

# Unitarianism Defined\*

## Lecture Two: The Trinity — Continued

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I now come to consider the claims of the Trinity, or the grounds on which it is held as a doctrine of Revealed Religion, and especially of the Gospel. How often and how confidently has it been called preeminently the doctrine of the Bible — alleged to be written out, nay, standing out on its pages from Genesis to Revelation in such bold relief, that “he who runs may read”! And yet nothing is farther from the truth. Beginning with the Hebrew race, in all their generations, and for whose special instruction the Old Testament was compiled, they are a standing testimony that it teaches no such doctrine. With a firmness and clearness of statement which admit of neither tampering nor evasion, they hold, and always held, that their Sacred Books declare most emphatically the doctrine of the strict, simple Unity of God. Christian Trinitarian expositors, Catholic and Protestant, affirm the same; and confess, with Bishop Burnet, “that it would not be easy to prove the Trinity from the Old Testament.” Finally, the Christian Fathers did not so much as pretend that the doctrine was plainly taught in the New Testament, or by Christ and his apostles. On the contrary, they often use the utmost ingenuity to account for the obscurity in which it was kept by them, as well as for the total ignorance concerning it of the favored people. What Christ and his apostles did not plainly teach would not be likely to appear in what the latter wrote. Some

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of the Fathers, as Athanasius, assigned as a reason why Christ did not declare his Deity to the Jews, that the world could not yet bear the doctrine; and he affirmed that the disciples had no knowledge of it before Pentecost.<sup>1</sup> Theodoret declares that, before his death, Jesus did not appear as God either to the Jews or the apostles.<sup>2</sup> And Chrysostom not only says that Christ did not immediately reveal his Deity, but that Mary did not herself know the secret that he was God Supreme.<sup>3</sup>

All through the writings of these men, so far as they are preserved to us, we have their acknowledgments that even after the death of Christ his apostles did not openly teach the doctrine; alleging the fact as a proof of their prudence and wisdom — on the one hand as regarded the Jews, who held so tenaciously the unity of Jehovah, and whose prejudices would be shocked; on the other, the Gentiles, who might thereby be confirmed in their polytheism. Chrysostom would have us believe that the apostle begins his epistle to the Hebrews by declaring that “it was *God* who spake by the prophets, and not that *Christ* himself had spoken by them, because their minds were weak, and they were not able to bear the doctrine concerning Christ.”<sup>4</sup> Ecumenius, on the text in Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians, eighth chapter and sixth verse — “There is one God the Father, and one Lord Jesus Christ” — says: “The apostle speaks cautiously of the Father and the Son, calling the Father One God, lest they should think there were two Gods; and the Son One Lord, lest they should think there were two Lords.”<sup>5</sup> And Theophylact, on 1 Timothy 2:5 — “For there is One God, and One Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” — says: “Because polytheism then prevailed, the apostle did not speak plainly of the Deity of Christ, lest he should be thought to introduce many Gods.” None of these writers are later than A.D. 320. Of course if Christ be not plainly taught by the apostles to be God, no such Trinity as is alleged can have been.

It were here pertinent to ask what authority had these men — for whom no special illumination, not to say inspiration, can with any show of plausibility be pretended, nay, which is never assumed for them — to foist upon the church this great “mystery,” to charge upon the sacred writers this strange concealment? Every man of common sense will

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<sup>1</sup> *Serm. Maj. de fide*, in *Montf. Collect. Pat.* vol. 2, 39.

<sup>2</sup> *Op.* 2, 15, ed. Hal.

<sup>3</sup> *Op.* 3, 289.

<sup>4</sup> In *Heb.* 1. *Op.* vol. 10, 1756.

<sup>5</sup> *Op.* vol. 1, 492.

answer, none whatever. The claim of such authority is preposterous, and not for a moment to be regarded. So far, however, as their admissions go to the point that Holy Scripture, on its face and in plain language, does not teach the doctrine, the same have been made in every age since down to our own — alike by Romanist and Protestant. Learned men of the Romish Communion, though firmly holding to their Trinitarianism, make the same admissions. Sacroboscus, in his “Defense of the Council of Trent,” declares that “the Arians appealed to the Scriptures in support of their opinion; and that they were not condemned by the Scriptures, but by Tradition.” Alphonso Salmeron says: “Christ did not receive testimony from the Evangelists that he was God.”<sup>6</sup> Cardinal Hosius says: “We believe the doctrine of a Triune God, because we have received it by tradition, though not mentioned at all in Scripture.”<sup>7</sup> And, most distinctly and boldly, Remundus, addressing the Lutherans and Calvinists, warns them in these words:

You will be obliged to confess, however unwillingly, that if you rely on the Scriptures you will be compelled to yield to the modern Arians, *no less than the Fathers were to those of ancient times*; unless, like them, you appeal to Tradition, and the unanimous consent of the Church. *They were taught by Tradition* that there are Three Consubstantial Persons of the same nature and essence which we worship as One God in the fullness of the Trinity; and also, that in Jesus Christ there are Two perfect substances, but only One Person. Tell me, if you listen to the Scriptures, and the express word of God alone, with what arms can you expect to engage with these men? In what way can you extricate yourselves from the *innumerable* arguments which they advance, unless you cling to Tradition, and the consent of the Church, as the only anchor of safety?<sup>8</sup>

In our own day, Mr. Newman, a convert to Rome from the Church of England, in his “Arians of the Fourth Century,” says:

It may startle those who are but little acquainted with the popular writings of this day (fourth century), yet I believe the most accurate consideration of the subject will lead us to acquiesce in the statement as a general truth, that the doctrines in question (the

<sup>6</sup> *Comm. in Ev. Prolog.* 26, tom. 1, 394.

<sup>7</sup> *Conf. Cath. fid. Christi.* cap. 27.

<sup>8</sup> *Hist. of Rise and Progress of Heresies*, Pt. 1.1.2, cap. 15.

Trinity, Atonement, etc.) have never been learned merely from Scripture. Surely the Sacred volume was never intended, and was not adapted, to teach our creed. . . . From the first, it has been the error of heretics to neglect the information provided for them, and to attempt for themselves a work for which they are unable — the eliciting of systematic doctrine from the scattered notices of the truth which Scripture contains.<sup>9</sup>

But Trinitarians of the Protestant Faith have confessed the obscurity of the Sacred Text upon this subject. The zealous French Reformer, Jurieu,<sup>10</sup> though holding that to deny the Trinity was to be guilty of one of the deadliest heresies, allows, in his Pastoral Letters, that it was not known in its proper shape till the early part of the fourth century, at the Council of Nice — nay, till the Council of Constantinople — and even proves, *from the Fathers*, that during the three first centuries it was the universal opinion that the Son was not equal to the Father, nor his existence of the same duration.

Bishop Smallridge, of the English Church, has this language:

It must be owned that the doctrine of the Trinity, as it is proposed in our Articles, our Liturgy, our Creeds, is not in so many words taught us in the Holy Scriptures. What we profess in our prayers we nowhere read in Scripture, that the One God, the One Lord, is not one only Person, but Three Persons in one substance. There is no such text in Scripture as this, that “the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in unity, is to be worshipped.” No one of the inspired writers hath expressly affirmed that in the Trinity none is afore or after other, none is greater or less than another, but the whole three persons are co-eternal together and co-equal.<sup>11</sup>

But the most striking acknowledgment upon this point from a learned Protestant was made in a speech delivered to the Irish House of Lords by Dr. Clayton, Bishop of Clogher, on the second of February, 1756. He said:

The strongest abettors of the Nicene Creed do not so much as pretend that the doctrine of the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son is to be found in the Scriptures, but only in the writings of

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<sup>9</sup> 55.

<sup>10</sup> Cited in Ben Mordecai’s (H’y Taylor’s) *Apol.* 1, 46.

<sup>11</sup> *Sixty Sermons*, 348.

some of the primitive Fathers. And I beseech your Lordship to consider whether it is not absolutely contradictory to the fundamental principles on which the Reformation of the religion from Popery is built, to have any doctrine established as a rule of faith which is founded barely on Tradition, and is not plainly and clearly revealed in the Scriptures?

I cannot refrain from adding what has a strong bearing on this entire discussion, that he said:

As to the ecclesiastical history of this and the following century (the third and fourth), I must inform your Lordships that all those books which were published *in opposition* to the decrees of the Council of Nice have been destroyed — so that all our information comes from the other side. And of all those histories suffered to come down to our hands, I do not know of one, except Eusebius of Cesarea (who says little on the subject), but what is so filled with falsehood, vagaries or contradictions, that their veracity is not to be depended on.

If, then, the Trinity be not a doctrine *expressly taught* in Scripture, it can be at the best but a matter of *inference*. And so accordingly it is often declared to be by Trinitarian Protestants. The Romanist takes it on tradition, but they on inference. Mr. Carlile, in his “Jesus Christ the Great God our Saviour,” admits that: “The doctrine of the Trinity is rather a doctrine of inference and of indirect intimation, than a doctrine directly and explicitly declared.”<sup>12</sup> And still further: “That a doctrine of inference ought never to be placed on a footing of equality with a doctrine of direct and explicitly revelation.” The celebrated Oxford Tracts ask: “Where is this solemn and comfortable mystery (of the Trinity) formally stated in Scripture as we find it in the Creeds?”<sup>13</sup> and proceed to declare it a thing of inference. The same Bishop Smallridge, from whom I just now quoted, goes on, in close connection, to say: “But although these truths are not read in Scripture, yet they may easily, regularly, and undeniably be inferred from Scripture.” And well does he add: “If, indeed, it can be shown that these inferences are wrong, they may safely be rejected.” Beyond all question they may; and this is the very thing I am trying to show, and hope to make plain.

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<sup>12</sup> 81.

<sup>13</sup> Tracts for the Times, nos. 45 and 81.

The case stands simply thus: There is not a shadow of pretense for calling it a plainly-revealed doctrine of Scripture. It is, as evidently, a doctrine of inference, and inference merely. Christ is never in Scripture styled God, identically, or, if you prefer, equally, the same being as the Father, the Infinite, the Supreme, “the Only True God.” But, things are said of him, or by him, which it is supposed could have been spoken only of or by Jehovah, from which it is inferred that Christ is God. Many things are ascribed to the Holy Spirit which are supposed peculiar to Jehovah; therefore it is inferred that the Holy Spirit is God. Again: since this would look like having Three Gods, and yet God being undeniably and over and over again declared to be but ONE, it is further inferred that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit must all be that One God. And so, by heaping inference on inference, comes this Trinity in Unity. How unreasonable to call such a doctrine an essential, fundamental article of Christian Faith! The moment it is permitted to establish and require assent to one article on such grounds, where are we to stop? What might not be established in this way? By a little ingenuity, and false interpretation of Scripture language, we might infer the most absurd notions, and open a floodgate of scandal and reproach on the Truth. No; the very term *inferred* negatives any allegation that the doctrine *inferred* is one *revealed* or *declared* to be true, and all claim to its being essential to be believed.

Holy Scripture, then, being our witness — and our appeal lies there — Holy Scripture nowhere affirms the doctrine. I say this deliberately. The direct, positive, literal, express declarations of Scripture affirm the opposite. “There is One God; and there is none other but He.”<sup>14</sup> No creed in Christendom expresses the doctrine in Scripture language, for the simple reason that it is impossible. Its stoutest advocates, who most insist on calling it a plain doctrine of the Bible, who are most ready to demand faith in it as a Fundamental, have never defined, because they cannot define it, in the words of Scripture. In saying this, it is with full knowledge that our Trinitarian brethren profess to hold, nevertheless, the doctrine of the Divine Unity; nor would I cast the least doubt or imputation on their sincerity in that profession. But they hold it in such a way as seems to me virtually to deny, and practically do it away, by merging it in this great “mystery.” I repeat that I do not object to the Trinity for its mere mysteriousness. As I have already said, I find mystery everywhere. But I do object to its unscripturalness, self-contradictoriness, absurdity,

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<sup>14</sup> Mark 12:32; compare 29 and 34; 1 Tim. 2:5; James 2:19.

polytheistic aspect. I can see it in no other light. I can think of nothing more absurd — nothing which savors more of polytheism. That many Trinitarians conscientiously and honestly, as well as devoutly, adore the Trinity as a Divine mystery, I gladly admit; but they make or find a mystery where I do not and cannot. In me, therefore, it would be plain polytheism to worship the Three Persons each as God; and all who do so worship are solemnly bound to see to it by their allegiance to the Truth — “the Truth as it is in Jesus” — that they have express Scripture warrant. Moreover, I say, nay, I insist, and on this am ready to join issue, that they have no right in this or in any case to set that up as a fundamental article of Faith, to make that a condition of holding the Christian name, or of Christian fellowship, which is not taught with the utmost directness, explicitness, and perspicuity in the Christian Scriptures. And such is not the Trinity.

Let us pass now to examine some of the arguments by which it is attempted to maintain the doctrine. We are referred to the use of the plural pronouns in the Old Testament, where God speaks of Himself, and of the plural form of the Hebrew proper names of the Deity. In the first case, only three instances occur in the whole of the Old Testament. “And God said, Let *us* make man in our image, after our likeness” (Gen. 1:26). “And the Lord said, Go to, let *us* go down” (Gen 11:7). “Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for *us*?” (Is. 6:8). Now it is an obvious answer to any argument drawn from such citations that if these *three* seem to indicate a plurality of persons in the Godhead, the supposition is utterly rebutted by the fact that the singular pronoun is used thousands on thousands of times, implying that God is but one Person. Besides, it is a common idiom in all languages, and in every age, for persons in authority to speak of themselves in the plural; as, for example, “We, Victoria, by the Grace of God, Queen,” etc. Nothing is more common in the Old Testament. In Ezra, Artaxerxes, king of Persia, begins his royal reply, “The letter which ye sent unto *us*” — and proceeds, as if to show the idleness of the argument under consideration — “hath been plainly read before *me*” (Ezra 4:18). That this idiom is only a common one, and by no means indicative of any plurality of persons in the being using it, is proved conclusively in that the same Lord or Jehovah who in the second of the two passages cited from Genesis says, “Let *us* go down,” says in another, with a precisely similar purpose, “*I* will go down” (Gen. 18:21).

In the second case, the plural forms of Hebrew names of God, the simple explanation is found in what the best Hebrew Grammars say. Wilson, in his, says: "Words that express dominion, dignity, majesty, are commonly put in the plural."<sup>15</sup> And Prof. Stuart, in his, says even more distinctly: "For the sake of emphasis, the Hebrews commonly employed most of the words which signify Lord, God, etc., in the plural form, but with the sense of the singular. This is called the *pluralis excellentiae*."<sup>16</sup> Learned Trinitarians, Romanists, as Bishop Tostat, Cardinal Cajetan, Bellarmine — Protestant, as Calvin, Grotius, South, Campbell, Michaelis, Rosenmüller, with a host of others, among whom are the best critics and lexicographers, alike recognize this rule of the Hebrew syntax. Trinitarians being our authority, the point is too plain to be longer dwelt upon. Not even a plurality of persons in the Godhead, much less any definite plurality such as a trinity, can be with any propriety argued from the plural form of Hebrew words.

Turning to the New Testament, the scene at the baptism of our Lord by John is sometimes cited in proof of the Trinity, because the Sacred Three were obviously present together and united in one act; the Father by the voice from the opened heavens; the Son standing in the water; the Holy Spirit in the descending dove.<sup>17</sup> But surely, if any three objects could be distinct, different, apart, these were. Besides this, there are really but three passages in the New Testament which are cited with any show of reason. The first is the Baptismal Formula at the close of Matthew's Gospel (Matt. 28:19). But nothing is there said of the oneness in any sense of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; no hint the remotest given that they are one. Then as to the preposition rendered *in*, it were better rendered *to* or *into*; while the words *the name of* are in the original simply an idiom of the Hebraistic Greek in which the New Testament is written, redundant in the translation and making obscure its meaning. "Go ye, therefore," says the Saviour, "and make disciples of all nations; baptizing them *to* or *into* the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." In other words, consecrating them by baptism to the faith and worship of the Father, the Supreme and All-bountiful Source and Giver of Good, spiritual and temporal; to the open acceptance and service of that Gospel of truth and salvation which He has revealed and published by His Son; and to the right improvement of those exhaustless and gracious influences by which He

<sup>15</sup> 270.

<sup>16</sup> 326.

<sup>17</sup> Matt. 3:16, 17; Mark 1:10, 11; Luke 3:21, 22.



moves on the soul, and is ever ready to aid, guide, quicken, and strengthen in all goodness and duty.

The second passage is the benediction with which the apostle concludes his second epistle to the Corinthian church (2 Cor. 13:14). The same remark is true of this as of the previous passage, that there is no mention, no hint, of the oneness of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. It is simply the expression of an affectionate, devout, and earnest wish on the part of Paul that “The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” — the divine favors, benefits, blessings, privileges conferred on man through Christ and his Gospel — “the Love of God” — of that Sovereign and glorious Being, that all-gracious Father, who in His own essential and perfect nature “is Love” itself (1 John 4:8, 16) — “and the Communion of the Holy Ghost” — the full participation of those gifts and graces which are the earnest and seal of the Spirit of God shed abroad in the hearts of all faithful seekers — might be with all them whom he had brought into the Christian church. Where, in either of these passages, is the least trace of this amazing dogma of “Three Persons in one God”?

But the third passage to which I referred is the famous text of the “Three Heavenly Witnesses.” And in respect to this I feel bound to say that did I not know that this text had been recently cited in a pulpit of this city, without a hint that its integrity had been even disputed, as an unquestioned and express scriptural proof of the doctrine under discussion, I should feel it labor wholly uncalled for, and mere waste of time, to recapitulate even in the briefest manner, as I now intend, the evidence of its utter spuriousness.

Briefly, then. The verse is not found in any ancient Greek MS.; that is, in any MS. of an age prior to the sixth century. Bishop Marsh calls it “a passage which no ancient Greek manuscript contains, and which no ancient Greek father ever saw.”<sup>18</sup> Of one hundred and fifty MSS. of an alleged age as early as the sixteenth century, which are extant, and have been collated, and which contain the First Epistle of St. John, only two contain this verse. One of these, known as the *Codex Ravianus*, was considered by Wetstein a gross imposture; and Michaelis, who says, “it is the second of the two manuscripts which have 1 John 5:7,” and that “it contains one half the sum total of the evidence in favor of that passage,” also pronounces it “a mere imposture”; and adds: “Let it be considered in future as having no critical existence, and never quoted in support of

<sup>18</sup> Lecture 9.

this verse.”<sup>19</sup> The other is known as the *Codex Montfortianus*. It comprises the whole New Testament, and is in the library of Trinity College, Dublin. It is really the only *genuine* manuscript which contains the verse; but it is of as recent date as the close of the fifteenth century. Bishop Marsh says that “it made its appearance about the year 1520; and that the MS. had just been written when it first appeared is highly probable, because it appeared at a critical juncture, and its appearance answered a particular purpose.”<sup>20</sup> What this “particular purpose” was, we shall presently see. Michaelis pronounces the manuscript “unimportant — on account of its modern date,”<sup>21</sup> and says that “the *spurious* passage in the first epistle of St. John was admitted into no manuscript before the sixteenth century.”<sup>22</sup> The very tenacity with which Michaelis held the doctrine of the Trinity made him the more desirous to keep this “spurious passage” out of the sacred text.<sup>23</sup> Speaking of the “immense weight of evidence against” it, this great critic says:

One should suppose that no critic, especially if a Protestant, would hesitate a moment to condemn as spurious a passage which is contained in no ancient Greek manuscript, is quoted by no Greek Father, was unknown to the Alogi in the second century, is wanting in both Syriac versions, in the Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopic, and Sclavonian versions, is contained only in the Latin, and is wanting in many manuscripts even of this version, was quoted by none of the Latin Fathers of the four first centuries, and to some of them, who lived so late as the sixth century, was either wholly unknown, or was not received as genuine.

The “particular purpose” which the “appearance” of the Montfortian MS. “answered,” according to Bishop Marsh, in the extract a little above, was this: The celebrated Erasmus published his first edition of the New Testament in the original Greek, accompanied by his own Latin translation, in the year 1516, and the second in 1519. From both he omitted the verse. Assailed violently from various quarters, his answer was: “I will not undertake to add what is not in the Greek manuscripts before me.” At last, however, so confident was he of his ground, he declared that if any Greek MS. could be found which contained it, he would insert it in his

<sup>19</sup> Marsh’s *Michaelis*, vol. 2, 294, 297.

<sup>20</sup> Marsh’s *Lectures*, part 6, 23-26.

<sup>21</sup> Marsh’s *Michaelis*, vol. 2, 284.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 328.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 4, 441.

next edition; and shortly after, the Dublin MS. before referred to, the *Codex Montfortianus*, was produced. Suspecting it all the while to be a translation from the Vulgate or Latin, as he has left on record, he nevertheless felt compelled by the word he had passed; and therefore did insert the verse in his third edition, in 1522.

In that very year Luther published the first edition of his German Bible, and omitted it. He evidently, as Michaelis thinks, must have deemed the manuscript which compelled Erasmus to insert it “of no authority”; and nothing, either of evidence or of censure, could induce him to admit the text into any of the subsequent editions which he issued. In the last edition, which was printed while he was living, that of 1546, he made this request:

I request my friends and my foes, my masters, printers, and readers, to let this New Testament continue mine. If they find faults in it, let them make another. I know well what I make; I see also well, what others make. But this Testament shall remain Luther’s German Testament. Nowadays there is neither measure nor end of mending and bettering. Let every man therefore take heed of false copies, for I know how unfaithfully and untruly others have reprinted what I have printed.

Yet, strange to say, Luther had hardly been thirty years dead before, with “Luther’s Translation” on the title page, the passage was foisted into his German text!

The verse is not in the old Latin Vulgate, or in any Latin version older than the ninth century. It is not in the old Syriac version of the third century, or in the manuscripts of the Ethiopic, nearly as ancient. It is not in the Egyptian Arabic, or indeed in any of the Arabic versions, or in the Armenian, all of the fourth century. It is not in the ancient French version, more than one thousand years old; or in the Illyrian, used in Russia, Muscovy, and by all the Slavonic races. It is rejected by the highest critical authorities of modern times, of every shade of theological opinion; besides Michaelis, as we have seen, by Westein, Simon, Griesbach, Le Clerc, Matthaei, Tischendorf, all Trinitarians. Bishop Lowth denies the use of his understanding to the man who would defend it. Dr. Middleton, Bishop Marsh, Archbishop Newcome, Mr. Horne, Prof. Porson, the unrivalled Greek scholar, Dr. Adam Clarke, the great Methodist commentator, abandon it. The *Eclectic Review* says: “We are

unspeakably ashamed that any modern divines should have contended for retaining a passage so indisputably spurious.” The *London Quarterly*, long considered the champion of the English Established Church, reviewing Bishop Burgess’ vindication of the verse, says:

The Bishop, then, on his own avowal, has been able to dismiss every doubt respecting the genuineness of a verse which is found only in a single Greek manuscript, and that of recent date; which is not quoted by a single Greek Father, nor in express terms by any Latin Father, before the sixth century; which is wanting in the more ancient manuscripts of the Vulgate or Latin; and even in those in which it is found, appears in such a variety of shapes as clearly to show that those transcribers, who thought proper to insert the verse, had no certain reading before them. We have the most sincere respect for the Bishop of St. David’s, but we cannot peruse the declaration without astonishment.<sup>24</sup>

The *British Critic*, the acknowledged organ of the Establishment, reviewed, in 1830, the whole controversy, and thus closed:

Believing that the verse is unquestionably spurious, and consequently that its authenticity cannot be maintained, except by the admission of principles which would tend inevitably to destroy our confidence in the authenticity of every other passage in the New Testament, we have witnessed with uneasiness the attempt of the learned Prelate (Bishop Burgess) to establish its claim to an inspired origin, and have wondered at the arguments by which he thinks its claim is proved.

To cite one more name. Dr. Davidson, Professor of Theology in the Independent College, near Manchester, England, in his Lectures, summing up the evidence on both sides, says: “It is almost superfluous to add that many of the most strenuous defenders of the doctrine of the Trinity have maintained the verse to be spurious; and that the great body of critics is opposed to its authenticity.”<sup>25</sup> Our American Prof. Stuart, of Andover, doubts, and Prof. S.H. Turner, of New York, rejects it. All the above are Trinitarian authorities; but to any who know their reputation, quite as weighty are Unitarians like Newton, Locke, Lardner, Milton, Priestley, and our own Norton. And yet this merest interpolation, this spurious text,

<sup>24</sup> Vol. 26, 324 et seq.

<sup>25</sup> 145.

is still retained in our Bibles, is read in and preached from the pulpit, by men who do or should know its spuriousness, and holds its place in the Book of Common Prayer of the English Church and the Episcopal Church in these United States; where, in the Epistle for the first Sunday after Easter, it is of course read publicly once at least in the year, and probably “without note or comment,” as part and parcel of the “inspired word of God”!

But admit for the sake of argument that the verse is the genuine testimony of St. John, the Evangelist, the disciple whom Jesus loved. What then? Of what is it the proof? Of the doctrine of the Trinity? of the Trinity in Unity, and Unity in Trinity? of Three Persons in one God? By no means. Nothing of the kind. Mr. Wardlaw says: “It has been allowed by Trinitarians of the highest fame not to be so.” Calvin says that “the expression, *three are one*, must signify in agreement, and not in essence.” Beza interprets it in the same way; and Macknight, paraphrasing the verse, says: “These three are one, in respect of *the unity of their testimony*.” The very structure and syntax of the Greek original demand this interpretation, and will properly bear no other.

If you will turn to the passage in our received version, you will see, I think, as corroborating the results of the best criticism upon it, that the spurious words break and mar the sense of the context. No reference, no allusion, had been made to “the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost” by the apostle; but in the sixth verse he had mentioned the “water,” the “blood,” and “the Spirit.” Hence very naturally and consecutively he proceeds, as the passage should read: “For there are three that bear record: the Spirit, and the water, and the Blood; and these three agree in one.”

I return now to my main course of argument; and I say, in the first place, that the doctrine of the Trinity, if the ultimate appeal lies to the Scriptures — as with all consistent Protestant Christians it surely must — is disproved by their general tenor and drift. That is uniform to the point of the simple and strict Unity of God. Who that is familiar with the Scripture will deny this? But in the next place, the positive, clear, unmistakable declarations of Scripture disprove it. What can be more positive, clear, unmistakable in its import, than the language of Jehovah by Moses: “Hear, O Israel! the Lord, our God, is One Lord! And thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and

with all thy might.” This, too, cited and emphasized as it is by our blessed Saviour himself,<sup>26</sup> as the first and great commandment. Moreover, note the care with which the sacred writers everywhere distinguish and keep distinct the Father from the Son, our God from His Anointed. So remarkable is this fact, so strong and emphatic the language in which it expresses itself, that one is almost tempted to think they foresaw this great corruption of subsequent ages, and would do what they could to guard the church against any confounding of Christ with God. For example, St. Paul says: “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.” So again: “One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism; One GOD and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all!”<sup>27</sup> In the introductory salutations of the apostolic epistles, mark how consistent with these statements is the language; holding this view, how naturally it expresses itself: “Grace be unto you, and peace, from God, our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort.” This is from the second epistle to the Corinthians; but you will find it but an example of the uniform style of St. Paul, and with the slightest possible variation of the other apostles.

Then further; by admission of distinguished Trinitarian scholars and divines, even of Protestant communions, as we have seen, the doctrine of the Trinity is not clearly, but at the most obscurely taught in the Scriptures; is to be learned by uninitiated readers, not from the Scriptures but from the church. The entire Romish Church takes exactly this ground, and in its extreme form; holding that though the doctrine be *in* the Scriptures, the laity cannot find it there, since it is in charge of the church through its traditions, and to the church must they come to learn it. Since my residence in Brooklyn, the Rev. Dr. Seabury, of New York, one of the most learned ministers of the Episcopal Church, and at that time editing *The Churchman*, declared in its columns that there were two rules for the guidance of Christian believers: the one, the Rule of Faith, which regarded all things *plainly taught* in Scripture, the conduct of life, and the duties of man; the other, the Rule of Tradition, which regarded things

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<sup>26</sup> Deut. 6:4; Matt. 22:38; Mark 12:29.

<sup>27</sup> 1 Cor. 8:4-6; Eph. 4:5-6.

*obscurely taught* there, for example, the *Trinity*, etc. Again, the various and contradictory forms of stating and expounding the doctrine, the different senses in which it is accepted and held, raise a violent presumption against the doctrine as belonging to Christ's holy gospel; suggest and furnish reasons for the weightiest doubts of its truth; and, at the very least, stamp it as unimportant, and refute all pretension to its being fundamental and essential. Any doctrine essentially belonging to Revealed Religion would be clearly stated in the Records of that Revelation; it would be so clearly stated there that nobody could mistake it; it would be one and uniform in all ages of the church, and everywhere in Christendom.

Here remember that no such words or phrases as the Trinity, the Triune God, the God-man occur in Scripture. They savor certainly far more of the subtleties of the schoolmen than of the simplicity of Holy writ. But not only are no such words and phrases to be found there, where is the known case of any man for the first time taking these Scriptures into his hands, whether in the original or in translation, in any language, in any land, with no previous knowledge of the religion they teach, with no preconceptions of Christian doctrine of any kind, and of himself finding there the dogmas which those words and phrases are made to cover? Where, in the authentic records of any Christian missionary labors, throughout the world, Papal or Protestant, is there such an experience? I confidently believe, nowhere. No such case can be cited. No such experience is recorded or known.

On the other hand we can produce two, each beyond challenge for simplicity and integrity, though very opposite in personal conditions and circumstances, of men who found in their own independent search of the Bible, the one in the original languages in which it was written, the other in a translation into his vernacular tongue, the doctrine of the strict simple Unity of God, the Father, and the subordination and inferiority therefore of our blessed Lord. I refer to the late Rajah Ram Mohun Roy, at Calcutta, and William Roberts, at Madras. The one, a high-caste Brahmin, accomplished in all the learning of the Orient; having every advantage of wealth, social position, and personal culture. The other, a native of the lowest caste, the servant of an English resident merchant, uneducated, obscure, and poor. The latter read the Bible in a translation into his own tongue, but could not find there the doctrine which the liturgy of his master's church, the Church of England, embodied, but only our own simple Unitarian faith. The former sought the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, and studied them profoundly, with the same result. The

Baptist Mission House at Serampore, of which Dr. Marshman was at the head, anxious to show him his mistake, detailed, as their most learned associate, the Rev. Wm. Adam, to confer with and convince the Rajah of his error, and lead him to the truth. But lo! the Rajah refuted his teacher, and converted Mr. Adam to Unitarianism; and when the Rev. Mr. Schmidt of the Baptist Mission, and Dr. Marshman, saw fit to animadvert in *The Friend of India*, of which the latter was editor, upon the first Christian publication of Ram Mohun Roy, entitled "The Precepts of Jesus," etc., being extracts from the discourses of our Lord, a discussion arose between the Rajah and Dr. M., in which the former showed himself a most skillful, able, and learned critic, and as a controversialist displayed the most generous Christian temper. His "Final Appeal" closed the controversy. Such cases, though they do not absolutely prove the truth of Unitarianism, do yet, especially in the absence of similar cases on the opposite side, increase the antecedent probability that it has a prevailing Scripture basis, and in the Christian church has a right to be.

Where, then, do we stand? We desire, we aim to get back to the original, simple, primitive Christianity — the Christianity of Christ and his apostles; to recover the faith which was in the beginning, long before the age of Systematic Theology. Systematic Theology — what is it the world over, but the piling up of human opinion? "Jesus," says Hagenbach, "is not the author of a *dogmatic theology*, but the 'author and finisher of our faith'; not the founder of a school, but emphatically the founder of religion and of the church." Again he says: "The first disciples of the Lord were, like their Master, far from propounding dogmatic systems."<sup>28</sup> So Neander: "When, in the after course of development, the power of Christ's spirit, which subordinated the human element to itself, no longer predominated, but the human individuality asserted its own importance, then partial systems arose, running counter to each other, which, in one way and another, did great injury to the cause of divine truth."<sup>29</sup> Our appeal, therefore, is finally and confidently to the Scriptures. We hold no peculiar or distinguishing doctrine which cannot be stated in the express, unaltered, unqualified words of Holy writ; a thing which our Trinitarian brethren cannot do for theirs.

But we are charged with holding mere denials, with holding a purely negative faith. We answer that we do deny, in every way and form in

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<sup>28</sup> *History of Doctrines*, vol. 1, 33, 35.

<sup>29</sup> *History of the Church*, 6th Boston ed., vol. 1, 337.



which it is ever stated by those from whom we differ, the Trinity. We do deny that God subsists in Three Persons, in every intelligible or proper sense of that expression. We do deny the propriety of speaking of or addressing either the Son or the Holy Spirit as the Supreme God. We do deny the right, the propriety, the Gospel lawfulness of worshipping either of them as the Supreme God. In these denials we glory; because our allegiance to Scripture, our very reverence of God, our loyalty and obedience to Christ compel us to make them. But is this all? Have we nothing but denials, negations? Far, very far from it. We affirm as distinctly, as emphatically as any, a positive, scriptural faith. We affirm the strict, simple, undivided, Unity of GOD. We affirm that He is One Person, One Being, One Conscious Intelligence. We affirm that the FATHER alone is the GOD of the New Testament. We affirm that to Him only are our prayers, supplications, confessions, adoration, thanksgivings, praises, our supreme homage and worship due. And finally, we affirm our full and unquestioning faith in the Father, in the Son, and in the Holy Ghost; we affirm it as sincerely, devoutly, heartily, gratefully as any who bear the Christian name, and call Christ Master and Lord.

Thus denying, and thus affirming, we stand fast by our faith. Our confidence is in God, who is "able to make us stand." "To his own Master" we know and rejoice that "each standeth or falleth." While, therefore, we repudiate all that weak human presumption which might wish or attempt to rule us out of the Christian church, "by the grace of God" our place is there, and there we mean to stay. But we rejoice that we stand, however firm and unquestioning in our own positive faith, on a broad and generous platform of hope for the world, and the largest charity. We have neither hard names nor harsh treatment for any from whom we dissent. We see alike in all, the children of One God, the Universal Father of the one great family on earth and in heaven. Differ we may, nay, differ we must, on many points from our orthodox brethren; but differ as we may, we agree, too, in far more, and those the more important ones, would they but be just and informed. We will hold our differences firmly in proportion as they seem to us important, but even then charitably. And we will pray and strive, as the great consummation, that we may thus "all come at length into the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."