

# LECTURE XVI.

## THE TRINITY.

### SYLLABUS.

1. Explain the origin and meaning of the terms, Trinity, Essence, Substance Subsistence, Person, *ὑποουσιον*.  
Turretin, Loc. iii, Qu. 23. Hill's Divin., bk. iii. ch. 10, § 2, 3. Knapp, § 42, 3; 43, 2. Dick, Lect. 28. Dr. W. Cunningham, Hist. Theol. ch. 9, § 2.
2. Give the history of opinions touching the Trinity; and especially the Patripassian, Sabbellian and Arian.  
Knapp, § 42 and 43. Hill, bk. iii, ch. 10. Dick, Lect. 29. Hagenback, Hist. of Doc. Mosheim, Com. de Reb. ante Constantinum, Vol. i, § 68, Vol. ii § 32 and 33. Dr. W. Cunningham, Hist. Theol., ch. 9, § 1.
3. Define the doctrine of the Trinity, as held by the orthodox: and state the propositions included in it.  
Turretin, Loc. iii, Qu. 25, 1-3, § and Qu. 27. Hill and Dick, as above. Jno. Howe, "Calm and Sober Inquiry Concerning Possibility of a Trinity."
4. What rationalistic explanations of the doctrine were attempted by the Origenists; and what by the mediæval scholastics? Are they of any value?  
Th. Aquinas, *Summa*. Hill, as above. Neander, Ch. Hist., 2 Am. Edit., Boston, Vol. ii, p. 360, &c., Vol. iv, 457, &c. Mosheim, Com., Vol. ii, § 27 and 31. Knapp, § 42. Watson, Theol. Inst., pt. ii, ch. 8, i (i.) 2.
5. Present the general Bible evidence of a Trinity, from the Old Testament and from the New.  
Turretin, Loc. iii. Qu. 25 and 26. Dick, Lect. 28. Knapp, § 34, 35.

**W**HILE a part of the terms introduced by the Scholastics to define this doctrine are useful, others of them illustrate

in a striking manner the disposition to substitute words for ideas, and to cheat themselves into the belief that they had extended the latter, by inventing the former. The Greek Fathers, like the theologians of our country, usually make no distinction between essence, and substance, representing both by the word *οὐσία*, being. But the Latin Scholastics make a distinction between *essentia*, *esse*, and *substantia*. By the first, they mean that which constitutes the substance, the kind of thing it is: or its nature, if it be a thing created. By the second, they mean the state of being in existence. By the third, they mean the subject itself, which exists, and to which the essence belongs. Subsistence differs from substance, as mode differs from that of which it is the mode. To call a thing substance only affirms that it is an existing thing. Its subsistence marks the mode in which it exists. e. g., matter and spirit are both substances of different kinds. But they subsist very differently. The infinite spirit

exists as a simple, indivisible substance; but it subsists as three persons. Such is perhaps the most intelligible account of the use of these two terms; but the pupil will see, if he analyses his own ideas, that they help him to no nearer or clearer affirmative conception of the personal distinction.

The word Person, *πρόσωπον persona*, (sometimes *ὑπόστασις* in the later Greek), means more than the Latin idea, of a *role* sustained for the time being; but less than the popular modern sense, in which it is employed as equivalent to individual. Its meaning will be more fully defined below. *ὁμοουσιος* means of identical substance. The Greek Fathers also employed the word *ἐμπεριχώρησις*, intercomprehension, to signify that the personal distinction implied no separation of substance. But, on the contrary, there is the most intimate mutual embracing of each in each; what we should call, were the substance material, an interpenetration.

The subsistence of the three persons in the Godhead was the earliest subject of general schism in the primitive Church. To pass over the primitive Gnostic and Manichæan sects, three tendencies, or schools of opinion, may be marked in the earlier ages; and in all subsequent times, the Orthodox, or Trinitarian, the Monarchian, and the Arian. The first will be expounded in its place. The tendency of mind prompting both the others may be said to be the same, and indeed, the same which has prevailed ever since, viz: a desire to evade the inscrutable mystery of three in one, by so explaining the second and third persons, as to reach an absolute unity both of person and substance, for the self-existent God. (*μόνη ἀρχή.*) Hence, it may justly be said that Arianism, and even Socinianism, are as truly monarchian theories, as that of Noëtus, to whom the title was considered as most appropriate.

Noëtus, an obscure clergyman, (if a clergyman) of Smyrna, is said to have founded a sect on the doctrine, that there is only one substance and person in the Godhead; that the names, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are nothing but names for certain phases of action or *roles*, which God successively assumes. Christ was the one person, the Godhead or Father, united to a holy man, Jesus, by a proper Hypostatic union. The Holy Ghost is still this same person, the Father, acting His part as revealer and sanctifier. Hence, it is literally true, that the Father suffered, i. e., in that qualified sense in which the Godhead was concerned in the sufferings experienced by the humanity, in the Mediatorial Person. This theory, while doing violence to Scripture, and deranging our theology in many respects, is less fatal by far, than that of Arians and Socinians: because it retains the proper divinity of the Messiah and of the Holy Ghost.

The Sabellian theory (broached by Sabellius, of Pentap-

Sabellian. olis in Lybia Cyrenaica, about A. D. 268,) has been by some represented as though it were hardly distinguishable from the Patripassian; and as though he made the names, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost the mere titles of three modes of action which the one Godhead successively assumes. By others it has been represented as only a sort of high Socinianism, as though he had taught that the Holy Ghost was an influence emanating from the Godhead, and Christ was a holy man upon whom a similar influence had been projected. But Mosheim has shown, I think, in his *Com. de Rebus*, &c., that both are incorrect, and that the theory of Sabellius was even more abstruse than either of these. The term which he seems to have employed was that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are three forms (*σχηματα*) of the Godhead, which presented real portions of His substance, extended into them, as it were, by a sort of spiritual division. Thus, the Son and Holy Ghost are not parts of the Father; but all three are parts, or forms, of a more recondite godhead. According to this scheme, therefore, the Son and Holy Ghost are precisely as divine as the Father; but it will appear to the attentive student very questionable, whether the true godhead of all three be not vitiated.

Arian. The theory of Arius is so fully stated, and well known, that though more important, it needs few words. He represents the Son, prior to His incarnation, as an infinitely exalted creature, produced (or generated) by God out of nothing, endued with the nearest possible approximation to His own perfections, adopted into sonship, clothed with a sort of deputed divinity, and employed by God as His glorious agent in all His works of creation and redemption. The Holy Ghost is merely a *κτισμα κτισμάτων* produced by the Son.

Now, it has been well stated by Dr. Hill, that there can be but three schemes in substance: the orthodox, the Patripassian, and the Subordinationist. All attempts to devise some other path, have merged themselves virtually into one or the other of these errors. Either the personal distinctions are obliterated, or they are so widened as to make the Son another and an inferior substance. Now, the refutation of the latter schemes will be sufficiently accomplished if we succeed (in the next Lecture) in establishing the proper divinity, and identity of substance of the Son.

Patripassian scheme refuted. The refutation of the former class of theories is effected by showing that some true and definite distinction of persons is predicted in Scripture of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. It will appear in so many places, asserted in so many forms, so intertwined with the very woof of the Scriptures, that its denial

does fatal violence to the integrity of their language. (a.) I point to those numerous passages, where one Person is said to act upon, or act through, another. See, e. g., Exod. xxiii: 20; Ps. ii: 6, cx.; Is. xlii: 1, liii: 12; Jno. xv: 26; xx: 21, &c., &c., where God the Father is said to send, to enthrone, to appoint to sacerdotal office, to uphold, to reward the Son, and the Son and Father to send the Holy Ghost. (b.) Consider those, in which mutual principles of affection are said to subsist between the persons. Is. xliii: 1; Jno. x: 17, 18, &c., &c. (c.) There is a multitude of other passages, where voluntary principles and volitions are said to be exercised by the several persons as such, towards inferior and external objects. Exod. xxxiii: 21. (The subject is the Messiah, as will be proved.) Eph. iv: 30, Rev. vi: 16, &c., &c. Yet, since these principles are all perfectly harmonious, as respects the three persons, there is no dissension of will, breach in unity of council, or difference of perfections. (d.) There is a still larger multitude of texts, which assert of the persons as such, actions and agencies toward inferior, external objects. See, for instance, Jno. v: 19; 1 Cor. xii: 11, &c., &c. Now, if these personal names, of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, meant no more than three influences or energies, or three phases of action of the same person, or three forms of one substance, is it not incredible that all these properties of personality, choosing, loving, hating, sending and being sent, understanding, acting, should be asserted of them? It would be the wildest abuse of language ever dreamed of.

The doctrine of the Trinity, as held by the Catholic Church, cannot be better defined, than in the words of our Confession. (Recite ch. II, § 3.)

### 3. Definition of Trinity.

It embraces the following propositions:

1. The true unity, indivisibility, and simplicity of God.
2. The subsistence of a threefold personal distinction, marked by a part of the properties of separate personalities, (in some inscrutable manner, entirely compatible with true unity) as intelligence, active principles, volition, action.
3. Identity of substance, so that the whole godhead is truly in each person, without confusion or division, and all the essence belongs alike to all the persons.
4. The distinction of the three persons, each by its property, incommunicable from one person to another, and the existence consequently of eternal relations between them.

Now, that it is inscrutable how these things can be, we freely admit. Did they involve a necessary self-contradiction, we should also admit that the understanding would be incapable of receiving them all together. But we do not hold that the persons are three in the same sense in which they are one. If it be asked what is the precise meaning of the phrase, person in the

Inscrutable; but not impossible.

Godhead? we very freely answer, that we know only in part. You will observe that all the Socinian and Rationalist objections mentioned in your text-books against this doctrine, either proceed on the misrepresentation, that we make three equal to one, (as in the notorious Socinian formula; let a. b. c. represent the persons, and x. the Godhead; then  $a=x$ ;  $b=x$ ;  $c=x$ . Add, and we have  $a+b+c=3x=x$ .) in the same sense: or they are *argumenta ad ignorantiam*. But is it not just we should expect, that when God reveals something about the subsistence of His being, it should be thoroughly inscrutable to us? We must remember that the human mind has no cognizance of substance, in fact, except as the existing ground, to which our intuitions impel us to refer properties. It is only the properties that we truly conceive. This is true of material substance; how much more true of spiritual substance? And more yet of the infinite? God, in revealing Himself to the natural reason, only reveals His being and properties or attributes—His substance remains as invisible as ever. Look back, I pray you, to that whole knowledge of God which we have acquired thus far, and you will see that it is nothing but a knowledge of attributes. Of the substance to which these properties are referred, we have only learned that it is. What it is, remains impenetrable to us. We have named it simple spirit. But is this, after all, more than a name, and the affirmation of an unknown fact to our understandings? For, when we proceed to examine our own conception of spirit, we find that it is a negation of material attributes only. Our very attempts to conceive of it, (even formed after we have laid down this as our prime feature of it, that it is the antithesis of matter,) in its substance, are still obstructed by an inability to get out of a materialistic circle of notions. We name it *Πνεῦμα, spiritus*, breath; as though it were only a gaseous and transparent form of matter; and only differed thus from the solid and opaque. This obstinate, materialistic limit of our conceptions arises, I suppose, from the fact, that conceptions usually arise from perceptions, and these are only of sensible, i. e., of material ideas. This obstinate incapacity of our minds may be further illustrated by asking ourselves: What is really our conception of God's immensity? When we attempt the answer do we not detect ourselves always framing the notion of a transparent body extended beyond assignable limits? Nothing more! Yet, reason compels us to hold that God's substance is not extended at all, neither as a vast solid, nor a measureless ocean of liquid, nor an immense volume of hydrogen gas expanded beyond limit. Extension, in all these forms, is a property wholly irrelevant to spirit. Again: (and this is most in point,) every Socinian objection which has any plausibility in it, involves this idea; that a trinity of Persons must involve a division of God's substance into three parts. But we know that divisibility is not a property of

spirit at all—the idea is wholly irrelevant to it, belonging only to matter.

The Socinian would say here: “Precisely so; and hence we reason against the impossibility of a trinity in unity. If divisibility is totally irrelevant to infinite Spirit, then it is indivisible, and so, can admit no trinity.”

Objections all Materialistic.

Inspect this carefully, and you will find that it is merely a verbal fallacy. The Socinian cheats himself with the notion that he knows something here, of the divine substance, which he does not know. By indivisible here, he would have us understand the mechanical power of utterly resisting division, like that imputed to an atom of matter. But has Spirit this material property? This is still to move in the charmed circle of material conceptions. The true idea is, not that the divine substance is materially *atomic*; but that the whole idea of parts and separation is irrelevant to its substance, in both a negative and affirmative sense. To say that Spirit is indivisible, in that material sense, is as false as to say that it is divisible. Thus the stock argument of the Socinian against the possibility of a trinity is found to be a fallacy; and it is but another instance of our incompetency to comprehend the real substance of spirit, and of the confusion which always attends our efforts to do so. We cannot disprove here, by our own reasonings, any more than we can prove; for the subject is beyond our cognition.

I pray the student to bear in mind, that I am not here attempting to explain the Trinity, but just the contrary: I am endeavoring to convince him that it cannot be explained. (And because it cannot be explained, it cannot be rationally rebutted.) I would show him that we must reasonably expect to find the doctrine inexplicable, and to leave it so. I wish to show him that all our difficulties on this doctrine arise from the vain conceit that we comprehend something of the subsistence of God's substance, when, in fact, we only apprehend something. Could men be made to see that they comprehend nothing, all the supposed impossibilities would vanish; there would remain a profound and majestic mystery.

The mint from which every attempted *rationale* of the Trinity has come, was the New Platonic; and the chief *media* of their introduction to the Christian Theology, Clem. Alexandrinus and Origen. Following the trinitarian scheme which the New Platonists attributed (with insufficient grounds) to Plato, of *Τὸ Ὀν*, *Νοῦς* and *Ψυχή*, they usually represent God the Father as the intelligent substance, intrinsically and eternally active, the *Νοῦς*, as the idea of self, generated from eternity by God's self-intellection; and the *Ψυχή*, as the active complacency arising upon it. The Platonizing fathers, who called themselves orthodox, were not slow to fling the charge of *monarchianism* (*Μονὴ Ἀρχή*)

4. Rational Explanation of Greek Schoolastics.

against all Patripassians, which I make against the Arians also, as reaching by diverse roads, an assertion of a single divine person. The modern student will be apt to think that their rationalism betrays the very same tendency; an unwillingness to bow the intellect to the dense mystery of a real and proper three in one; and an attempt to evade it by perpetually destroying the personality of the second and third persons.

This attempted explanation appears with new completeness and fullness, after the Peripatetics had modified the Platonic System, in the Latin Scholastics. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, states the matter about thus: Infinite activity of thought is the very essence of the Divine substance. But from eternity there was but a two-fold object of thought for this intellect to act on—God's self, and His decree. Now, as man is made intellectually in God's image, we cannot conceive of God's thinking, except by conceiving of our own acts of thought as the finite type of which His is the infinite antitype. Now, when man thinks, or conceives, it is only by means of a species of image of that which is the object of his thought, present before his mind. So, God's very act of thinking of Himself and His decree generates in the divine mind, a species of them; it generates them eternally; because God is eternally and necessarily active in thinking. This species or idea is therefore eternal as God, yet generated by God, it is of the same essence, for it is non-corporeal, spiritual entity, and God's essence is pure intellection. It is one with God; for it is God's idea of Himself, and His own eternal purpose which is Himself purposing. This is the *Λόγος*, the 2d Person. Again, as in our souls, so in God; the presence of a moral object in conception awakens moral sentiment, and of a plan or device, approval or disapproval; so, God's contemplation of this idea of Himself and His decree, begets a moral complacency, and a volition to effectuate (when the fullness of time shall have come) the decree. This complacency and volition are the Spirit, the 3d or practical Person of the Godhead, proceeding from the Father and the Idea, or *Λόγος*.

This *rationale* we cannot but regard as worthless, though ingenious. *First:* The Scriptures inform us in advance, that God is inscrutable; and that we need not expect to explain His subsistence. Job ii: 7. *Second:* According to this explanation, both the *Νοῦς* and the *Ψυχή* would be compounded, the former of the two species of God's being and of His decree; the latter of two feelings, His moral self-complacency and His volition to effectuate His decree. *Third:* Neither the 2d nor 3d persons would be substance at all, but mere idea and feeling, which have no entity whatever, except as affections of the substance of the Father. This seems to our minds an objection so obvious and conclusive, that no doubt the student is almost incredulous

that acute men should have seriously advanced a theory obnoxious to it. The answer is, that the Platonic and Peripatetic metaphysics ignored, in a manner astonishing to the modern christian mind, the distinction between substance and affections. Between the two kinds of entity, they drew no generic distinction. But is this not one of the very traits of modern, transcendental Idealism, from Spinoza down? *Fourth*: On this scheme of a trinity, I see not how the conclusion could be avoided, that every intelligent free agent is as much a finite trinity in unity as God is an infinite one. Let us then attempt no explanation where explanation is impossible.

Having thus defined the doctrine, we proceed to its proof.

5. Proof of Trinity wholly of Revelation.

That the evidence for the Trinity must be wholly a matter of revelation, would appear sufficiently from the weakness of the attempt made by the Scholastics, to find some proof or presumptive probability in the light of reason. The most plausible of these, perhaps, is that which Neander informs us, Raymund Lulle employed against the Unitarian Moslems of Barbary, which is not discarded even by the great Aquinas and the modern Christlieb. They say God is immutable from eternity. He exists now in a state of active benevolence. Hence, there must have always been, from eternity, some sense in which God had an object of His benevolence, in some measure extraneous; else active benevolence would have been impossible; and the result would be, that the creation of the angels (or earliest holy creatures) would have constituted an era of change in God. The reasoning appears unsound by this simple test. God is now actively righteous and punitive, as well as good; and a parallel argument will prove, therefore, with equal conclusiveness, the eternity of a devil. The solution of the sophism is to be found in those remarks by which we defended God's immutability against the objection, that the creation of the universe constituted a change in God. It does not; because God's purpose to create, when His chosen time should have come, was unchangeably present with him from eternity. Creation makes the change in the creature; not in God. The argument would be more plausible, if left in its undeveloped form viz: That an eternal absolute solitude was incompatible with absolute blessedness and perfection. Yet the answer is, that we cannot know this to be true of any infinite essence.

The Scripture evidence for a Trinity presents itself in two

forms. The most extensive and conclusive **General Direct** may be called the indirect and inferential **Proofs.** proof, which consists in these two facts when collated: 1st, That God is one. 2d, That not only the Father, but the Son and Holy Ghost, are proper God. This evidence presents itself very extensively over the Bible; and the two propositions may be said to be intertwined with its whole woof

and warp. The other testimony is the general direct testimony, where a plurality in the one God is either stated, or involved in some direct statement. The latter evidence is the one we present now: the former will become evident as we present the proof of the Divinity of the 2d and 3d Persons.

The text-books assigned to the students, present a collection and discussion of those passages so complete, that I shall not make an unnecessary recapitulation. I shall only set down a list of those passages which I consider relevant; and conclude with a few cursive remarks on the argument in a few points. The student, then, may solidly advance the following testimonies, as cited and expounded by the Books.

From the Old Testament:

Gen. i: 2, with Ps. civ: 30: Prov. viii: 22, &c.

Gen. i: 26: iii: 22: xi: 7; Is. vi: 8,

Numb. vi: 24-26, may have some feeble weight when colated with Is. vi: 3, and 2 Cor. xiii: 14.

Hosea i: 7; Isaiah lxiii: 7-14, and Ps. xlv: 6.

The argument from the plural forms אֱלֹהִים, אֲדֹנָיִם, it seems to me ought to be surrendered after the objections of Calvin and Buxtorff.

In the New Testament a very clear argument arises from the formula of Baptism. Matt. xxviii: 19. The only objection of any plausibility, is that from 1 Cor. x: 2—"Baptized unto Moses." In addition to the answers of Turretin, it is surely sufficient to say, that this is a very different case from that where the names of the 2d. and 3d. persons are connected with that of God the Father in the same sentence and same construction.

Another indisputable argument is derived from the Apostolic benediction. 2 Cor. xiii: 14. See also Rev. i: 4, 5: 1 Cor. xii: 4-6.

The argument from the baptism of Christ seems to me possessed of some force, when the meaning of the Father's avowal and of the Spirit's descent are understood in the light of Scripture.

The much litigated passage in 1 John v: 7, is certainly of too doubtful genuineness to be advanced, polemically, against the adversaries of the Trinity: however, we may believe that the tenour of its teaching is agreeable to that of the Scriptures elsewhere.