it is not my present purpose to argue directly against it; and in the former case, it is pressed with all the difficulties which bear

⁶ *Ibid.* 6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Sect. IV. cc. 2-4.

upon the doctrine as commonly stated, and at the same time with new difficulties which affect this particular form of statement. That the Son and the Spirit should exist necessarily, as well as the Father, and possess equally with the Father all divine attributes, and yet be subordinate and inferior to the Father — or, in other words, that there should be two beings or persons, each of whom is properly and in the highest sense God, and yet that these two beings or persons should be subordinate and inferior to another being or person, who is God — is as incredible a proposition as the doctrine can involve.

II. Others again, who have chosen to call themselves Trinitarians, profess to understand by the word *person* something very different from what it commonly expresses; and regard it as denoting neither any *proper personality*, nor any *real distinction*, in the divine nature. They use the word in a sense equivalent to that which the Latin word *persona* commonly has in classic writers, and which we may express by the word *character*. According to them, the Deity considered as existing in three different persons is the Deity considered as sustaining three different characters. Thus some of them regard the three persons as denoting *the three relations* which He bears to men, as their Creator (the Father), their Redeemer (the Son), and their Sanctifier (the Holy Spirit). Others found the distinction maintained in the doctrine on three attributes of God, as His goodness, wisdom, and power. Those who explain the Trinity in this manner are called *modal* or *nominal* Trinitarians. Their doctrine, as everyone must perceive, is nothing more than simple Unitarianism, disguised, if it may be said to be disguised, by a very improper use of language. Yet this doctrine, or rather a heterogeneous mixture of opinions in which this doctrine is conspicuous, has been, at times, considerably prevalent, and has almost come in competition with the proper doctrine.

III. There are others who maintain, with those last mentioned, that, in the terms employed in stating the doctrine of the Trinity, the word *person* is not to be taken in its usual sense; but who differ from them in maintaining that those terms ought to be understood as affirming a real threefold distinction in the Godhead. But this is nothing more than a mere evasion, introduced into the general statement of the doctrine for the purpose of rescuing it from the charge of absurdity, to which those who thus explain it allow that it would be liable, if the language in which it is usually expressed were to be understood

in its common acceptation. They themselves, however, after giving this general statement, immediately relapse into the common belief. When they speak particularly of the Father, the Son, or the Spirit, they speak of each unequivocally as a person in the proper sense of the word. They ascribe to them *personal* attributes. They speak of each as sustaining *personal* relations peculiar to himself, and performing *personal* actions, distinct from those of either of the others. It was the Son who was sanctified and sent into the world; and the Father by whom he was sanctified and sent. It was the Son who became incarnate, and not the Father. It was the Son who made atonement for the sins of men, and the Father by whom the atonement was received. The Son was in the bosom of the Father, but the Father was not in the bosom of the Son. The Son was the Logos who was with God, but it would sound harsh to say that the Father was with God. The Son was the first-born of every creature, the image of the Invisible God, and did not desire to retain his equality with God. There is no one who would not be shocked at the thought of applying this language to the Father. Again, it was the Holy Spirit who was sent as the "Comforter" to our Lord's Apostles, after his ascension, and not the Father nor the Son.

All this, those who assert the doctrine of three distinctions, but not of three persons, in the divine nature, must and do say and allow; and therefore they do in fact maintain, with other Trinitarians, that there are three divine persons, in the proper sense of the word, distinguished from each other. They have adopted their mode of stating the doctrine merely with a view of avoiding those obvious objections which overwhelm it as commonly expressed; without any regard to its consistency with their real opinions, or with indisputable and acknowledged truths. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is an intelligent being, a person. There may seem something like irreverence in the very statement of this truth; but in reasoning respecting the doctrine of the Trinity, we are obliged to state even such truths as this. The Son of God is an intelligent being, a person. And no Christian, one would think, who reflects a moment upon his own belief, can doubt that these two persons are not the same. Neither of them, therefore, is a mere distinction of the divine nature, nor the same intelligent being regarded under different distinctions. Let us consider for a moment what sort of meaning would be forced upon the language of Scripture if, where the Father and the Son of God are mentioned, we were to substitute the terms, "the first distinction in the Trinity," and "the second distinction in the Trinity"; or, "God considered in

the first distinction of his nature,” and “God considered in the second distinction of his nature.” I will not produce examples, because it would appear to me like turning the Scriptures into burlesque.

If you prove that the person who is called the Son of God possesses divine attributes, you prove that there is another divine person beside the Father. In order to complete the Trinity, you must proceed to prove, *first*, THE PERSONALITY and then the divinity of the Holy Spirit. This is the only way in which the doctrine can be established. No one can pretend that there is any passage in the Scriptures in which it is expressly taught that there is a threefold distinction of any sort in the divine nature. He who proves the doctrine of the Trinity from the Scriptures must do it by showing that there are three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who are respectively mentioned in the Scriptures as each possessing divine attributes. There is no other medium of proof. There is no other way in which the doctrine can be established. Of course, it is the very method of proof to which, in common with other Trinitarians, those resort, who maintain that form of stating the doctrine which we are considering. It follows from this that their real opinions must be in fact the same with those of other Trinitarians. Indeed, the whole statement appears to be little more than a mere oversight, a mistake, into which some have fallen in their haste to escape from the objections which they have perceived might be urged against the common form of the doctrine.

The remarks that have been made appear to me plain, and such as may be easily understood by every reader. I have doubted, therefore, whether to add another, the force of which may not be at once perceived, except by those who are a little familiar with metaphysical studies. But as it seems to show decisively that the statement which we are considering is untenable by any proper Trinitarian, I have thought, on the whole, that it might be worthwhile to subjoin it.

In regard to the personality of the divine nature, the only question is whether there are three persons, or but one person. Those with whom we are arguing deny that there are three persons. Consequently they must maintain that there is but one person. They affirm, however, that there is a threefold distinction in the divine nature; that is, in the nature of this one person. But of the nature of any being we can know nothing but by the attributes or properties of that being. Abstract all the attributes or properties of any being, and nothing remains of which you can form even an imagination. These are all that is cognizable by the human mind. When you say, therefore, that there

is a threefold distinction in the nature of any being, the only meaning which the words will admit (in relation to the present subject) is that the attributes or properties of this being may be divided into three distinct classes, which may be considered separately from each other. All, therefore, which is affirmed by the statement of those whom we are opposing is that the attributes of that ONE PERSON who is God may be divided into three distinct classes; or, in other words, that God may be viewed in three different aspects in relation to His attributes. But this is nothing more than a *modal* or *nominal* Trinity, as we have before explained these terms. Those, therefore, whose opinions we are now considering, are, in fact, *nominal* Trinitarians in their statement of the doctrine, and *real* Trinitarians in their belief. They hold the proper doctrine, with an implicit acknowledgement in the very statement which they have adopted that the proper doctrine is untenable; and have involved themselves, therefore, in new difficulties, without having effected an escape from those with which they were pressed before.

IV. But a very considerable portion of Trinitarians, and some of them among the most eminent, have not shrunk from understanding the doctrine as affirming the existence of *three equal divine minds*, and consequently, to all common apprehension, of three Gods; and from decidedly rejecting the doctrine of the unity of God, in that sense which is at once the popular and the philosophical sense of the term. All the unity for which they contend is only such as may result from those three divinities being inseparably conjoined, and having a mutual consciousness, or a mutual *inbeing*: which last mode of existence is again expressed in the language of technical theology by the terms *perichoresis* and *circumincession*. “To say,” says Dr. William Sherlock, “they are three divine persons, and not three distinct infinite minds, is both heresy and nonsense.”⁸ “The distinction of persons cannot be more truly and aptly represented than by the distinction between three men; for Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are as really distinct persons as Peter, James and John.”⁹ “We must allow the Divine persons to be real, substantial beings.”¹⁰ There are few names of higher authority among Calvinists than that of Howe. The mode of explaining the doctrine to which he was inclined is well known. He was disposed to regard the three divine persons as “three distinct, individual, necessarily existent, spiritual beings,”

⁸ Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity, 66. London, 1690.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

who formed together “the most delicious society.”¹¹ Those who give such accounts of the doctrine may at least claim the merit of having rendered their opinions in some degree consistent with each other. They have succeeded, at a dear purchase to be sure, in freeing their creed from intrinsic absurdity, and have produced a doctrine to which there is no decisive objection, except that it contradicts the most explicit declarations of the Scriptures, and the first principles of natural religion; and is, therefore, irreconcilable with all that God has in any way taught us of Himself.

After the Council of Nice, that which we have last considered became gradually the prevailing form of the doctrine, except that it was not very clearly settled in what the divine unity consisted. The comparison of the three persons in the Trinity to three different men was borrowed by Sherlock from the Fathers of the fourth century. Gregory Nazianzen, who himself maintained zealously this form of Orthodoxy, says that “those who were too Orthodox fell into polytheism,”¹² i.e. tritheism. It might have been difficult to determine the precise distance from tritheism of those who were not *too* Orthodox.

This, then, is the state of the case. The proper modern doctrine of the Trinity is, when viewed in connection with that of the unity of God, a doctrine essentially incredible. In endeavoring to present it in a form in which it may be defended, *one class of Trinitarians* insist strongly upon the supremacy of the Father, and the subordination of the Son and the Spirit. These, on the one hand, must either affirm this distinction in such a manner as really to maintain only a very untenable form of Unitarianism; or, on the other hand, must in fact retain the common doctrine, encumbered with the new and peculiar difficulty which results from declaring that the Son and Spirit are each properly God, but that each is a subordinate God. *Another class*, the nominal Trinitarians, explain away the doctrine entirely, and leave us nothing in their general account of it with which to contend, but a very unjustifiable use of language. *A third class*, those who maintain three distinctions, and deny three persons, have merely put a forced meaning upon the terms used in its statement; and have then gone on to reason and to write in a manner which necessarily supposes that those terms are used correctly, and that the common form of the doctrine, which they profess to reject, is really that in which they themselves receive it. And *a fourth class* have fallen into plain

¹¹ Howe’s *Calm Discourse of the Trinity in the Godhead*. Works Vol. II. 537ff., particularly 549, 550.

¹² *Orat. I. Opp. I. 16.*

and bald tritheism, maintaining the unity of God only by maintaining that the three Gods of whom they speak are inseparably and most intimately united. To these we may add, as a *fifth class*, those who receive, or profess to receive, the common doctrine, without any attempt to modify, explain, or understand it.

All the sects of Trinitarians fall into one or other of the five classes just mentioned. Now we may put the nominal Trinitarians out of the question. They have nothing to do with the present controversy. And if there be any, who, calling themselves Trinitarians, do in fact hold such a subordination of the Son and Spirit to the Father, that their doctrine amounts only to one form of Unitarianism, we may put these out of the question likewise. After having done this, it will appear from the preceding remarks that the whole body of real Trinitarians may be separated into two great divisions; namely, those who, in connection with the divine unity, hold the proper doctrine, either with or without certain modifications — which modifications, though intended to lessen, would really, if possible, add to its incredibility; and those who, maintaining the unity only in name, are in fact proper believers in three Gods. Now we cannot adopt the doctrine of those first mentioned, because we cannot believe what appears to us a contradiction in terms; nor the doctrine of those last mentioned, because neither revelation nor reason teaches us that there are three Gods. If there be anyone who does not acquiesce in the conclusion to which we have arrived, I beg him to read over again what precedes, and to satisfy himself either that there is, or that there is not, some error in the statements and reasonings. The subject is not one with which we are at liberty to trifle, and arbitrarily assume opinions without reason. It behooves everyone to attend well to the subject; and to be sure that he holds the doctrine with no ambiguous or unsteady faith, before he undertakes to maintain, or professes to believe it, or in any way gives countenance to its reception among Christians.

With the doctrine of the Trinity is connected that of the HYPOSTATIC UNION, as it is called, or *the doctrine of the union of the divine and human natures in Christ, in such a manner that these two natures constitute but one person*. But this doctrine may be almost said to have pre-eminence in incredibility above that of the Trinity itself. The latter can be no object of belief when regarded in connection with that of the Divine Unity; for these two doctrines directly contradict each other. But the former, without reference to any other doctrine, does in itself involve propositions as clearly

self-contradictory as any which it is in the power of language to express. It teaches that Christ is both God and man. The proposition is very plain and intelligible. The words *God* and *man* are among those which are in most common use, and the meaning of which is best defined and understood. There cannot (as with regard to the terms employed in stating the doctrine of the Trinity) be any controversy about the sense in which they are used in this proposition, or, in other words, about the ideas which they are intended to express. And we perceive that these ideas are wholly incompatible with each other. Our idea of God is of an infinite being; our idea of man is of a finite being; and we perceive that the same being cannot be both infinite and finite. There is nothing clear in language, no proposition of any sort can be affirmed to be true, if we cannot affirm this to be true — that it is impossible that the same being should be finite and infinite; or, in other words, that it is impossible that the same being should be man and God. If the doctrine were not familiar to us, we should revolt from it, as shocking every feeling of reverence toward God, and it would appear to us, at the same time, as mere an absurdity as can be presented to the understanding. No words can be more destitute of meaning, *so far as they are intended to convey a proposition which the mind is capable of admitting*, than such language as we sometimes find used, in which Christ is declared to be at once the Creator of the universe, and a man of sorrows; God omniscient and omnipotent, and a feeble man of imperfect knowledge.¹³

I know of no way in which the force of the statement just urged can appear to be evaded, except by a sort of analogy that has been instituted between the double nature of Christ, as it is called, and the complex constitution of man, as consisting of soul and body. It has been said or implied that the doctrine of the union of the divine and human natures in Christ does not involve propositions more self-contradictory than those which result from the complex constitution of man — that we may, for instance, affirm of man that he is mortal, and that he is immortal; or of a particular individual that he is dead, and that he is living (meaning by the latter term that he is existing in the world of spirits).¹⁴ The obvious answer is that there is NO analogy between these propositions and those on which we have remarked. The propositions just stated belong to a very numerous class, comprehending all those in

¹³ See Professor Stuart's Letters, 48.

¹⁴ The argument Dr. Norton makes here is perfectly correct — the analogy does not support the hypostatic union. We note, however, the fact that this JOURNAL does not accept the notion of man's "complex constitution" either.

which the same term is at once affirmed and denied of the same subject, *the term being used in different senses*; or in which terms apparently opposite are affirmed of the same subject, *the terms being used in senses not really opposed to each other*. When I say that man is mortal, I mean that his present life will terminate; when I say that he is immortal, I mean that his existence will not terminate. I use the words in senses not opposed, and bring together no ideas which are incompatible with each other. The second proposition just mentioned is of the same character with the first, and admits, as everyone will perceive, of a similar explanation. In order to constitute an analogy between propositions of this sort and those before stated, Trinitarians must say that, when they affirm that Christ is finite and not finite, omniscient and not omniscient, they mean to use the words “finite” and “omniscient” in different senses in the two parts of each proposition. But this they will not say; nor do the words admit of more than one sense.

A being of a complex constitution like man is not a being of a double nature. The very term *double nature*, when one professes to use it in a strict, philosophical sense, implies an absurdity. The nature of a being is ALL which constitutes it what it is; and when one speaks of a double nature, it is the same sort of language as if he were to speak of a double individuality. With regard to a being of a *complex constitution*, we may, undoubtedly, affirm that of a part of this constitution which is not true of the whole being; as we may affirm of the body of man that it does not think, though we cannot affirm this of man — or, on the other hand, we may affirm of the being itself what is not true of a part of its constitution, as by reversing the example just given. This is the whole truth relating to the subject. Of a being of a complex constitution, it is as much an absurdity to affirm contradictory propositions as of any other being.

According to those who maintain the doctrine of the two natures in Christ, Christ speaks of himself, and is spoken of by his Apostles, sometimes as a man, sometimes as God, and sometimes as both God and man. He speaks, and is spoken of, under these different characters indiscriminately, without any explanation, and without its being anywhere declared that he existed in these different conditions of being. He prays to that being whom he himself was. He declares himself to be ignorant of what (being God) he knew, and unable to perform what (being God) he could perform. He affirms that he could do nothing of himself, or by his own power, though he was omnipotent. He, being God, prays for the glory which he had with God, and declares that

another is greater than himself.¹⁵ In one of the passages QUOTED IN PROOF OF HIS DIVINITY, he is called the image of the invisible God; in another of these passages, he, the God over all, blessed forever, is said to have been anointed by God with the oil of gladness above his fellows; and in a third of them, it is affirmed that he became obedient to death, even the death of the cross.¹⁶ If my readers are shocked by the combinations which I have brought together, I beg them to do me the justice to believe that my feelings are the same with their own. But these combinations necessarily result from the doctrine which we are considering. Page after page might be filled with inconsistencies as gross and as glaring. The doctrine has turned the Scriptures, as far as they relate to this subject, into a book of riddles, and, what is worse, of riddles admitting of no solution. I willingly refrain from the use of that stronger language which will occur to many of my readers.

The doctrine of the Trinity, then, and that of the union of two natures in Christ, are doctrines which, when fairly understood, it is impossible, from the nature of the human mind, should be believed. They involve manifest contradictions, and no man can believe what he perceives to be a contradiction. In what has been already said, I have not been bringing arguments to disprove these doctrines; I have merely been showing that they are intrinsically incapable of any proof whatever; for a contradiction cannot be proved — that they are of such a character that it is impossible to bring arguments in their support, and unnecessary to adduce arguments against them.

Here, then, we might rest. If this proposition have been established, the controversy is at an end, as far as it regards the truth of the doctrines, and as far as it can be carried on against us by any sect of Christians. Till it can be shown that there is some ESSENTIAL mistake in the preceding statements, he who chooses to urge that these doctrines were taught by Christ and his Apostles must do this, not as a Christian, but as an unbeliever. If Christ and his Apostles communicated a revelation from God, these could make no part of it, for a revelation from God cannot teach absurdities.

But here I have no intention of resting. If I were to do so, I suppose that the old, unfounded complaint would be repeated once more, that those who reject these doctrines oppose reason to revelation; for there are men who seem unable to comprehend the possibility that the doctrines of their sect may make no part of the Christian revelation. What pretense, then, is there

¹⁵ See John 17; Mark 13:32; John 5:30; 14:28.

¹⁶ Col. 1:15ff.; Heb. 1:8, 9; Phil. 2:5-8.

for asserting that the doctrines in question are taught in the Scriptures? Certainly they are nowhere *expressly* taught. It cannot even be pretended that they are. There is not a passage from one end of the Bible to the other on which one can by any violence force such a meaning as to make it affirm the proposition “that there are three persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory”; or the proposition that Christ “was and continues to be God and man in two distinct natures and one person forever.”¹⁷ There was a famous passage in the First Epistle of John (5:7) which was believed to affirm *something like* the first-mentioned proposition; but this every man of tolerable learning and fairness, at the present day, acknowledges to be spurious. And now this is gone, there is not one to be discovered of a similar character. THERE IS NOT A PASSAGE TO BE FOUND IN THE SCRIPTURES WHICH CAN BE IMAGINED TO AFFIRM EITHER OF THOSE DOCTRINES THAT HAVE BEEN REPRESENTED AS BEING AT THE VERY FOUNDATION OF CHRISTIANITY.

What pretense, then, is there for saying that those doctrines were taught by Jesus Christ and are to be received upon his authority? What ground is there for affirming that he, being a man, announced himself as the infinite God, and taught his followers also that God exists in three persons? But I will state a broader question. What pretense is there for saying that those doctrines were taught by any writer, Jewish or Christian, of any book of the Old or New Testament? None whatever — if, in order to prove that a writer has taught a doctrine, it be necessary to produce some passage in which he has affirmed that doctrine.

What mode of reasoning, then, is adopted by Trinitarians? I answer that, in the first place, they bring forward certain passages which, they maintain, prove that Christ is God. With these passages they likewise bring forward some others, which are supposed to intimate or prove the personality and deity of the Holy Spirit. It cannot but be observed, however, that, for the most part, they give themselves comparatively little trouble about the latter doctrine, and seem to regard it as following almost as a matter of course, if the former be established. Now there is no dispute that the Father is God; and it being thus proved that the Son and Spirit are each also God, it is *inferred*, not that there are three Gods, which would be the proper consequence, but that there are three persons in the Divinity. But Christ having been proved to be God, and it being at the same time regarded by Trinitarians as certain that he was a man, it is *inferred* also that he was both God and man. The stress of

¹⁷ Westminster Assembly’s Shorter Catechism, Answers 6 and 21.

the argument, it thus appears, bears upon the proposition that Christ is God, the second person in the Trinity.

Turning away our view, then, for the present, from the absurdities that are involved in this proposition, or with which it is connected, we will proceed to inquire, as if it were capable of proof, what Christ and his Apostles taught concerning it.