

Who Was Jesus Christ?

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George Frederick Simmons was born in Boston, Massachusetts on March 24, 1814; he died in Concord, Massachusetts on September 5, 1855. He graduated from Harvard in 1832, and after being employed as a private tutor, prepared for the ministry at Cambridge Divinity School, where he completed his course in 1838. He was ordained the same year as an evangelist of the Unitarian denomination, and at once went to Mobile, Alabama, where he began his ministry. Owing to his decided opposition to slavery, he remained there only until 1840, when he was obliged to fly for his life, and barely escaped the fury of a mob. In November, 1841, he was ordained pastor of the Unitarian church at Waltham, Massachusetts.

In the meantime he had become deeply interested in certain theological questions which he felt he could not solve while engaged in pastoral work, and so resigned in the spring of 1843 and sailed for Europe, where he remained until October, 1845, spending most of the time at the University of Berlin, and being brought much in contact with the German historian Neander. In February, 1848, he was called to Springfield, Massachusetts as the successor of Dr. William B.O. Peabody. Here, while he was greatly admired by part of his congregation, others regarded him with less favor, and in 1851 he was compelled to resign, after preaching two sermons on a riotous assault that had been made in the town on George Thompson, the English anti-slavery apostle.

In January, 1854, he was installed pastor of a church at Albany, New York, but in the summer of 1855 he was attacked by typhus fever, from the effects of which he never rallied. Mr. Simmons was distinguished by an acutely philosophical mind, a strong sense of right, and a thoughtful and reverent spirit. "I knew him well," said his classmate, Samuel Osgood, "loved him much, and respected him even more." He was retiring in his habits, and his somewhat unsocial nature was no doubt an obstacle in the way of his exercising a proper influence on his flock. He published "Who was Jesus Christ?" a tract (Boston, 1839); "Two Sermons on the Kind Treatment and on the Emancipation of Slaves, preached at Mobile, with a Prefatory Statement" (1840); "A Letter to the So-Called 'Boston Churches'" (1846); "The Trinity," a lecture (1849); "Public Spirit and Mobs," two sermons delivered at Springfield on the Sunday after the Thompson riot (1851); and "Faith in Christ the Condition of Salvation" (1854).

Six of his sermons were published in one volume soon after his death (Boston, 1855). We reprint here the tract "Who Was Jesus Christ?" printed for the American Unitarian Association (Boston: James Munroe & Co., 1839).

Who was Jesus Christ? None but the fool and the sluggard can listen to this question with indifference. I invite you, reader, to attend me while I reply to it. And may the Great Fountain of Light shed His beams to illuminate our path, that we may not grope darkly, that we may not blindly stand, that we may not be swelled with ignorant vain-glory, or boast of aught but of that which springs from Him.

Who was Jesus of Nazareth? He was the Mediator of God's revelation to mankind. For God *hath* revealed Himself. This we take for granted. And, at the outset, let us comprehend, as best we may, the meaning of that high declaration. When we speak of God, we mean the God of nations, the God of the storm and of the summer air, the Lord of life and death; we mean the Creator of the Universe, the Ruler of the distant stars; we mean the God of battles, that striketh down the proud. We mean, in short, the Infinite and Eternal Mind, whose nature no mortal can fathom, whose existence no creature can comprehend, who liveth and liveth the prime Source and Fount of being, and the heart of all that is. All this must enter into our minds when we take upon our lips His sacred name, and say that He hath revealed Himself to His children. This position we assume, without discussion; and also that the New Testament contains the faithful record of that revelation.

Thus far does the whole Christian church move on together; but no farther. For when I proceed to assert, as I do, that Jesus Christ was the Messenger and Son of God, immediately a large body separates from me, maintaining that he was God himself, that through no inferior instrument, but in His own essence, did the Great First Cause appear among men, and that Jesus of Nazareth was even He.

Against this declaration, before which, could we fully comprehend it, our whole nature would sink confused, I steadily set myself and strenuously war. I maintain on the contrary that Jesus was the Messenger and Son of God. This is my first position. Simply to establish it, the proof is so ample that we can view only a small part.

According to the Scriptures, which we have assumed to be a faithful record of the revelation, Jesus constantly speaks of himself and is spoken of by others as Sent from God the Father, as inferior to Him, as dependent on Him, as deriving from Him all his power. Here are some of his own words: "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and *Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.*" "My Father is greater than I." "*All power is given unto me.*" "*I can of myself do nothing.*" "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but *the will of him that sent me.*" "Go to my brethren, and say to them, I ascend unto my

Father and your Father, and to my God and your God.” This is the constant tenor of his language.

He always *acted* as a finite being, dependent on God. He was subject to the common wants of nature — ate, slept, wept, and was pained even to agony. He frequently addressed God in prayer, as at the grave of Lazarus and on the cross.

The language used by others with regard to him corresponded with this simple view. The very names “Son of God” (not “God the Son,” nor any such dark appellation), “Christ,” that is, the anointed of God (“God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power”), “Mediator” (“For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus”) necessarily imply subordination. But, to go a step farther, which of the names that we find applied to him did he himself choose as his habitual designation? He chose one singular, and not given to him by any other person in the gospel narrative; and he chose it and attracted to it frequent and marked attention for the very purpose, as it seems to me, of resisting that tendency to deify him, which he perceived to exist and which has since proved so fatal. He called himself the *Son of Man* to impress upon his hearers that he was an offspring of the human race, and the example of its capability, that he was a brother, a fellow subject, and the universal model. Such was the human spirit formed to be. He was the Son of Man; and whatever more this may signify, it is plainly a term of inferiority. The great Creator we do not call by any such appellation.

To go higher, we add that God Himself is represented as declaring the doctrine which we advocate. “And lo, a voice from heaven, saying, *This is my beloved Son* in whom I am well pleased.”

It would truly seem that no truth in the Bible was taught more clearly, expressly and repeatedly than this of the derived and subordinate nature of Jesus Christ. Once it formed the express topic of conversation between him and his disciples. “When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist, some Elias, and others Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?” Here then the very question of our present inquiry is put; and here, if anywhere, might we expect the true nature of the Lord to be revealed. How then do the apostles answer? Do they say “Thou art the Lord God Almighty,” “Thou art the living God”? They would have said so, if the doctrine of the Deity of Jesus were true, and if they had known it. But no, nothing of this kind. “Simon Peter answered and said, *Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God.*” Son of God, this is the name chosen by the apostles to designate and magnify him; and Christ answered with marked approval, “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona; for flesh and blood have not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” Yet if he were the Supreme himself, how utterly insufficient and unworthy (not to say false) was Peter’s reply! Son of God then is his legitimate title of honor.

Now the very name Son implies a derived existence. So do, still more strongly, all the names by which he is called; and the positive declarations of his inferiority are so numerous that I am obliged to abstain from quoting them. There are three hundred texts in which it is taught either directly or by clearest implication.

Suppose it possible, however, that Jesus for some reason unknown to us concealed from his followers the knowledge of his true nature until after his death. Did the day of Pentecost make any alteration in the testimony of his ministers? Listen to Peter on that very day, when the people of all nations crowd around him for satisfaction. Would you not then expect to find the fundamental truth of the Religion discovered? "Ye men of Israel," he says, "hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth, *a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you . . .*" Does not this make it evident that the apostles then regarded him as a being instrumental and inferior to the Supreme?

We may then, without any remnant of doubt, rely on the express, distinct, emphatic and repeated declarations of that truth, which was from the beginning the most natural to believe, that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messenger of God, created, sanctified and sent by Him.

Now since this is so, it is impossible that he was God. He could not be at once the sender and the sent. The texts which I have quoted, and to which I have referred, prove that Jesus was a created finite being, sent by God. He could not therefore have been the uncreated, infinite Being who sent him.

In order to escape this inference, so obvious that it hardly seems necessary to state it, the theory of the Double Nature is invented. But I think it will be apparent to you that this hypothesis affords here no relief whatever. For what we have proved, we have proved not of one nature of Christ or of another, but of his mind itself; and even the advocates of the Double Nature do not suppose that he had more than one mind. Now it has abundantly appeared that this one mind, this one spiritual existence, this self of Jesus (if we may so speak) was the inferior and instrument of the Supreme Being. That self could not therefore have been the *same* as the Supreme Being.

But as this has been called, and perhaps is, the turning point of the discussion, it may be well to give it more attention. And since the hypothesis regards the very internal construction of the Savior's soul, it can be examined only by a process somewhat abstract, by the reasoning of metaphysics.

Do you not perceive that the essence of Mind consists in its different faculties being connected together by one consciousness, which gives to it the conviction that it is the same person in all its acts and in all the different epochs of its life, which furnishes the idea of self, and which makes one know that there cannot be two selves to the same person, which enables one to consider his whole being as single under the name of "I" or "me"? It is to this single Mind or Self that all influences, sensations, communications are addressed, through whatever

part of our constitution (or through whatever “nature,” if you prefer that phraseology) they may be received. Thus, if my body is wounded, it is I that feel it; if the affections of the heart are anguished, it is I that experience the pain; if my understanding is revolted by an absurdity, or my hopes are blighted by disaster, it is I that am disgusted or despond. It is always the same I, or one Mind, that experiences whatever is experienced. It is not the body that suffers when wounded, although we use that license of language; for when my mind separates itself from the body, or lies dormant as in a swoon or at death, you may torture the nerves as much as you please without causing me the slightest uneasiness. Unless the mind is pained there is no pain. If my heart is wounded by affliction, it is I that suffer through my affections; and the terms “heart,” “affections” are only names which we give to different sensibilities, capacities, or modes of action of the Soul, and do not at all detract from the strict unity of the Single Mind. I beg you, if you are a believer in Orthodoxy, to weigh this until you rightly estimate it. For is it not entirely within everyone’s power of comprehension?

Now, whatever we have shown with regard to Jesus, we have shown of this one Mind, not of any supposed part of his constitution, nor of one or another character which he assumed. Whatever we have shown, therefore, must necessarily be to the exclusion of anything inconsistent with it. If the one Mind of Jesus was a derived existence, it could not be the Underived Existence. The advocates of the Double Nature cannot, and do not, maintain that he had more than one Mind; for where there are two or more minds, there are two or more beings. If Jesus therefore was, himself (that is, by his one mind), a finite being, he was not, himself, the Infinite Being.

I maintain, therefore, in these pages, not only the unity of God, but the unity of His Son. Jesus Christ is one. The contrary doctrine is that in him were united the nature of a man and the nature of God, without any commixture or confusion, perfect God and perfect Man, yet so as to form one Mind, and so that he could speak of himself by the word I, sometimes meaning only his human nature, and sometimes meaning only his divine. This is in itself (is it not?) manifestly impossible. For whenever we use the word I, we must refer to the whole Being, to that Self which gives us our identity and holds together all the faculties and parts of our constitution; and which would, in any conscious being different from Man, hold together and personify all the different parts of which he might be composed, or which might be called his natures. This law of Mind is universal. Every Intelligence using the word “I” must of necessity mean his whole, his single being.

What support, then, my friend, is proposed to us for this doctrine, which seems to me so absurd and monstrous, and which cannot but seem to you at least strange and incomprehensible. The proof must be sought in Scripture. But it is not pretended (although it may astonish those to know it who, coinciding in the popular belief, have never investigated its proof), *it is not pretended* that the doctrine of the Double Nature is taught there. It is supposed to be a matter of

inference merely, from certain texts which are alleged to be irreconcilable with each other on any other hypothesis.

Thus confessedly devoid of all direct proof, this celebrated cornerstone of creeds is, on the contrary, fatally inconsistent with certain particular texts and with the whole tenor of the New Testament. But that we may not lose ourselves in vague declarations, let us restrict ourselves to one example.

In reference, as some think, to the day of judgment, but, as I believe, to the destruction of Jerusalem and overthrow of Judaism¹ (of which the disciples had earnestly inquired the epoch, saying, “*When* shall these things be? And what shall be the *sign* of thy coming and of the end of the age?”), he declares, “Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.” Here he declares that he did not know when that which he prophesied would happen. Now, if he were omniscient, he did (whether by one nature or another, it makes no difference), he did in fact know it perfectly well. With all the earnestness therefore with which we would deliver Jesus from the charge of prevarication, do we deny his infinite knowledge, his equality with the Father in any sense, and maintain his true and entire inferiority.

This text is one of singular decisiveness because it precludes the reply, which our ears are accustomed to expect, that he speaks in his human nature. For he doth expressly speak of himself as the Son of God, or in what is called his *divine* nature. The Father doth know; but the Son doth not. Nor can I see any possible escape from the compulsion of this text. Orthodoxy may change shapes like Proteus; but still this enemy clings to it, and forces it to disclose itself. The shifting Mystery is brought at last to a most exigent alternative. It must yield or rebel against its Lord.

It has no answer. It can have no refuge, but some new masterstroke of evasion. There *is* no answer, reader. Christ has stamped his meaning too plainly on his words, for us of necessity to doubt. On nothing that regarded himself did he dwell so constantly and strongly as on his inferiority to the Father. Yield, then, I beg you, if you have hitherto resisted, to the manifest power of his word. “The Father is greater than I” — than *I*, and what can we suppose him to mean by *I* but that one mind in which his true being consisted? Is it not plain that if he had another, an Infinite nature, by which he was equal with the Father, and was in fact the Supreme God himself, he here prevaricated and deceived those who put their trust in him? Do you blame me then for rejecting such a supposition with the utmost aversion; and for laying it down, as I now once more do, to be the teaching of the New Testament, as well as the dictate of sober sense, that Jesus Christ was one, and that, in that unity, he was subordinate to God; that he was sent into the world, was God’s Messenger; that it is his high prerogative to be called God’s Son. The force of this last, his legitimate title of honor, is a separate subject of discussion. We have here shown that he was not the Supreme Being,

¹ *Editor’s note:* Jesus’ reference is in fact to the Parousia and not to the events of AD 70.

but the Messenger of the Supreme Being. This was the position with which we started.

When, however, in discussing our faith we come to any conclusion, we are not satisfied if any portion of Scripture seems to militate against it. We suspect our deductions, when any part of the holy word appears to oppose them. It is natural therefore to desire that those texts which have been brought forward to disprove our present conclusion should be shown not to oppose it. This I now proceed to do.

Certain passages are adduced, on the supposed authority of which it is maintained that the august subject of our present inquiry was indeed the Infinite Creator and Governor of the universe. Now, in the first place, since he is demonstrated to have been the Messenger of God, it is impossible to believe that in a divine revelation he should be asserted to be God himself. For it is impossible that a divine revelation should teach an absurdity. But this will be called setting reason above revelation. Therefore I propose to illustrate it.

There are certain truths so evident that nothing could persuade us to doubt them. Such, for instance, is the self-evident proposition that it is a duty to act rightly. Suppose I should find it asserted that Christ had used these words: "It matters not whether you do right, or whether you do wrong; for virtue and vice are both the same." I should say immediately that it was impossible that such a sentiment should be part of revelation from God. So would all say without hesitation. Now I affirm that the proposition that Jesus was the Infinite God, knowing everything and incapable of suffering, and at the same time an anguished man of limited knowledge and power, being an absolute contradiction, is likewise a proposition which can form no part of a divine revelation. So that it is impossible that any passage of God's word should be rightly pressed against me in the position I have taken.

This reasoning however might be obnoxious. It would be called, however erroneously, exalting Reason above Revelation. Let it be therefore clearly understood, and not forgotten, that I entirely waive this argument, which is not at all necessary to my course, and suppose, for the sake of the inquiry, that it were possible that Jesus should be at once the Messenger sent and the God who sent him, and therefore that it were possible that some texts should teach his Supreme Divinity. Let such texts be brought forward. And first it may not be improper to settle some principles by which they are to be examined.

It is a fundamental principle of interpretation that *obscure passages are to be explained by those which are clear*. And it is a very familiar principle. We hardly read a page of any book without applying it in greater or less degree. We are continually meeting with passages which in themselves are dark (or would be so) but which are immediately illustrated and explained by the light that falls on them from those which shine. It is also true that we *always explain a person's words with reference to his known opinions*. I will fabricate a paragraph which shall illustrate both these canons.

Suppose that Rev. Mr. Thatcher, in his *Life of Buckminster*, had used the following words in reference to the death of that great preacher: "Genius as well as mediocrity must die. Christianity indeed tells us of immortality; but our experience instructs us that we are mortal. The flower is cut down and perishes; so Buckminster has been struck and is no more. The world may admire and hope; but he will not live again." Now this passage may be called an obscure passage. Taken separately it seems to express a disbelief in a future state of being; and a literal critic might reason from it, with what he should esteem great cogency, against the doctrine of immortality. But without a moment's hesitation we reject such an understanding of it, because upon almost every page of the rest of the memoir we find sentiments inconsistent with such an understanding, Christian sentiments, and because in the second place we know Thatcher to have believed firmly in the immortality of the soul, and of consequence presume that, with regard to his friend's death, he did not intend to deny it.

I repeat the rule then, that *whatever obscure passages may occur in a book are to be explained by those which are clear: and the words of any man to be understood in accordance with his known opinions.*²

And with this guide, which one never fails to follow when he reads any book with sense and interest, we might leave the inquirer to go on alone through the New Testament, and expound thereby for himself the difficult passages he should find. And here my predecessors on this side of the question have generally preferred to leave him, because they have been unwilling to encumber a plain subject with minute doubts, and by entering on the exposition of certain difficult texts which are alleged against them, to expose themselves to cavil, and encourage in others the disposition to rest upon a small number of knotty expressions, rather than upon obvious declarations and the general tenor of the Scripture.

But this would not satisfy you. And it ought not. It is natural to desire to reconcile every part of Scripture with what seems the just conclusion from the whole; and it is not strange that the Christian should feel uneasy while a single phrase of the sacred oracles appears to militate against his faith. I will suppose you, therefore, too candid and liberal to cavil, and too sensible of the ample evidence of your faith to rest it on isolated constructions. Let the texts then be produced. Where is the testimony of Scripture that Jesus Christ was God?

It is obviously no advance at all towards that conclusion to show that he was more than a common man, for this is allowed. And however obvious this may be, I would call the reader's particular attention to it. For many appear to take all expressions of high honor as proof of Supreme Divinity. Nothing can be more unreasonable. To be more than man is not to be God. Between the Finite and the Infinite there are infinite degrees; and at those degrees we find the high

² This is the rule. A case of insincerity would be the exception. And even then you are to explain in accordance with opinions and character.

Intelligences which inhabit heaven. We are to set aside therefore all texts brought to show the *preexistence* of the Lord, and that he *created the world*, and is the appointed *Judge of the human race*. Suppose that he presides over all the affairs of our Orb; yet this Orb is but a small part of Creation. Look up into the sky. There are spread not only worlds, but countless systems of worlds, like our own, on in immeasurable and unexplored succession, beyond where sight or imagination can extend. And as we contemplate that vast display, which is itself perhaps but a small division of the universe, we feel the littleness of supposing that the immediate Governor of our inconsiderable planet must of necessity be the Creator and Supporter of the whole. The insect which spends its life upon a leaf finds mountains and valleys on its surface. He has, it may be, his Cape Horn, his Andes, his northern and southern Pole; and were he capable of religious ideas he might, in exploring the wonders of his universe, regard the showers which fall from the waterpot of the gardener as vast operations of the Great Disposer, might ascribe to the Original energy of the Infinite One those results which proceed only from the instrumental care of man. So with ourselves. We speak of the Earth as all, when it is but a mite, a speck, a grain of sand in the midst of Infinite Space, when it might, with all its attendant orbs, which seem so vast to human sense, with its sun, its planets and their satellites, fall away into some chink or crevice of Creation and not be missed. When we speak of the Universe and of infinity, let us consider what we mean; let the imagination pass beyond the bounds of sublunary existence, and honor the Almighty by stretching itself at least over the whole extent of his visible dominion. Look into the firmament; and then consider that our question is whether Christ was *that* God. He may have been empowered by the Father to judge, to regulate, and even to be His instrument in creating our world,³ and all this would be nothing to prove that he was God. "All power *is given* unto me," he declares. All his authority is derived and subordinate. Whether a part of that power did or did not consist in creating and judging the world may be separately considered. It has nothing to do with our present question.

Where then are the texts? Surely in support of an article so fundamental, in its nature so strange and incredible, so long believed and so confidently held as that of the Deity of Christ, they must *appear*, at least, to be frequent and distinct. Quite the contrary. In the whole course of the first three gospels, from the beginning of Matthew to the end of Luke, there is not a word, not a hint of the doctrine.⁴ I say not a hint, for the name Emmanuel in the first chapter of Matthew is not one. In prophetic illustration of the Savior's divine mission, a passage is

³ *Editor's note:* Our author is unaware that Scripture does not ascribe to Jesus a part in the *Genesis* creation.

⁴ In Matt. 4:7 Jesus utters the words "It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" as a reason for not tempting the Lord his God by casting himself down from the pinnacle of the temple in compliance with the suggestion of the Evil One.

there quoted from the Old Testament concerning a child in the time of Ahaz whose name was *Emmanuel* (which means in Hebrew “God with us”). This name is not given to Jesus. But if it had been, it would have been nothing to our present point. Names, like this, of sacred significance, were of very frequent application among the Jews. Thus *Isaiah* means “the salvation of the Lord,” *Elijah* “God the Lord”; yet no one supposes that Elijah was the Supreme Being. Neither will I do you the dishonor of supposing that you will press the form of baptism at the conclusion of Matthew against me, and compel me to argue that when I should assert that I spoke in the name of Peter, James and John, I would not mean that Peter and James were the same man.

I repeat then that in the whole of the three gospels there is not a word of the supposed Deity of Jesus Christ, nor is it pretended that there is any,⁵ except in those texts to which I have just referred. Now, how strong is this position alone! Matthew, for instance, wrote his gospel not with the expectation that its deficiencies should be filled up by a subsequent writer, but he composed it and published it to give to the nation of the Jews all the information that they needed to receive of our religion. There they were to find Christianity; and there alone were many of them to find it. Is it possible then that the fundamental doctrine of the faith, and one so foreign from their ideas that, if true, they needed particularly to be instructed in it, should be omitted in that gospel? And what conclusion can we form from Matthew’s silence but that, not believing the Supreme Divinity of his Master, he did not teach it? In like manner did Mark write for the Romans. His account was to be their record, their oracle. And were they to be utterly uninformed of that truth, which must have been the hinge of the whole, and a belief in which those who now hold to it regard as absolutely essential to salvation?

We do not see the full force of the present argument by viewing the gospels as part of the same book. You are aware that they are separate compositions, written independently of each other, and bringing each a separate and new authority. Suppose now that you had never met with these accounts, but had received the Faith only through tradition, and believing in it, were anxious to know whether the doctrine of Christ’s Supreme Divinity were a part of it. Suddenly you hear that there has been discovered in the ruins of some buried city a history of the Lord, which is incontestably proved to be written by one of his immediate followers. You then feel confident that your doubts are to be resolved. You procure, open and peruse the manuscript, and find not a word of the doctrine from beginning to end; but, on the contrary, find Christ constantly spoken of as the Son, the Sent, the Subject. Another memoir is discovered, written by another

⁵ I do not mean hereby to set any limit to possible folly. There have been men who have found an argument for the Trinity in the story of Rahab and her two guests in the book of Joshua. The same persons might find the Deity of Christ in Matt. 18:20; 28:18; Mark 2:7; and 6:50. But I address myself to you who are not bereft of reason.

of the first disciples. You peruse it with equal avidity, and still not a word of the doctrine. In like manner yet another, and no word or hint appears that the great subject of the history is to be regarded in any other light than that of a minister of God's will. I say that nothing could exceed the confidence which these would beget. At the end of the first, you would be confident. At the end of the third, you would be amazed at the popular delusions. I beseech the Trinitarian to consider this well.

How is this silence to be explained? Is it said that the doctrine in question was universally accepted, so that it did not need to be expressly taught? But it was not universally accepted. I myself believe that it was never heard of for a century after, and in another treatise I shall endeavor to show that it was not; but, however this may be, it is an admitted fact that the Jewish Christians, a large part of them at least, who were denounced as heretics by the Trinitarian Fathers of subsequent ages, under the names of Ebionites and Nazarenes, were confirmed and utter unbelievers of the doctrine, held to the strict humanity of Christ, and one party of them rejected even the miraculous conception. *These* needed to be taught. Believing that Christ was a man, they certainly did need, in order to become Christians, to be instructed that he was God, if such were the Christian faith. *How they were in fact instructed, you may find in Matthew's gospel. That gospel was theirs.*

How, then, is the silence to be explained? Explanation has been attempted. Athanasius, in the fourth century, says that "all the Jews were so firmly persuaded that their Messiah was to be nothing more than a man like themselves that the apostles were obliged to use great caution in divulging it." And another Trinitarian Father writes that the three first evangelists revealed Christ according to the flesh only, and that it remained for John, at a later period, to exhibit him in the glory of his true character. Do you accept and adopt this? I leave then to the Trinitarian to explain how three separate memoirs should be written of a person without letting the reader know who he was. I am not pressed with the difficulty. For to me those sacred records seem to teach upon every page that Jesus was the Christ, the Holy one of God.

So much for the first three gospels. In the remainder of the New Testament I find fifteen texts which a cursory reader might think taught something of Christ's Supreme Divinity. And I have been able to find no more. There are no others which an intelligent Trinitarian will urge. On these fifteen must the system called orthodox be founded, so far as it has any foundation in Scripture. Some even of these, the supporters of that system will immediately yield. Let us examine them impartially; and let every inquirer beware that his judgment be not clouded by the associations of early habit. Let us look at them with fresh eyes.

1. The first which comes before us is the proem to St. John's gospel. At the outset let it be observed that whatever this passage, on examination, be found to teach, it certainly does not teach that Jesus was God. For he is spoken of in verse 14 as "an only begotten of the Father," and elsewhere in the chapter he is called

“Son of God,” “Lamb of God,” and “Son of Man,” names which could not be applied to the Supreme Being. The Trinitarian is educated in the belief that “the Word” in the first verse means Jesus Christ, and he is probably so accustomed to that interpretation that it seems to him a matter of course. He has perhaps never thought of questioning it. But it is a merely gratuitous assumption. There is no reason whatever for it. It is indeed said that the word was made flesh. But suppose that instead of “the Word” had been used the “Wisdom” of God, and it were said, as it might be with propriety, that the *Wisdom of God* was made flesh in Christ, should you think that by “wisdom of God” was meant Jesus Christ in his preexistent state? Certainly not. You would give to Wisdom its natural meaning. Why not do the same with the term “Word”? Christ was a visible and audible manifestation of God’s power and love, but God Himself is invisible. The last verse of the passage decides the question for us, showing plainly that they are different beings. “No one hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.”

To explain fully this proem to John’s gospel would require so extensive an examination of contemporary opinions that we must, in the present connection, defer it. Let a brief statement now be sufficient.

On account of the incompetence under which the human mind always labors to comprehend at once the whole of the Divine Nature, or to view at the same time and describe under one name all the ways in which the Creator may be regarded, that form of Eastern philosophy which was the theology, and might be called the *natural religion*, of the philosophic part of the people at the time of John’s writing, had introduced the custom of speaking of God’s Active Spirit as a secondary Being whom He had employed as His agent in creating the world. This Being, or Principle, was termed *Logos* by the Jewish Platonists, which is the term used by Saint John, where it has been translated “word.” It expresses a conception which, although somewhat analogous to our idea of the Spirit, has now passed away, and which has therefore no adequate expression in our language. It would seem on that account most proper to retain in the various versions the original word. But, if it must be translated, it may be explained as meaning the wisdom of God in action; and to avoid the amplification, may be rendered in brief by the English word *Wisdom*. This *Logos* being regarded at the time as a kind of secondary Being, or Principle, John begins his gospel, wherein he was to teach the truth as it was in Jesus, by contradicting that superstition, averring that the *Logos* or Divine Wisdom was in no way separate, but was no other than God Himself. “In the beginning was Wisdom; and Wisdom was with God; and Wisdom was God.”⁶ In the verses following, where our translators have used “him,” the word “it” should be substituted, the Greek pronoun (like the French pronoun *il*) admitting of both versions. King James’s translators,

⁶ This mode of speaking receives important illustration from Prov. 8:12-31. Notice particularly the 15th and the 22nd and following verses.

believing the Logos to be a person, wrote "him." We, on the contrary, seeing plainly that the Logos is no other than an attribute of God, are required to use the word "it." "It came unto its own, and its own received it not"; and, finally, that men might no longer be blind to the manifestations of Deity, it was embodied or "made flesh in Jesus Christ." In him were the divine attributes shown forth as they had never been before.

At the time of John's writing, the doctrine of the Logos having formed the soul of Jesus had not been broached. Had it been, we should have found it rebuked by him, as we find many other kindred errors. But the doctrine of a double nature in the Godhead, although at that time but little developed, had already struck root in this oriental or Platonic philosophy, and consequently John at the very outset takes occasion to contradict it. "If, therefore, this view be correct, it is a remarkable fact that his language has been alleged as a main support of that very doctrine, the rudiments of which it was intended to oppose."

2. 1 John 5:7. "For there are three that bear record [in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth] the spirit, the water, and the blood..."

Thus reads our English translation. But the words enclosed in brackets are spurious; that is, they are no part of the Bible, no part of the epistle as it was written by John, but have been added without authority at a later time. This is not a matter of any doubt; it is a certainty, and universally allowed at the present day by the advocates, as well as by the opponents, of the Trinity.

A writer in the *Eclectic Review*, for instance, "the religious character of which is unsuspectingly orthodox," writes thus of the passage: "We are unspeakably ashamed that any modern divines should have fought for the retention of a passage so indisputably spurious. We could adduce half a dozen, or half a score of passages of ample length, supported by better authority than this, but which are rejected in every printed edition and translation."

Bishop Lowth, also a Trinitarian and a learned man, is equally decided. "We have some wranglers in theology," he says, "sworn to follow their master, who are prepared to defend anything, however absurd, should there be occasion. But I believe there is no one among us, in the least degree conversant with sacred criticism, and having the use of his understanding, who would be willing to contend for the genuineness of the verse 1 John 5:7."

I do not therefore dwell on this text for the sake of making its spuriousness any more evident, but because its history will illustrate the manner in which some few other corruptions have crept into our text.

The books of the New Testament are written in the Greek language from which our English Testament is a translation. Before the invention of printing, the Greek text was handed down by means of manuscript copies of the different parts, on parchment or paper, each taken from one more ancient, and so originally from the autograph of the apostle or evangelist himself. Of these manuscripts we have a large number preserved to us, of different degrees of

antiquity, dating probably from the seventh century downwards. Of this epistle of John between one and two hundred codices have been examined; and from this number only one is found containing our present text, or rather, I should say, containing a form of words nearly resembling our present text. That one is the Dublin manuscript. When Erasmus published his edition of the Greek Testament about the period of the Reformation, knowing this verse to be spurious, he of course omitted it; but when his first and his second editions appeared without it, the uninformed "Orthodox" of the day, who had been accustomed to read the text in their Latin translation, "the Vulgate," raised a great clamor against the learned Editor for omitting their favorite stronghold. He answered that it was no part of the epistle of John, and that if they would produce a single manuscript containing it, he would insert it. This Dublin manuscript was finally produced, and in his third and subsequent editions he did insert it, for the sake, as he says, "of avoiding calumny." Thence it has come into the common editions of the present day. But Luther rejected it in his translation, as well as others in theirs; and in some versions and editions it is enclosed in brackets.

The corruption of the Dublin manuscript is discovered, by certain signs which it would be out of place to explain here, to have been imitated from the Latin Vulgate, which was the version in common use throughout Catholic countries. It appears in the greater part of the copies of this version, although from the best manuscripts of that also, it is cast out. It is quoted by none of the Greek Fathers, although in the Arian controversy which arose in the fourth century, we find the Scriptures ransacked from beginning to end, and even the verse succeeding this cited to furnish confirmation to the doctrine of the Trinity. It was not quoted by them because it was not there. Nor do we find it in the writings of any Latin writer, till Vigilius Tapsensis at the end of the fifth century. It was possibly first inserted in the Vulgate by him, for it was his habit to put his own words in other people's mouth, and he is supposed to be the author of the creed which goes by the name of Athanasius. But it may, more probably, have been first written in the margin, according to the custom of that age, as a note or gloss, and by a subsequent transcriber have been incorporated into the text, by mistake, or as an authority convenient to the advocates of the Trinity and supposed to be conformable to the true opinions of St. John. It has thence stolen into the fashionable texts of different languages, and stands there like a thief in the crowd, whom everybody knows but nobody seizes. We would better now lay hands on it at once, and cross out the suppositious words in all the Bibles we may possess.

In this state of the case, it is a very wicked treachery to use this text in argument; and it is also wrong, as it seems to me, to read it from the pulpit without comment, as a part of the epistle, thereby imposing on the ignorant and giving countenance to forgery. The former offense we have to charge on no writers of consideration at the present day; but the latter, I believe, is the prevalent custom in the Trinitarian churches.

But, strange to say, when we thus expose the few manifest and admitted corruptions of the Bible, a clamor is raised against us, as impairing the purity of the sacred records; in like manner as if a housekeeper who should be observed washing the raiment of her household were accused therefore of disregard of cleanliness. No, we have that respect for the Bible that we would keep it clean. We would have it defiled by no spatterings from the mud of the Middle Ages. This text was cast upon it by the desperate plunges of a headstrong church in the slough of miry controversy. Who value the Bible purity the most, those who carefully remove it, or those who would have the ugly splash remain?

“But,” it may be said in reply, “do you not by these explanations throw a doubt over the whole Bible? I am unable to examine the original authorities. I have heretofore relied on the Bible of my fathers. If I am told that this, that and the other, and who knows how many more, verses are spurious, what secure foundation have I?” I answer that such explanations as I have made can rightly induce no feeling of insecurity whatever; because, in the first place, the suspicion or conviction of spuriousness affects only a very small number of texts, and at most need only teach you to trust not to isolated passages, but to the general tenor, the prevalent sense, which cannot be counterfeited or corrupted; because too, in the second place, the corruptions have been ascertained and corrected, and may easily be known by you, if you will. From the time of Erasmus no sufficient attention was given to the state of the text until Griesbach, a learned German scholar of our own time, who devoted thirty years of his life to the collation of different manuscripts, and as the fruit of his assiduous toil published the Greek Testament which goes by his name, and which is now generally received by scholars as the true text. It may be considered as containing no errors. This is the Bible. The Bible is not that English version which we have, not that original from which it is taken, but the Bible consists of the Scriptures as they proceeded from the sacred writers; and to decide even to the minutest letter or particle just how they did proceed from the sacred writers has been Griesbach’s task. When he rejected this 1 John 5:7, he did not take anything of the Bible away, but only removed from it the wild invention of some deluded theologian. Let not then the stale charge be ever repeated that we mutilate the Scriptures and “use a Unitarian Bible.” We do not use a Unitarian Bible, but a Trinitarian Bible. Griesbach was himself a Trinitarian, and his edition is a standard text among all denominations of Christians. That the English reader might have the advantage of it, our translation has been conformed to it in those passages where corrections had been made by him, and published at Boston under the title of “The New Testament conformed to Griesbach’s Standard Text.” This you ought always to have by you in such inquiries as the present. When you want to know whether any text is genuine, that will inform you.

I greatly fear that having said so much of the corruptions of Scripture will lead you to think that they are numerous. They are not so. The result of the labors of the learned has been to show that no book has been handed down to us from

antiquity with so few changes as the New Testament. The works of Cicero, of Livy, of Ovid, of Josephus present much more numerous and considerable variations. Those of the New Testament are for the most part of a very unimportant character, one letter substituted for another, a word for its synonym, a plural for a singular, or one tense of a verb for another, Jesus for Christ, or Christ for Jesus, and others of the same sort, attributable to accidental causes, and not bearing upon any article of our faith. But among these are some three or four or more which go to support the theological doctrine of the Supreme Divinity of the Savior, and these it is extremely important to correct. "But how is it," I think I hear it asked, "that there have been no mistakes on the other side? How is it that all the incorrect readings are against you?" For this simple reason I reply, that all our manuscripts (the oldest of them dating only from the seventh century) came to us from the hands of Trinitarian transcribers, who would, both in case of accidental error and of intentional corruption, be apt to make the text speak for them. This is illustrated by the next passage we come to examine, which, in like manner with the last, as well as with two more out of our fifteen, is to be expelled as corrupt.

3. 1 Timothy 3:16. It thus reads in our English: "And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory."

The true Bible reading is decided to be "*He who* was manifest in the flesh" (i.e. Christ) "*was* justified in the spirit, seen of angels..." It being admitted by men of all modes of belief who have examined the matter that the present is not the true reading, the only doubt is between "which" and "he who." And you will easily perceive by merely looking at the Greek letters how the word "God" might have arisen from either of these. The Greek for God, contracted, as is usual in the manuscripts, is ΘΣ. The Greek for "he who" is ΟΣ. The Greek for "which" is Ο. Now the copyist seeing Ο might have added Σ to make it ΟΣ, or finding ΟΣ might have added the two dashes which convert it into ΘΣ signifying God, either by mistake, or more probably from thinking that they had been omitted from mistake by his predecessor, and his theological opinions would have led him to prefer the latter reading. This conjecture is made probable by its having been discovered that the two dashes in question have been added to several of the important manuscripts by an after hand, and with a different ink from that in which the rest is written. But however these conjectures of the manner of the corruption may be received, it is placed beyond any reasonable doubt that the word "God" is no part of the genuine text.

The manner in which the passage is often cited is an instance of the looseness with which thoughtless readers generally interpret texts of a like kind. It is frequently quoted as if it read "Great is the mystery of the Godhead," but "godliness" means nothing of the sort. Godliness means piety, which it is the great burden of the epistle to enforce. You will perceive from reading the

previous and succeeding chapters that certain schismatics had arisen in the church of Ephesus, who inculcated celibacy and an ascetic life as that which was acceptable to God. And there were those also who professed to reveal the hidden philosophy of religion, the mystery of the faith, the secret things of heaven and of futurity, against whom the warning in the last verses of the last chapter is pronounced, and to whom History traces much of the gradual corruption of Christianity. To these teachers Paul alludes in the present text. He has instructed Timothy that with regard to officers of the church, the great concern is that they should be pious; for however much value might be set on other pretended mysteries, yet “the pillar and ground of the truth, and *without controversy* great, is the mystery of *piety*.⁷ He who was manifest in the flesh, was justified in the spirit” was not justified by knowledge of a dark philosophy, but by the state of his soul, by inward purity, “was seen of angels,” even to higher Intelligences was a spectacle of moral beauty, “was preached unto the Gentiles,” for his kingdom being founded on an inward state could not be restricted to a single people, “was believed on in the world,” and among the believers were the Ephesians themselves, and finally was “received up into glory,” which was a sign of confirmation and acceptance, and an assurance of like reward to his imitators. All this is a strong enforcement of the great principle that “the pillar and foundation of the faith is” (not asceticism, nor a knowledge of mysteries, but) piety, “godliness,” a mysterious bliss, a state of the heart known only to the few who experience it. So that this text, far from favoring the way of thinking called orthodox, is one of those which might perhaps, without injustice, be turned directly against it; for I apprehend that those who follow that way are apt, like the Ephesian Gnostics (although the virtues of the truly devout are continually operating to counteract the tendency), to rely rather on their theological zeal and their knowledge of mysteries than on spiritual purity and heavenly-mindedness; or, at least, that they set a disproportionate value on the former class of virtues.

It may be well to mention in this connection that in Colossians 2:2, 3 which reads as follows, “the mystery of God [and of the Father and of Christ] in whom are hid all the treasures of knowledge,” the words here enclosed between brackets are spurious.

4. Another corrupted passage is found in Revelation 1:11, where the words “I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, and” have been inserted. The words are put into the mouth of Christ. But although, in John’s vision, these words are several times repeated in other connections, yet he never represents them as being used by Christ, but always as an utterance of the Almighty. The last chapter of the Revelation, which may be carelessly supposed to afford such an instance, is obscure. It is perhaps not improbable that the angel takes upon his lips the dread declaration of the thirteenth verse, as a sort of appellation of the

⁷ The true punctuation is that of Griesbach, who puts a period after “church of God” in the preceding verse.

great First Cause, or rather as a phrase to call up in the mind the might and independency of Him in whose name he spoke. “I, the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end”⁸ — blessed are they that do *his* commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and enter in through the gates of the city.” At the sixteenth verse, Jesus, in confirmation of the angel, commences to speak, and the eighteenth and nineteenth verses are words of John.

5. Our fifth text is Acts 20:28: “The church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”

The true reading is “church of the Lord,” meaning of the Lord Jesus. The error of the text is allowed on all hands; and Trinitarian writers of credit, such as Robert Hall, Stuart and others, avoid the shocking image of “God’s blood,” and if they quote the passage, quote it correctly. By the old commentators you will find this spoken of as a matter of doubt; in our day it is not so.

Of the remaining ten citations, three (Nos. 6, 7, and 8) present difficulties only in our translation.

6. Acts 7:59. “And they stoned Stephen, calling upon (God), and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” You will observe in our Bible that the word God is here printed in italics, which, as you probably know, indicates that it is put in by the translators. The insertion is wholly unauthorized. In his dying hour Stephen saw, or imagined, his Master appearing to him, and he called aloud, saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” You should always be on your guard against such spurious insertions as this.

7. 1 John 3:16 explains itself in like manner on inspection. “Hereby we perceive the love (of God) because he laid down his life for us.” The words “of God,” although in one of the Bibles which I possess not italicized, are added in the English. The true meaning is “hereby we perceive the love (i.e. the true Christian love), in that he (i.e. Christ) laid down his life for us. And (so) we (also) ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”

The corrections which I have made thus far are generally allowed. Indeed it may be said that there is almost no dispute concerning them. But in the next article to which we proceed, I reject a translation which is strenuously advocated by our opponents. With what propriety, it is for you to judge.

8. Romans 9:5. The English runs thus, prefaced by the 4th verse, “Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service (of God), and the promises, whose are the fathers and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.”

If this apparently insuperable text shall finally appear to teach nothing of that doctrine which in the translation it seems to support, the result ought to lead you to distrust in future such apparent contradictions to the general tenor of Scripture.

⁸ In the common edition, the words have been a little changed. I follow Griesbach in all these particulars.

In the times of the apostles and for a long time after, no punctuation was used in writing, and no separation between words. These have been added by recent hands, and in a manner agreeable to what was at the time esteemed the true Christian doctrine. This inter-punctuation therefore is of no sacred authority whatever, and confessedly in many places has been misplaced. The text was written by Paul in a continued series of capital letters, of which the following will give you an idea in English: "ANDOFWHOMASCONCERNINGTHEFLESHCHRISTCAMEWHOISOVER ALLGODBLESTEDFOREVERAMEN." And if he were with you now, and should read it to you, his tone of voice would make you immediately comprehend his meaning. It would fall at "all," where therefore we should place a period, and utter the rest as an exclamation. "And of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is above all. God be blessed forever! Amen." Our English idiom requires "be" in the last clause (God *be* blessed forever!), a word which is never found in the Greek in expressions similar to the present, as you may perceive by its being printed in italics in such texts as 2 Corinthians 1:3. Of the above text, you will feel the climax of the period more fully by reading the fourth verse also. To the Jews pertained "the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service [of the sanctuary], and the promises, and the fathers, and [finally, in his bodily descent] Christ who is above all [higher than law, sanctuary, or fathers]. God be blessed, forever! Amen." I use the word "above" instead of "over" as being more fit in the place, and equally correct in itself.

If you are familiar with Paul's letters, you will have observed that it is his frequent custom to suffer the impulses of his devotional sensibility to break in upon his train of argument, and it is to be remarked that he never uses the word "Amen" in the body of his epistle except at the conclusion of a doxology so introduced. That word therefore in the passage before us is almost sufficient of itself to lead us to suppose such an ascription of praise to be there intended; which probability, taken in connection with what has been before said, and also with the further circumstance that Christ is here spoken of "as concerning the flesh" (whereas it is not "as concerning the flesh" but as concerning the spirit that he is supposed to be God), and considered moreover with an eye to that rule of interpretation that "a man's words are to be understood in accordance with his known opinions" (which in the case of Paul, you can hardly fail to be satisfied were that Jesus was a being inferior to God), seems to render our interpretation of the passage absolutely certain. But Christians who read it with a Trinitarian eye discovered in it the popular signification, and punctuated it accordingly. Shall their commas fetter us to folly?

The seven texts which remain to be examined read undoubtedly as they were originally written, and have been translated without any radical error.

9. And first I may pass by Colossians 2:9, "For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily," for surely I need not show how the full glory of

a monarch may be said to dwell in his ambassador. In Christ dwelt all the fullness of divinity. The full, the unspeakable glory of God received its bodily manifestation in him. He was the perfect image of the Father.

10. And the next text, 1 John 5:20, presents only a slight difficulty of grammatical reference. “And we are in him that is true, (even)⁹ in his son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life,” in which “this” refers not to Jesus Christ, but to “him that is true,” although that antecedent is more distant from the pronoun. This construction may be illustrated by a similar use of language on an ordinary subject. Suppose I should be speaking of Edmund Burke, and of his son who died in the midst of great promise. I might say: “He was truly glorious. He was glorious in himself; he was glorious in his son. This is the man I admire,” meaning of course the parent and not the child. Now read the text, and see whether it is not equally obvious that “this” means God and not His Son our Lord. If it be obvious in the English, it is still more so in the Greek, as you may perceive from a literal translation. “And we know that the Son of God hath come, and hath given to us understanding, that we may know the True One; and we are in the True One; in his son Jesus Christ. This is (or that is) the true *God*, and eternal life.” The word “God” is here the emphatic word; and perhaps by “this is” or “that is” is signified no more than that familiar transition which we indicate by the marks *i.e.*

11. Leaving then that very unambiguous expression, I think you will find not much greater difficulty in the famous answer of Jesus to Philip, who had asked him *to show them the Father*: “He that hath seen *me*, hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou, show us the Father?” The Father is a spirit, and is visible only in His works, His creatures, His offspring, especially in His brightest image, Jesus Christ. To him was Philip referred. In him God dwelt, and in him was He to be beheld. This same explanation Jesus himself affords by adding, “Believeth thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me?” It was not by being Christ, but by being *in* Christ, that the Father was visible.

12. John 10:30, “I and my Father are one.” The Trinitarian construction of this phrase has received altogether more attention than, as an objection, it deserves. Surely any candid inquirer will not hesitate to allow that whatever other texts may prove, this text does not prove what it has been supposed to. For *how* are the Son and the Father one? The Son himself informs us, when he prays, that his disciples and he may be one, as he and the Father are one (John 17:22, “that they may be one, even as we are one”). And were the disciples and their Master to be the same being? Certainly not. Christ prayed that they might be the same in spirit, in faith, in hope, in counsel. Nor can we possibly understand him in any other way. And it is Christ’s own explanation that he and his Father were one in the same sense, *i.e.* in spirit and in counsel. Indeed, if an earthly ambassador in a foreign court should find his powers doubted, and should be told that his king

⁹ “Even” is an English interpolation.

would not confirm his treaties, it would be very natural for him to use this same style, and say “I and my King are one,” that is, not the same being, but one and the same thing, to all intents and purposes the same agent; as Paul in like manner says that he and Apollos were one. And indeed the very Greek word translated “one” requires this understanding; for had it meant one being, it would have been in the masculine gender εἷς, but it is actually in the neuter gender ἓν. Moreover, the very context of the passage sets the question entirely at rest.

Speaking of his faithful disciples, Jesus says, “I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them me, is greater than all; and none is able to pluck them out of my *Father’s* hand. I and my Father are one.’ Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him.” Jesus asks them why, and they answer that it is for blasphemy, “because that thou being a man makest thyself God,” by which they meant not that he had pretended to be God, but that he had assumed God’s power; as we should say that a man made himself a king who should wrongfully levy taxes and issue orders to the armies of a kingdom. Their charge amounted to this: “By this unheard-of assumption of power, you would make yourself out to be God. It is blasphemy.” I have no idea that the Jews themselves, even in their momentary rage, understood the phrase in the 30th verse in the strange manner in which it has since been understood. If they had, their amazement and horror would have hindered all utterance but inarticulate cries of execration. We see the same thing also in the 18th verse of the 5th chapter, where “the Jews sought the more to kill him” because he had said “that God was his Father, making himself equal with God,” that is, comparing himself with God, putting himself on a par with Him, claiming divine power and relationship, not claiming to be the same being; for the Jews were not insane, and they therefore knew that asserting God to be his Father, far from amounting to, was wholly inconsistent with, asserting God to be himself. They knew that a person was not his own Father.

In John 10:33 then, his enemies charge him with assuming such dignity as would make him out to be God. How does Jesus answer them? For this is the great inquiry. His words clear away our theological doubts and leave nothing more for the disputant to say. “Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken) 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? If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works; that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him.” Here he expressly states that he claims to be only the *Son* of God; he also declares that the Father hath sanctified and sent him, and explains his oneness with God to consist in the mutual communion of their spirits.

The quotation here made from the Old Testament, “I said ye are gods,” will lead us to an understanding of two other texts, which, together with a third which I shall quote last of all, present, I think, from the whole New Testament the only

serious difficulties in the way of a candid inquirer. I refer to the use of the word "god" in a secondary sense, meaning a divine person, but not the Supreme. This understanding of the word will probably seem unnatural and forced when first proposed to a modern reader, on account of its being foreign from our idiom. But he must remember that all men are not Englishmen, and that it is certain that the word "god" was used in this secondary sense in the times when the Scriptures were composed. It occurs frequently thus in the writings of the age immediately subsequent, and, as has already appeared, is so found in the Old Testament. They were "called gods to whom the word of God came." Men in high office were called gods. Thus Exodus 21:6, "Then shall his master bring him unto the judges." The Hebrew is "unto the gods." Psalm 82:1, "God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods." And then the sixth verse which is quoted above by Jesus, "I have said, Ye are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High."

13. Hereby then we may explain the first of the difficult texts, the exclamation of the doubting Thomas when he saw and felt the prints of the nails after the resurrection: "My Lord and my God!" i.e. "my Lord and divine master!" To many this interpretation appears forced, but, I apprehend, less so the more it is reflected on. When first proposed to myself, it seemed to me a mere subterfuge, and a rather awkward one too, to escape the natural force of the text. But then I reflected that Thomas does by no means say "O Lord, thou art my God"; and, on investigation of the commentaries of scholars, I was satisfied that the explanation was not the refuge of a disputant, but that, without doubt, such was the frequent use of the word "god" at that time. I have never been able, however, to decide whether such is the true meaning of the exclamation, or whether it is to be understood merely as an utterance of pious surprise, in like manner as we should exclaim, if we can imagine ourselves to see a father whom we had thought to be dead: "My father! Great God!" The prejudices of the English reader may incline him rather to the latter exposition; upon thoughtful investigation, the probabilities will perhaps preponderate in favor of the former. But in order to reject at once the Trinitarian exposition, we need only recur to our rule of interpretation, "that the obscure passages of any book are to be explained by those which are clear." From a thousand unambiguous texts, plain declarations, emphatic disclaimers, some of which I have quoted, it is rendered sure that Jesus was not the Supreme God. It would be the greatest weakness then to give to this exclamation of the confused and bewildered disciple an interpretation which should be inconsistent with that conclusion.

14. Another instance of this use of the word "god" is supposed to be found in Hebrews 1:8, which is a quotation from the Old Testament where we have found the term frequently employed in that sense. "And to the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever," that is, according to the present explanation, "O divine being." I am, however, here also in doubt whether another exposition be not the true one. It is to be observed that the words "O" and "is" are put in by the

translators, and that the original reads, “Thy Throne God forever and ever,” which may mean “God thy throne, is forever and ever” or “God is thy throne forever and ever,” and this latter is the phrase found in Wakefield’s translation.¹⁰ But whatever may be the true meaning, the position that it does not teach that the Son is the Supreme God is rendered sure by the very next verse, which proceeds, “therefore, God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.” If the Son were the Supreme God, he could not be addressed with the words, “God, even *thy God*,” nor could he be spoken of as having “fellows,” for what would be meant by fellows of the Great Creator, and of his being “anointed by his God with the oil of gladness.” Moreover, our great rule of interpretation solves whatever difficulties may remain. It may be added finally that this epistle to the Hebrews has been decided by scholars (although some oppose the decision) not to have been written by Paul, nor by any apostle, and that therefore it is not to be cited for points of doctrine.¹¹

15. There remains but one text to be examined, a very obscure and difficult one. I refer to Philippians 2:6: “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth. And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Concerning which text, it is to be remarked in the first place that whatever may be found to be its true meaning, it would seem obvious that it presents Jesus Christ and God as different beings, for can it be supposed that God exalted Himself, and gave Himself a name which is above every name? When I learn from Scripture that on account of his humility Jesus Christ was elevated by God to high glory, I need no further evidence to convince me that he is inferior to the power which exalts him.

Let us now return to the sixth verse. “Who, being in the form of God.” “Being in the form of God” cannot of course be taken in its literal sense, as meaning being in God’s outward shape, for God has no such shape. It refers then to an inward, a spiritual likeness, which is what we mean when we say that Christ was the image of God. “Thought it not robbery to be equal with God.” Of the phrase “to be equal with God,” it is to be observed, as has been observed before, that it is not to be confounded with being identical with God (which is what Trinitarians claim for their Master), and that it implies in itself that the two are different beings. In the second place, I say, avoiding as far as possible all the discussions of learning, that our translators are not to be understood as meaning

¹⁰ *Editor’s note:* The Wakefield translation is, in all probability, not correct.

¹¹ *Editor’s note:* It is definitely a part of holy Scripture.

equality in its strictest sense, but only similarity; or, if they do, their translation is to be rejected as false. ἴσα θεῶ does not mean “equal with God,” but “like God,” and if I were addressing scholars, I should prove this by further arguments.

Again, the Greek word answering to “robbery” (ἀρπαγμὸν) does indeed mean robbery, but it means also, what is the signification in the present connection, “robber’s plunder,” or as Wahl in his Lexicon explains it, “what is retained with an eager grasp, what is eagerly claimed and conspicuous exercised.”

The following is the sense of the passage. The apostle is exhorting the Philippians to humility, and says: “Let the same mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in truth the image of God, yet considered not his likeness to God *a robber’s spoil*, wore it not like a stolen honor, but bore it meekly, as those do to whom honors rightfully belong, but made himself of no reputation, taking the appearance and rank of a servant, being after the fashion of men, and being found in condition as a man, humbled himself, being submissive even unto death, and the death of the cross.” The punctuation which I use is that of Griesbach, a little, but not very materially, different from that of our version. It makes however the force of the passage more conspicuous. As to the language, instead of “and was made” in the seventh verse, the Greek word is “being,” and instead of “fashion” in the eighth verse, “state” or “condition” is better.

I have heard it more than once argued from the pulpit that “being in the form of God” must mean being God Himself, because being in “the form of a servant” is used directly after to mean being in truth a servant. But it is not used so. “Taking upon himself the form of a servant” cannot have this meaning. Jesus was not in fact a servant. A servant is a person who devotes himself to menial offices about our persons, on our farms, or in our houses. Christ was not such a person; but he, in a manner, resembled such a person, by remaining in an inferior rank of life and by not distinguishing himself from common men by any outward glory. So that, far from allowing the objection, I turn the analogy directly against the objector, and demand of him that he shall construe “in the form of” as meaning likeness only, in the one case as well as in the other. Christ’s being in “the form of a servant” meant only that he resembled a servant; his “being in the form of God” therefore means only that he resembled God, which he certainly did in a manner which can be predicated of no other created being of whom we have any knowledge. We honor him as divine. We revere him for his stainless and triumphant virtue, for his all-embracing, all-conquering benevolence, for his character, his life and his functions, all wholly and equally celestial. For these divine attributes and offices we “honor him even as we honor the Father,” but while we thus render him a *like* honor, we have a far *larger measure* of the same for that Being who is alike his Father and our Father, the prime Source of every good. To Him alone we render our supreme adoration; and while we honor the highest of His creatures *as* we honor Him, we presume not to honor any *equally with* Him.

Such is the foundation of the doctrine of the Supreme Divinity of Jesus Christ. Besides these fifteen texts, I know of no others which have been supposed to furnish a ground for that doctrine. I know of no others which can be brought forward as objections to our former conclusion. Of the first twelve out of these fifteen, I can perceive no possible way by which a reasonable man may escape the constructions I have given. But I can easily imagine that there are some to whom the secondary sense of the word θεός in Nos. 13 and 14 will seem forced, and who, being ignorant of the original language, will be unwilling to change “equal with God” in No. 15 for “like God.” To such, then, I say: is it possible that you will bring these passages, at best dark and doubtful, to disprove the clear deduction which we have made from the express teachings of all the rest of Scripture? Deduction do I say! It is no deduction. It is express statement. It is the simple declaration of our Lord himself that he was inferior to the Father; while with regard to those doctrines which we oppose, it is to be remarked that they are not pretended to be declared in any texts whatever, but only to be *inferred* from certain. If then with regard to the three last citations you are doubtful, call to mind our rule of interpretation, that the obscure passages of any book are to be explained by those which are clear, and apply it to the case in hand. And if you cannot satisfy yourself as to the true meaning, be content to remain in suspense, and do not desperately plunge into an evidently false one. The followers of Jesus firmly believed him, and Jesus expressly, distinctly, emphatically and repeatedly declares himself to be a messenger, having no power of himself, but deriving it all from his heavenly Father, from “his Father and our Father, his God and our God.” Let no dark constructions then, no doubtful and detached phraseology, no theological inferences overturn that stable truth.

Here, indeed, we might rest. But that you may have no doubt what your own mind is, fix on some of the characteristic acts of Jesus, and suffer them to affect you. Imagine yourself present in the garden during the last agony. Conceive in the obscurity of night that human figure, separating itself from the disciples, and turning aside among the olive trees, trembling with agitation, and falling upon its knees, with the sweat dripping upon the ground like great drops of blood, breathe forth the prayer, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” Can you entertain the idea that the trembling being before you is the Supreme Creator, and that at that very moment he is enjoying uninterrupted felicity and ruling among the distant stars? Or stand at the foot of the cross and witness the last struggles of exhausted nature, hear the plaintive prayer “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” and the last loud cry when life was yielding, and ask yourself *there* whether that being, in the midst of his groans and streaming wounds, be at that moment serene in perfect bliss, among the angelic hosts, incapable of grief.

Indeed, indeed, fellow Christians, ye do most of you seem to make our blessed Lord the mere actor of a part on earth, and his sufferings a theatrical display. For if his soul, his self, were Deity, all agitation and infliction was merely outward and apparent, carried no true suffering to the spirit, and therefore

cheats us when we sympathize. Let us dry our eyes and keep our tears for unaffected agony; or if we grieve, grieve only that Christ should be made a player of. If he were God, whether the first, the second, or the hundredth person in the Godhead, he did in truth feel no suffering, however much the corporal frame may have been wrung, but while the body hung on the cross was at that moment infinitely blessed. Alas, where then is our “Lamb to slaughter led, the bruised, the suffering and the dead,” our example of innocence and resignation and fortitude, our type of martyrdom, the boast of humanity, the consolation and strength of the mourner? Where is our spectacle of woe and the world subdued? It is gone, it is clean gone; and we are left without a pattern in our sharpest distresses. Our chief stay is taken from us, and Christianity becomes hardly worth the keeping.

But it may perhaps be imagined (for we hardly know what limit to put to human conjecture) that Christ intentionally and justifiably concealed his true character, in order that it might be revealed more profitably at a subsequent period. On the contrary, however, he seems to have been remarkably free and open in his statement of it. He not only declares who he is, but asseverates, reiterates and enforces the declaration, once indeed alleging it on oath, and at other times with explanations and illustrations.

Call to mind the frequent and decisive texts by which Jesus is proved to be distinct from and inferior to the Father.

1. They are spoken of emphatically as separate beings, as two beings. “It is written in your law that the testimony of two men is true. *I am one* who bears witness of myself, and the *Father that sent me* beareth witness of me” (John 8:17, 18).

2. Jesus *contrasts* himself with God. “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, *whether it be of God or whether I speak of myself*” (John 7:17). “If I honor *myself*, my honor is nothing; it is *my Father* that honoreth me” (John 8:54).

3. He speaks of himself as *sent*, which is precisely to the point of the present argument, in the most unambiguous and emphatic manner. “This is life eternal that they might know *thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent*” (John 17:3).

4. He had a separate will of his own, but yet made it subordinate to the will of God. “For I came down from heaven, not to do *mine own will*, but the *will of him that sent me*” (John 6:38).

5. He declared positively the entire dependence of his power. “*I can of mine own self do nothing*” (John 5:30).

6. The plain bearing of a multitude of other texts will be seen without my pointing it out. “To sit on my right hand and on my left *is not mine to give*, but it shall be given to them for whom it is *prepared of my Father*” (Matt. 20:23).

7. “*My Father is greater than I*” (John 14:28).

8. “As the living Father hath sent me, and *I live by the Father*” (John 5:26).

9. "All power is *given* unto me" (Matt. 28:18).
10. Christ is stated to be "*the first born* of every creature" (Col. 1:15).
11. "*Him hath God exalted* with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior" (Acts 5:31).
12. In 1 Corinthians 15:28, it is affirmed of Christ that "when all things shall be subdued unto him then shall the *Son also himself be subject* unto him that put all things under him, that *God may be all in all.*"
13. "For there is *one God*, and *one Mediator* between God and men, *the man Christ Jesus*" (1 Tim. 2:5).
14. "Jesus of Nazareth, *a man approved of God among you*, by miracles and wonders and signs which *God did by him* in the midst of you" (Acts 2:22).
15. "Because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that *man whom he hath ordained*" (Acts 17:31). Is it conceivable that the reader of this text should believe God and "the man whom he ordained" to be the same identical being?
16. Is there any doubt that Paul taught that Jesus Christ was a created being in like manner as Adam was? "For since by man came death, *by man* came also the *resurrection* of the dead. For as in *Adam* all die, even so in *Christ* shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:21, 22).
17. But to return to Christ's own words, which need no confirmation, and leave no room for doubt. He was always earnest to disclaim for himself and attribute to the Father all power, goodness and glory. "The *Father* that dwelleth in me, *he doeth the works*" (John 14:10). "Why callest thou me good?" he said to the young lawyer. "*There is none good but one, that is God*" (Matt. 19:17). "I do nothing of myself; but *as my Father hath taught me*, I speak these things" (John 8:28).
18. He *prays* to the Father, "to his Father and our Father, to his God and our God," in a manner which can leave no doubt on the mind of his inferiority and dependence. "At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight" (Matt. 11:25, 26). And he then instructs the bystanders *why* he had prayed, by adding "All things are delivered unto me of my Father."
19. "Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by, I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 11:41, 42). This prayer is to be particularly remarked, because our Lord therein declares that the very *purpose* of its being uttered was to convince the people "that God had sent him," that the miraculous power by which he was about to raise Lazarus from the dead was communicated to him from a higher source, that it was God who did the work. Why will we not believe this?

20. "And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me! Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt. 26:39).

We may rely then on these express statements and unambiguous revelations of the nature of our Lord.

I would now propose to you some additional considerations.

1. At the very beginning, while uninstructed, the disciples undoubtedly regarded Christ as a human being. Now if the doctrine of his Supreme Divinity be true, what a momentous change must have taken place in their minds! But there is no trace of this change. We have no indication of the time when any one disciple came to the awful and overwhelming conviction that he was in the bodily presence of his Creator.

We have, indeed, the record of one sudden conversion. And by that conversion, if the doctrine in question be true, Paul must have passed almost instantaneously from believing Jesus to be a blasphemous impostor to adoring him as the Supreme Jehovah. His soul would have sunk subdued by the unutterable imagination, and in the record of his words and conduct there could hardly fail of escaping some hint of the faith to which he had arrived. None such is found.

2. We know that with the Jews the strict Unity of God was the first and undoubted tenet of their faith, and that they defended that faith with the most ferocious jealousy. If Jesus, then, had in their presence claimed to be God, their rage would not have suffered them to speak; they would have murdered him on the spot. Or at his trial, this pretension would have been the first charge against him. But no, they had to hunt up false witnesses. Does not this amount almost to a demonstration that the Jews at least were not aware of his claiming to be Jehovah? And, secondly, if he did make the claim, must they not have known it? Once indeed they accuse him of putting himself on a par with God, in assuming divine power, but that has been explained before.

3. Neither did the Jews ever, to our knowledge, accuse the *disciples* of teaching that their Master was their Creator, although they were hard pushed for plausible charges against them, and although that would have afforded a ground of accusation legal and sufficient.

4. Since the supremacy of the one Jehovah was the universal and firm tenet of the nation of Israel, the introduction of a new person in the Godhead among that part of the people who became converted to Christianity would hardly have failed of giving rise to some question with regard to the true object of worship. Yet, although we are informed of many controversies which arose in that age, we have heard of none which concern that topic.

What then is your conclusion from all this examination? Do you adhere to the prevalent theology that, besides God the Father, there is also God the Son? Or do you hold to the faith of Paul that "*to us there is but one God the Father*"? Do

you not conclude, beyond any reasonable doubt, that no man of the times of the Savior, whether Jew or disciple, believed Jesus to be the Supreme Being? And do you not conclude, beyond any possibility of doubt, that whether they believed it or not, he was, as he repeatedly, explicitly and with great emphasis declared himself to be, and as all the considerations of reason would lead us to regard him, not God, but the messenger and Son of God?

To prove this our proposition, I have no fear that any person who can be expected to be moved by arguments will deem those which have been adduced insufficient. But I do fear that some, habituated to the popular theory, and unprepared to change, will suffer the arguments to remain in the mind, undecided on, until they gradually fade from the memory.

Let me therefore beseech you to take notice of your responsibility. That one blinded by the prejudices of education should entertain destructive error is pardonable; and if his bigotry lead him to uncharitableness and corruption of God's word, there is still palliation. But that one, after having the momentous truths of Christianity clearly proposed to his judgment and conscience, should, through indolence or worldliness, continue to be, in practice, the open or silent advocate of that which overthrows them, of that which strikes at God's majesty, makes Christianity a riddle, and infects the current of religious feeling from which the salvation of mankind is to flow — is not pardonable, nor will such a one be pronounced guiltless in the day of judgment.