

Of the Son of God and of the Holy Spirit

JOHN MILTON

We begin with this issue a reprinting of a portion of the rarely available Treatise on Christian Doctrine (ca. 1649-1660) by the British poet and statesman, John Milton (1608-1674). We will reproduce the complete sections "Of the Son of God" and "Of the Holy Spirit." These were published in 1908 in London by the British and Foreign Unitarian Association, as the third edition of the original translation from Latin by Charles Sumner in 1825 (the Latin version was published simultaneously). Milton's objections to the Trinity show a close affinity to modern arguments for non-Trinitarianism. Milton's position is Arian rather than the Christological "Socinianism" represented by this journal. He displays a detailed knowledge of the original of both Testaments as he presents the case that God is a single Person, the Father of Jesus Christ. We include the introduction to the 1908 edition by Alexander Gordon.

INTRODUCTION

In the sixth volume (published 1880) of his *Life of John Milton*, the late Professor Masson writes: "Two of his manuscripts about which, as we know, he was especially anxious just before his death [which occurred on 8 November, 1674] were the small one containing the fair transcript of his *Latin Letters of State* and the much larger one containing that

complete *Treatise of Christian Doctrine or Systematic Body of Divinity*, on which he had so long been engaged." These manuscripts were left by Milton "to the charge of the young scholar, Daniel Skinner, B.A., of Trinity College, Cambridge, who had for some time been his amanuensis"; apparently "on the understanding that Skinner would do his best to have the two books printed in Holland." On 20 November, 1676, Daniel Elzevir writes to Sir Joseph Williamson, Secretary of State, that about a year before he had agreed with Skinner to print both manuscripts, but having found "things which I judged fitter to be suppressed than published, I resolved to print neither the one nor the other." On 19 February, 1677, he writes to Skinner's father, a London merchant, stating that he will send him the manuscripts, to be placed in Williamson's hands. They came to London in a parcel addressed *To Mr. Skinner, merch*; the parcel was put into a press in the old State Paper Office in Whitehall; and there, in the latter part of 1823, this parcel was discovered by Robert Lemon, the deputy-keeper, among papers of 1677, 1678, and 1683.

By command of George IV, the editing of the treatise *De Doctrina Christiana* was entrusted to his then librarian and historiographer, Charles Robert Sumner, afterwards successively bishop of Llandaff (1826) and Winchester (1827). In 1825 Sumner published simultaneously the Latin treatise, and an English translation (revised by William Sidney Walker, a classic scholar of high rank, and a well-known Shakespearean critic). The Latin original was reprinted at Brunswick in 1827. The English translation was reproduced at Boston, Mass., in 1825 (giving rise to Channing's remarkable *Essay on Milton*); it was also included in the fourth and fifth volumes (1853) of the edition of Milton's Prose Works in Bohn's Standard Library.

Though thus placed "before the world, it seems to have found few real readers," writes Masson. Yet he adds that "it is not to be overlooked or dismissed carelessly. Not only does it throw light upon *Paradise Lost*, not only does it form an indispensable commentary to some obscure parts of that poem by presenting in explicit and categorical prose what is there imaginatively assumed and even veiled; but it tells us a good deal about Milton and his opinions besides, peculiarly and even oddly characteristic, that we should not have known otherwise, or should have known but vaguely."

To this neglect of Milton's own exposition of his ultimate views on theology, we must ascribe the attempts which from time to time have been made to identify him with opinions which he decisively rejected.

In 1679, Titus Oates, dedicating to the King his *True Narrative of the Horrid Plot*, etc., asserts that "Milton was a known frequenter of a Popish Club." In 1684, Thomas Long, in his *Compendious History of all the Popish and Fanatical Plots*, etc., affirms that "Milton was by very many suspected to be a Papist, and if Dr. Oates may be believed, was a known frequenter of the Popish Club, though he were Cromwell's Secretary." Milton's younger brother, Christopher, was deputy-recorder of Ipswich at the time of the poet's death. Later than this, according to his biographer (Mr. J.M. Rigg, in *Dict. Nat. Biog.*), "he was, or professed to be, a Roman Catholic, and accordingly, though no great lawyer, was raised by James II to the Exchequer bench, 26 April 1686, being first invested with the coif (21 April), and knighted (25 April). His tenure of office was equally brief and undistinguished. On 16 April, 1687, he was transferred to the Common Pleas, and on 6 July, 1688, he was discharged as superannuated [he was in his seventy-third year], retaining his salary." Now Sir John Perceval (1683-1748), afterwards Earl of Egremont, writes in his autobiography that Dr. Arthur Charlett told him [some time after 1699] that he had heard from Dr. Wm. Binckes, that Binckes was "at an entertainment in King James' reign, when Sir Christopher Milton . . . did then say publicly his brother was a Papist some years before he died, and that he died so." Further, Perceval writes that Dr. English told that "he had often heard Mr. Prior, the poet, say that the late Earl of Dorset told him the same thing." Thus Perceval gives us, at fourth hand, but along two lines, the ascription to Sir Christopher Milton of a statement which is evidently false; for its utterance not even the atmosphere of an "entertainment" could furnish any valid excuse. Perceval's statement was first published in 1879, in the Seventh Report of the Historical Manuscripts Commission.

Not till this present year did any persons venture to treat this story as furnishing serious evidence that Milton had preceded his brother as a convert to the Church of Rome. This fatuity has been adventured by Mr. W.H. Grattan Flood, in the *Tablet* (23 May, 1908), and by Monsignor A.S. Barnes, himself a convert, in the *Cambridge Review* (10 June, 1908). The latter fixes the "entertainment" as being an Assize Dinner at Warwick, and this on the strength of a passage, and a note, in Dr. Binckes' printed sermon of 5 Nov. 1704. Here, however, Binckes does not say that he had himself heard Sir Christopher Milton's statement. Monsignor Barnes, while too good a stickler for antiquity to attach any weight to a publication that did not appear till 1825, bases his case on the sermon of 1704,

and the publication of 1879. It may suffice to note, that in his treatise *On Christian Doctrine* Milton denies that “any preference was given” to Peter “over the other apostles”; says that the text, Matt. 16:18, 19, “is perverted by the Pope to form the charter of his authority”; repudiates transubstantiation (which he calls “anthropophagy, for it deserves no better name”) and “the Mass of the Papists,” as involving “a profanation too horrible to be even alluded to without shuddering”; maintains that “the privilege of dispensing the elements is confined to no particular man or order of men”; rejects “the fable of a purgatory” which “the Papists feign”; and more to the same purpose.

In the *Belfast Newsletter* this autumn a correspondence respecting Milton’s religious standing ran a singular course. No one invoked the authority of Titus Oates or of Monsignor Barnes. Nor did it appear that the writers (with two exceptions) were in a position to quote from the work which Masson rightly treats as Milton’s own key to his religious position. Milton was claimed as an Anglican (whereas he was an Independent); and as a Trinitarian, on the strength of isolated passages, especially from his earlier writing, interpreted in accordance with the wishes of the respective writers. There is no doubt that Milton’s writing, both in poetry and prose, exhibits a movement of theological opinion, continuous from his early days; for his was no stagnant mind. *Paradise Regained* even exhibits this movement as compared with *Paradise Lost*. For the deliberate and reasoned views which he ultimately reached, recourse must needs be had to his treatise *On Christian Doctrine*. This treatise, as Sumner observes, is “distinguished in a remarkable degree by calmness of thought, as well as by moderation of language.”

Masson well says that “Milton’s fundamental idea in the treatise is that . . . though every sane man must be naturally a theist, yet no one can have right thoughts of God by natural reason alone, and the condition of mankind as respects matters supernatural would have been that of almost complete agnosticism, but for the divine revelation contained in the Christian Scriptures. The divine origin and inspiration of these Scriptures, defined as comprising only and precisely those books of the Old and New Testaments which Protestants have accepted as canonical, is Milton’s assumption throughout.” Masson remarks that this assumption Milton does not think it necessary to prove; and accounts for the omission on the ground that Milton wrote as a believer for believers. Milton, however, does not lie open to this criticism quite so palpably as Masson implies. He distinguishes between the authenticity of the books in

question — which, he holds, may be established, as that of others cannot, by external testimony confirmed by internal evidence — and their binding authority, respecting which he says (almost quoting the Westminster Confession) “the truth of the entire volume is established by the inward persuasion of the Spirit working in the hearts of individual believers.” He further, with many Puritans, as well as Quakers, maintains that while “the written word is highly important,” yet “the external Scripture” may be, and has been, corrupted; whereas “the Spirit that leads to truth cannot be corrupted.”

On the basis of Scripture, then, to the exclusion of ecclesiastical tradition and conciliar decisions — though not disdaining all help of commentators (his favourite is Beza), or of patristic writers, whose opinions he frequently commends — Milton constructs his system; which includes in its two books (the first consisting of thirty-three, the second of seventeen chapters) not merely theology proper, but church order, and public and private duty.

In every Christian theology the Christology is a matter of supreme interest. Hence Sumner rightly advises any who are in doubt “as to the real sentiments of Milton respecting the second person of the Trinity,” to study the fifth chapter of the first book, *Of the Son of God*. He very fairly condenses its purport thus: “It is there asserted that the Son existed in the beginning, and was the first of the whole creation; by whose delegated power all things were made in heaven and earth; begotten, not by natural necessity, but by the decree of the Father, within the limits of time; endued with the divine nature and substance, but distinct from and inferior to the Father; one with the Father in love and unanimity of will, and receiving everything, in his filial as well as in his mediatorial character, from the Father’s gift.”

This chapter, and the one which follows it, *Of the Holy Spirit*, are here reprinted in full, from the second edition (1853) of Sumner’s translation.

Sumner adds that, on the Vicarious Atonement, Milton’s views leave “nothing to be desired.” This doctrine is exhibited at length in the three chapters *Of Man’s Restoration, and of Christ as Redeemer, Of the Functions of the Mediator, and of his Threefold Office, Of the Ministry of Redemption*. It was the argument, not only of Milton, but of those who, like Dr. Samuel Clarke in the eighteenth century, held a kindred view of the person of Christ, that on their system “Christ’s death was real,” as Milton puts it; which it could not have been, he affirms, on the system of “those who consider the Son as of the same essence with the Father.”

Milton does not employ the expression Original Sin. At the same time he holds, on the one hand, that all mankind did sin in Adam, and have thence incurred a moral deterioration; on the other hand, that “no one perishes, except he himself sin,” by a personal act of his own. On Predestination he endeavours to take a middle course, securing the freedom of the human will, while maintaining the Divine foreknowledge. In regard to eternal punishment his mind seems not absolutely made up. It “varies with the degree of guilt.” With Chrysostom and Luther he thinks it probable that hell is situated, not at the center of the earth, but “beyond the limits of this universe.” For, “if as has been shown from various passages of the New Testament, the whole world is to be finally consumed by fire, it follows that hell, being situated in the center of the earth, must share the fate of the surrounding universe, and perish likewise; a consummation more to be desired than expected by the souls in perdition.”

In his *Dedication*, addressed *To all the Churches of Christ, and to all who profess the Christian Faith throughout the World*, Milton says, “If I communicate the result of my inquiries to the world at large; if, as God is my witness, it be with a friendly and benignant feeling towards mankind, that I readily give as wide a circulation as possible to what I esteem my best and richest possession, I hope to meet with a candid reception from all parties, and that none at least will take unjust offence, even though many things should be brought to light which will at once be seen to differ from certain received opinions. I earnestly beseech all lovers of truth, not to cry out that the Church is thrown into confusion by that freedom of discussion and inquiry which is granted to the schools, and ought certainly to be refused to no believer, since we are ordered *to prove all things*, and since the daily progress of the light of truth is productive far less of disturbance to the Church, than of illumination and edification.”

“For my own part,” he adds, “I adhere to the Holy Scriptures alone — I follow no other heresy or sect. I had not even read any of the works of heretics, so called, when the mistakes of those who are reckoned for orthodox, and their incautious handling of Scripture, first taught me to agree with their opponents whenever those opponents agreed with Scripture. If this be heresy, I confess with St. Paul, Acts 24:14, *that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and the prophets* — to which I add, whatever is written in the New Testament. Any other judges

or paramount interpreters of the Christian belief, together with all implicit faith, as it is called, I, in common with the whole Protestant Church, refuse to recognize.”

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I. THE SON OF GOD

Prefatory Remarks

I cannot enter upon subjects of so much difficulty as the Son of God and the Holy Spirit, without again premising a few introductory remarks. If indeed I were a member of the Church of Rome, which requires implicit obedience to its creed on all points of faith, I should have acquiesced from education or habit in its simple decree and authority, even though it denies that the doctrine of the Trinity, as now received, is capable of being proved from any passage of Scripture. But since I enrol myself among the number of those who acknowledge the Word of God alone as the rule of faith, and freely advance what appears to me much more clearly deducible from the Holy Scriptures than the commonly received opinion, I see no reason why anyone who belongs to the same Protestant or Reformed Church, and professes to acknowledge the same rule of faith as myself, should take offence at my freedom, particularly as I impose my authority on no one, but merely propose what I think more worthy of belief than the creed in general acceptance. I only entreat that my readers will ponder and examine my statements in a spirit which desires to discover nothing but the truth, and with a mind free from prejudice. For without intending to oppose the authority of Scripture, which I consider inviolably sacred, I only take upon myself to refute human interpretations as often as the occasion requires, conformably to my right, or rather to my duty as a man. If indeed those with whom I have to contend were able to produce direct attestation from heaven to the truth of the doctrine which they espouse, it would be nothing less than impiety to venture to raise, I do not say a clamour, but so much as a murmur against it. But inasmuch as they can lay claim to nothing more than human powers, assisted by that spiritual illumination which is common to all, it is not unreasonable that they should on their part allow the privileges of diligent research and free

discussion to another inquirer, who is seeking truth through the same means and in the same way as themselves, and whose desire of benefiting mankind is equal to their own.

In reliance, therefore, upon the divine assistance, let us now enter upon the subject itself.

Of the Son of God

Hitherto I have considered the INTERNAL EFFICIENCY of God, as manifested in his decrees.

HIS EXTERNAL EFFICIENCY, or the execution of his decrees, whereby he carries into effect by external agency whatever decrees he has purposed within himself, may be comprised under the heads of GENERATION, CREATION, and the GOVERNMENT OF THE UNIVERSE.

First, GENERATION, whereby God, in pursuance of his decree, has begotten his only Son; whence he chiefly derives his appellation of Father.

Generation must be an external efficiency, since the Father and Son are different persons; and the divines themselves acknowledge this, who argue that there is a certain emanation of the Son from the Father (which will be explained when the doctrine concerning the Holy Spirit is under examination); for though they teach that the Spirit is co-essential with the Father, they do not deny its emanation, procession, spiration, and issuing from the Father, — which are all expressions denoting external efficiency. In conjunction with this doctrine they hold that the Son is also co-essential with the Father, and generated from all eternity. Hence this question, which is naturally very obscure, becomes involved in still greater difficulties if the received opinion respecting it be followed; for though the Father be said in Scripture to have begotten the Son in a double sense, the one literal with reference to the production of the Son, the other metaphorical, with reference to his exaltation, many commentators have applied the passages which allude to the exaltation and mediatorial functions of Christ as proof of his generation from all eternity. They have indeed this excuse, if any excuse can be received in such case, that it is impossible to find a single text in all Scripture to prove the eternal generation of the Son. Certain, however, it is, whatever some of the moderns may allege to the contrary, that the Son existed in the beginning, under the name of the logos or word, and was the first of the whole creation, by whom afterwards all other things were made both in heaven

and earth.¹ John 1:1-3, “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” etc.; 17:5, “and now, O Father, glorify me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.” Col. 1:15, 18, “the first-born of every creature.” Rev. 3:14, “the beginning of the creation of God.” 1 Cor. 8:6, “Jesus Christ, by whom are all things.” Eph.3:9, “who created all things by Jesus Christ.” Col. 1:16, “all things were created by him and for him.” Heb. 1:2, “by whom also he made the worlds,” whence it is said, v. 10, “thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth.”²

All these passages prove the existence of the Son before the world was made, but they conclude nothing respecting his generation from all eternity. The other texts which are produced relate only to his metaphorical generation, that is, to his resurrection from the dead, or to his unction to the mediatorial office, according to St. Paul’s own interpretation of the second Psalm: “I will declare the decree; Jehovah hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee” — which the apostle thus explains, Acts 13:32, 33, “God hath fulfilled the promise unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second Psalm, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.” Rom. 1:4, “declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” Hence, Col. 1:18, Rev. 1:5, “the first begotten of the dead.” Heb. 1:5, speaking of the exaltation of the Son above the angels; “for unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? and again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son.” Again, 5:5, 6, with reference to the priesthood of Christ: “so also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest, but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee: as he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever,” etc. Further, it will be apparent from the second Psalm, that God has begotten the Son, that is, has made him a king: v. 6, “yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Sion”; and then in the next verse, after having anointed his King, whence the name of *Christ* is derived, he says, “this day have I begotten thee.” Heb. 1:4, 5, “being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.” No other name can be intended but that of Son, as the following

¹ Milton’s Arianism differs from the Socinian position represented by this journal — editors.

² See chapter VII, on the Creation, treatise “On Christian Doctrine.” [All footnotes belong to Gordon’s edition of 1908, except when otherwise noted.]

verse proves: “for unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee?” The Son also declares the same of himself. John 10:36, “say ye of him whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest, because I said, I am the Son of God?” By a similar figure of speech, though in a much lower sense, the saints are also said to be begotten of God.

It is evident however upon a careful comparison and examination of all these passages, and particularly from the whole of the second Psalm, that however the generation of the Son may have taken place, it arose from no natural necessity, as is generally contended, but was no less owing to the decree and will of the Father than his priesthood or kingly power, or his resuscitation from the dead. Nor is it any objection to this that he bears the title of begotten, in whatever sense that expression is to be understood, or of God’s “own Son,” Rom. 8:32. For he is called the own Son of God merely because he had no other Father besides God, whence he himself said, that “God was his Father,” John 5:18. For to Adam God stood less in the relation of Father, than of Creator, having only formed him from the dust of the earth; whereas he was properly the Father of the Son made of his own substance. Yet it does not follow from hence that the Son is co-essential with the Father, for then the title of Son would be least of all applicable to him, since he who is properly the Son is not coeval with the Father, much less of the same numerical essence, otherwise the Father and the Son would be one person; nor did the Father beget him from any natural necessity, but of his own free will — a mode more perfect and more agreeable to the paternal dignity; particularly since the Father is God, all whose works, and consequently the works of generation, are executed freely according to his own good pleasure, as has been already proved from Scripture.

For questionless, it was in God’s power consistently with the perfection of his own essence not to have begotten the son, inasmuch as generation does not pertain to the nature of the Deity, who stands in no need of propagation; but whatever does not pertain to his own essence or nature, he does not effect like a natural agent from any physical necessity. If the generation of the Son proceeded from a physical necessity, the Father impaired himself by physically begetting a co-equal; which God could no more do than he could deny himself; therefore the generation of the Son cannot have proceeded otherwise than from a decree, and of the Father’s own free will.

Thus the Son was begotten of the Father in consequence of his decree, and therefore within the limits of time, for the decree itself must have been anterior to the execution of the decree, as is sufficiently clear from the insertion of the word “to-day.” Nor can I discover on what passage of Scripture the asserters of the eternal generation of the Son ground their opinion, for the text in Micah 5:2 does not speak of his generation, but of his works, which are only said to have been wrought “from of old.” But this will be discussed more at large hereafter.

The Son is also called “only begotten.” John 1:14, “and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father”; v. 18, “the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father”; 3:16, 18 “he gave his only begotten Son.” 1 John 4:9, “God sent his only begotten Son.” Yet he is not called one with the Father in essence, inasmuch as he was visible to sight, and given by the Father, by whom also he was sent, and from whom he proceeded; but he enjoys the title of only begotten by way of superiority, as distinguished from many others who are also said to have been born of God. John 1:13, “which were born of God.” 1 John 3:9, “whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin.” James 1:18, “of his own will begat he us with the word of truth.” 1 John 5:1, “whosoever believeth . . . is born of God.” 1 Peter 1:3, “which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope.” But since throughout the Scriptures the Son is never said to be begotten, except, as above, in a metaphorical sense, it seems probable that he is called *only begotten* principally because he is the one mediator between God and man.

So also the Son is called the “first born.” Rom. 8:29, “that he might be the first born among many brethren.” Col. 1:15, “the first born of every creature”; v. 18, “the first born from the dead.” Heb. 1:6, “when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world.” Rev. 3:14, “the beginning of the creation of God” — all which passages preclude the idea of his co-essentiality with the Father, and of his generation from all eternity. Thus it is said of Israel, Exod. 4:22, “thus saith Jehovah, Israel is my son, even my first born”; and of Ephraim, Jer. 31:9, “Ephraim is my first born”; and of all the saints, Heb. 12:23, “to the general assembly of the first born.”

Hitherto only the metaphorical generation of Christ has been considered; but since to generate another who had no previous existence, is to give him being, and that if God generate by a physical necessity, he can generate nothing but a co-equal Deity, which would be inconsistent with self-existence, an essential attribute of Divinity; (so that according to the

one hypothesis there would be two infinite Gods, or according to the other the *first* or *efficient cause* would become the *effect*, which no man in his senses will admit); it becomes necessary to inquire how or in what sense God the Father can have begotten the Son. This point also will be easily explained by reference to Scripture. For when the Son is said to be “the first born of every creature,” and “the beginning of the creation of God,” nothing can be more evident than that God of his own will created, or generated, or produced the Son before all things, endued with the divine nature, as in the fulness of time he miraculously begat him in his human nature of the Virgin Mary. The generation of the divine nature is described by no one with more sublimity and copiousness than by the apostle to the Hebrews, 1:2, 3, “whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person,” etc. It must be understood from this, that God imparted to the Son as much as he pleased of the divine nature, nay, of the divine substance itself, care being taken not to confound the substance with the whole essence, which would imply, that the Father had given to the Son what he retained numerically the same himself; which would be a contradiction of terms instead of a mode of generation. This is the whole that is revealed concerning the generation of the Son of God. Whoever wishes to be wiser than this, becomes foiled in his pursuit after wisdom, entangled in the deceitfulness of vain philosophy, or rather of sophistry, and involved in darkness.

Since, however, Christ not only bears the name of the only begotten Son of God, but is also several times called in Scripture God, notwithstanding the universal doctrine that there is but one God, it appeared to many who had no mean opinion of their own acuteness, that there was an inconsistency in this; which gave rise to an hypothesis no less strange than repugnant to reason, namely, that the Son, although personally and numerically another, was yet essentially one with the Father, and that thus the unity of God was preserved.

But unless the terms unity and duality mean the same with God as with man, it would have been to no purpose that God had so repeatedly inculcated the first commandment, that he was the one and only God, if another could be said to exist besides, who also himself ought to be believed in as the one God. Unity and duality cannot consist of one and the same essence. God is one *ens*, not two; one essence and one subsistence, which is nothing but a substantial essence, appertain to one *ens*; if two subsistences or two persons be assigned to one essence, it

involves a contradiction of terms, by representing the essence as at once simple and compound. If one divine essence be common to two persons, that essence or divinity will either be in the relation of a whole to its several parts, or of a genus to its several species, or lastly of a common subject to its accidents. If none of these alternatives be conceded, there is no mode of escaping from the absurd consequences that follow, such as that one essence may be the third part of two or more.

There would have been no occasion for the supporters of these opinions to have offered such violence to reason, nay even to so much plain scriptural evidence, if they had duly considered God's own words addressed to kings and princes, Psalm 82:6, "I have said, Ye are gods, and all of you are children of the most High"; or those of Christ himself, John 10:35, "if he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the Scripture cannot be broken — "; or those of St. Paul, 1 Cor. 8:5, 6, "for though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or earth (for there be gods many and lords many,) but to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things," etc.; or lastly of 2 Peter 1:4, "that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature," which implies much more than the title of gods in the sense in which that title is applied to kings; though no one would conclude from this expression that the saints were co-essential with God.

Let us then discard reason in sacred matters, and follow the doctrine of Holy Scripture exclusively. Accordingly, no one need expect that I should here premise a long metaphysical discussion, and advocate in all its parts the drama of the personalities in the Godhead: since it is most evident, in the first place, from numberless passages of Scripture, that there is in reality but one true independent and supreme God; and as he is called one (inasmuch as human reason and the common language of mankind, and the Jews, the people of God, have always considered him as one person only, that is, one in a numerical sense) let us have recourse to the sacred writings in order to know who this one true and supreme God is. This knowledge ought to be derived in the first instance from the Gospel, since the clearest doctrine respecting the one God must necessarily be that copious and explanatory revelation concerning him which was delivered by Christ himself to his apostles, and by the apostles to their followers. Nor is it to be supposed that the Gospel would be ambiguous or obscure on this subject; for it was not given for the purpose of promulgating new and incredible doctrines respecting the nature of God,

hitherto utterly unheard of by his own people, but to announce salvation to the Gentiles through Messiah the Son of God, according to the promise of the God of Abraham. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him," John 1:18. Let us therefore consult the Son in the first place respecting God.

According to the testimony of the Son, delivered in the clearest terms, the Father is that one true God, by whom are all things. Being asked by one of the scribes, Mark 12:28, 29, 32, which was the first commandment of all, he answered from Deuteronomy 6:4, "the first of all the commandments is, 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord'"; or as it is in the Hebrew, "Jehovah our God is one Jehovah." The scribe assented; "there is one God, and there is none other one but he"; and in the following verse Christ approves this answer. Nothing can be more clear than that it was the opinion of the scribe, as well as of the other Jews, that by the unity of God is intended his oneness of person. That this God was no other than God the Father, is proved from John 8:41, 54, "we have one Father, even God . . . it is my Father that honoureth me; of whom ye say that he is your God"; 4:21, "neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father." Christ therefore agrees with the whole people of God, that the Father is that one and only God. For who can believe it possible for the very first of the commandments to have been so obscure, and so ill-understood by the Church through such a succession of ages, that two other persons, equally entitled to worship, should have remained wholly unknown to the people of God, and debarred of divine honours even to that very day? especially as God, where he is teaching his own people respecting the nature of their worship under the gospel, forewarns them that they would have for their God the one Jehovah whom they had always served, and David, that is, Christ, for their King and Lord. Jer. 30:9, "they shall serve Jehovah their God, and David their King, whom I will raise up unto them." In this passage Christ, such as God willed that he should be known or worshipped by his people under the gospel, is expressly distinguished from the one God Jehovah, both by nature and title. Christ himself therefore, the Son of God, teaches us nothing in the gospel respecting the one God but what the law had before taught, and everywhere clearly asserts him to be his Father. John 17:3, "this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent"; 20:17, "I ascend unto my Father and your Father;

and to my God and your God”: if therefore the Father be the God of Christ, and the same be our God, and if there be none other God but one, there can be no God beside the Father.

Paul, the apostle and interpreter of Christ, teaches the same in so clear and perspicuous a manner, that one might almost imagine the inculcation of this truth to have been his sole object. No teacher of catechumens in the Church could have spoken more plainly and expressly of the one God, according to the sense in which the universal consent of mankind has agreed to understand unity of number. 1 Cor. 8:4-6, “we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one: for though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth (as there be gods many and lords many), but to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.” Here the expression “there is none other God but one,” excludes not only all other essences, but all other persons whatever; for it is expressly said in the sixth verse, “that the Father is that one God”; wherefore there is no other person but one; at least in that sense which is intended by divines, when they argue from John 14:16, that there is *another*, for the sake of asserting the personality of the Holy Spirit. Again, to those “who are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, God the Father of whom are all things” is opposed singly; he who is numerically “one God,” to “many gods.” Though the Son be another God, yet in this passage he is called merely “Lord”; he “of whom are all things” is clearly distinguished from him “by whom are all things,” and if a difference of causation prove a difference of essence, he is distinguished also in essence. Besides, since a numerical difference originates in difference of essence, those who are two numerically, must be also two essentially. There is “one Lord,” namely, he whom “God the Father hath made,” Acts 2:36, much more therefore is the Father Lord, who made him, though he be not here called Lord. For he who calls the Father “one God,” also calls him one Lord above all, as Psalm 110:1, “the Lord saith unto my Lord” — a passage which will be more fully discussed hereafter. He who calls Jesus Christ “one Lord,” does not call him one God, for this reason among others, that “God the Father hath made him both Lord and Christ,” Acts 2:36. Elsewhere therefore he calls the Father both God and Lord of him whom he here calls “one Lord Jesus Christ”; Eph. 1:17, “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ”; 1 Cor. 11:3, “the head of Christ is God”; 15:28, “the Son also himself shall be subject unto him.” If in truth the Father be called “the Father of Christ,” if he be called “the

God of Christ,” if he be called “the head of Christ,” if he be called the God to whom Christ, described as “the Lord,” nay, even as “the Son himself, is subject, and shall be subjected,” why should not the Father be also the Lord of the same Lord Christ, and the God of the same God Christ; since Christ must also be God in the same relative manner that he is Lord and Son? Lastly, the Father is he “of whom,” and “from whom,” and “by whom,” and “for whom are all things,” Rom. 11:36; Heb. 2:10. The Son is not he “of whom,” but only “by whom”; and that not without an exception, viz., “all things which were made,” John 1:3, “all things, except him which did put all things under him,” 1 Cor. 15:27. It is evident therefore that when it is said “all things were by him,” it must be understood of a secondary and delegated power; and that when the particule “by” is used in reference to the Father, it denotes the primary cause, as John 6:57, “I live by the Father”; when in reference to the Son, the secondary and instrumental cause: which will be explained more clearly on a future occasion.

Again, Eph. 4:4-6, “there is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all, and in you all.” Here there is one Spirit, and one Lord; but the Father is one, and therefore God is one in the same sense as the remaining objects of which unity is predicated, that is, numerically one, and therefore one also in person. 1 Tim. 2:5, “there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” Here the mediator, though not purely human, is purposely named man, by the title derived from his inferior nature, lest he should be thought equal to the Father, or the same God, the argument distinctly and expressly referring to one God. Besides, it cannot be explained how anyone can be a mediator to himself on his own behalf; according to Gal. 3:20, “a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one.” How then can God be a mediator of God? Not to mention that he himself uniformly testifies of himself, John 8:28, “I do nothing of myself,” and 8:42, “neither came I of myself.” Undoubtedly therefore he does not act as a mediator to himself; nor return as a mediator to himself. Rom. 5:10, “we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.” To whatever God we were reconciled, if he be one God, he cannot be the God by whom we are reconciled, inasmuch as that God is another person; for if he be one and the same, he must be a mediator between himself and us, and reconcile us to himself by himself; which is an insurmountable difficulty.

Though all this be so self-evident as to require no explanation — namely, that the Father alone is a self-existent God, and that a being which is not self-existent cannot be God, — it is wonderful with what futile subtleties, or rather with what juggling artifices, certain individuals have endeavoured to elude or obscure the plain meaning of these passages; leaving no stone unturned, recurring to every shift, attempting every means, as if their object were not to preach the pure and unadulterated truth of the gospel to the poor and simple, but rather by dint of vehemence and obstinacy to sustain some absurd paradox from falling, by the treacherous aid of sophisms and verbal distinctions, borrowed from the barbarous ignorance of the schools.

They defend their conduct, however, on the ground, that though these opinions may seem inconsistent with reason, they are to be received for the sake of other passages of Scripture, and that otherwise Scripture will not be consistent with itself. Setting aside reason therefore, let us have recourse again to the language of Scripture.

The passages in question are two only. The first is John 10:30, “I and my Father are one” — that is, one in essence, as it is commonly interpreted. But God forbid that we should decide rashly on any point relative to the Deity. Two things may be called one in more than one way. Scripture saith, and the Son saith, *I and my Father are one* — I bow to their authority. Certain commentators conjecture that they are one in essence — I reject what is merely man’s invention. For the Son has not left us to conjecture in what manner he is one with the Father (whatever member of the Church may have first arrogated to himself the merit of the discovery), but explains the doctrine himself most fully, so far as we are concerned to know it. The Father and the Son are one, not indeed in essence, for he had himself said the contrary in the preceding verse, “my Father, which gave them me, is greater than all” (see also 14:28, “my Father is greater than I”), and in the following verses he distinctly denies that he made himself God in saying, “I and my Father are one”; he insists that he had only said as follows, which implies far less, 10:36, “say ye of him whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?” This must be spoken of two persons not only not co-essential, but not co-equal. Now if the Son be laying down a doctrine respecting the unity of the divine essence in two persons of the Trinity, how is it that he does not rather attribute the same unity of essence to the three persons? Why does he divide the indivisible Trinity? For there cannot be unity without totality. Therefore,

on the authority of the opinions holden by my opponents themselves, the Son and the Father without the Spirit are not one in essence. How then are they one? It is the province of Christ alone to acquaint us with this, and accordingly he does acquaint us with it. In the first place, they are one, inasmuch as they speak and act with unanimity; and so he explains himself in the same chapter, after the Jews had misunderstood his saying: 10:38, “believe the works; that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him”; 14:10, “believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself, but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.” Here he evidently distinguishes the Father from himself in his whole capacity, but asserts at the same time that the Father remains in him; which does not denote unity of essence, but only intimacy of communion. Secondly, he declares himself to be one with the Father in the same manner as we are one with him — that is, not in essence, but in love, in communion, in agreement, in charity, in spirit, in glory. John 14:20, 21, “at that day ye shall know that I am in the Father, and ye in me, and I in you: he that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father”; 17:21, “that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us”; 17:23, “I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me”; 17:22, “the glory which thou gavest me I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one.” When the Son has shown in so many modes how he and the Father are one, why should I set them all aside? why should I, on the strength of my own reasoning, though in opposition to reason itself, devise another mode, which makes them one in essence; or why, if already devised by some other person, adopt it, in preference to Christ’s own mode? If it be proposed on the single authority of the Church, the true doctrine of the orthodox Church herself teaches me otherwise; inasmuch as it instructs me to listen to the words of Christ before all other.

The other passage, and which according to the general opinion affords the clearest foundation for the received doctrine of the essential unity of the three persons, is 1 John 5:7, “there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one.” But not to mention that this verse is wanting in the Syriac and the other two Oriental versions, the Arabic and the Ethiopic, as well as in the greater part of the ancient Greek manuscripts, and that in those manuscripts

which actually contain it many various readings occur, it no more necessarily proves those to be essentially one, who are said to be one in heaven, than it proves those to be essentially one, who are said in the following verse to be one on earth. And not only Erasmus, but even Beza, however unwillingly, acknowledged (as may be seen in their own writings) that if John be really the author of the verse, he is only speaking here, as in the last quoted passage, of an unity of agreement and testimony. Besides, who are the three who are said to bear witness? That they are three Gods will not be admitted; therefore neither is it the one God, but one record or one testimony of three witnesses, which is implied. But he who is not co-essential with God the Father, cannot be co-equal with the Father. This text, however, will be discussed more at large in the following chapter.

But, it is objected, although Scripture does not say in express words that the Father and Son are one in essence, yet reason proves the truth of the doctrine from the texts quoted above, as well as from other passages of Scripture.

In the first place, granting (which I am far from doing) that this is the case, yet on a subject so sublime, and so far above our reason, where the very elements and first postulates, as it were, of our faith are concerned, belief must be founded, not on mere reason, but on the Word of God exclusively, where the language of the revelation is most clear and particular. Reason itself, however, protests strongly against the doctrine in question; for how can reason establish (as it must in the present case) a position contrary to reason? Undoubtedly the product of reason must be something consistent with reason, not a notion as absurd as it is removed from all human comprehension. Hence we conclude, that this opinion is agreeable neither to Scripture nor reason. The other alternative therefore must be adopted, namely, that if God be one God, and that one God be the Father, and if notwithstanding the Son be also called God, the Son must have received the name and nature of Deity from God the Father, in conformity with his decree and will, after the manner stated before. This doctrine is not disproved by reason, and Scripture teaches it in innumerable passages.

But those who insist that the Son is one God with the Father, consider their point as susceptible of ample proof, even without the two texts already examined (on which indeed some admit that no reliance is to be placed), if it can be demonstrated from a sufficient number of Scripture testimonies that the name, attributes, and works of God, as well as divine

honours, are habitually ascribed to the Son. To proceed therefore in the same line of argument, I do not ask them to believe that the Father alone and none else is God, unless I shall have proved, first, that in every passage each of the particulars above mentioned is attributed in express terms only to one God the Father, as well by the Son himself as by his apostles. Secondly, that wherever they are attributed to the Son, it is in such a manner that they are easily understood to be attributable in their original and proper sense to the Father alone; and that the Son acknowledges himself to possess whatever share of Deity is assigned to him by virtue of the peculiar gift and kindness of the Father; as the apostles also testify. And lastly, that the Son himself and his apostles acknowledge throughout the whole of their discourses and writings, that the Father is greater than the Son in all things.

I am aware of the answer which will be here made by those who, while they believe in the unity of God, yet maintain that the Father alone is not God. I shall therefore meet their objection in the outset, lest they should raise a difficulty and outcry at each individual passage. They twice beg the question, or rather require us to make two gratuitous concessions. In the first place, they insist, that wherever the name of God is attributed to the Father alone, it should be understood οὐσιωδῶς, not ὑποστατικῶς, that is to say, that the name of the Father, who is unity, should be understood to signify the three persons, or the whole essence of the Trinity, not the single person of the Father. This is on many accounts a ridiculous distinction and invented solely for the purpose of supporting their peculiar opinion; although in reality, instead of supporting it, it will be found to be dependent on it, and therefore if the opinion itself be invalidated, for which purpose a simple denial is sufficient, the futile distinction falls to the ground at the same time. For the fact is, not merely that the distinction is a futile one, but that it is no distinction at all; it is a mere verbal quibble, founded on the use of synonymous words, and cunningly dressed up in terms borrowed from the Greek to dazzle the eyes of novices. For since *essence* and *hypostasis* mean the same thing,³ it follows that there can be no real difference of meaning between the adverbs *essentially* and *substantially* (*hypostatic*), which are derived from them. If then the name of God be attributed to the Father alone *essentially*, it must also be attributed to the Father alone *substantially*; since one substantial essence means nothing else than one hypostasis,

³ See Chapter II of the treatise "On Christian Doctrine."

and vice versa. I would therefore ask my adversaries, whether they hold the Father to be an abstract *ens* or not? Questionless they will reply, the primary *ens* of all. I answer, therefore, that as he has one hypostasis, so must he have one essence proper to himself, incommunicable in the highest degree, and participated by no one, that is, by no person besides, for he cannot have his own proper hypostasis, without having his own proper essence. For it is impossible for any *ens* to retain its own essence in common with any other thing whatever, since by this essence it is what it is, and is numerically distinguished from all others. If therefore the Son, who has his own proper hypostasis, have not also his own proper essence, but the essence of the Father, he becomes on their hypothesis either no *ens* at all, or the same *ens* with the Father; which strikes at the very foundation of the Christian religion. The answer which is commonly made, is ridiculous — namely, that although one finite essence can pertain to one person only, one infinite essence may pertain to a plurality of persons; whereas in reality the infinitude of the essence affords an additional reason why it can pertain to only one person. All acknowledge that both the essence and the person of the Father are infinite; therefore the essence of the Father cannot be communicated to another person, for otherwise there might be two, or any imaginable number of infinite persons.

The second postulate is, that wherever the Son attributes Deity to the Father alone, and as to one greater than himself, he must be understood to speak in his human character, or as mediator. Wherever the context and the fact itself require this interpretation, I shall readily concede it, without losing anything by the concession; for however strongly it may be contended, that when the Son attributes everything to the Father alone, he speaks in his human or mediatorial capacity, it can never be inferred from hence that he is one God with the Father. On the other hand, I shall not scruple to deny the proposition, whenever it is to be conceded not to the sense of the passage, but merely to serve their own theory; and shall prove that what the Son attributes to the Father, he attributes in his filial or even in his divine character to the Father as God of God, and not to himself under any title or pretence whatever.