

(As Matthew xii. 40 does not occur in the parallel account in Luke xi. 29-32, interrupts the course of the argument, and is inaccurate in its reference to the circumstances of the Resurrection, it may be regarded as a later gloss.) It appears then, on close inquiry, that it is not a reverent Christian faith which demands our submission to Christ's authority on these matters, as the evangelical testimony warrants no such demand. It is at the root prejudiced ecclesiastical dogmatism, which knows only the bondage of the letter, and not the freedom of the Spirit; it is a Bibliolatry, such as Christ rebuked in the scribes when He declared, "Ye search the Scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of Me" (John v. 39).

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THE REVEALING OF THE TRINITY.

THE purpose of this paper is to suggest, with much diffidence on the part of the writer, a theory as to the principle of Revelation, especially Christian Revelation, which may supply a natural explanation of the various changes through which Christian dogma has passed in the course of the ages.

In the first place, we may note that as in literature, art, and science so in theology it is the supply that creates the demand, and not *vice versa*. The history of inventions, of literature, and of art supply many instances in which a completely original genius strikes out a new line for himself, presents to mankind an idea, a style, a type, a manner hitherto unheard of, and which after passing through the stages of ridicule, of opposition, and toleration becomes eventually universally accepted. It falls to the lot of very few indeed to witness the immediate success of their

ideas. The reception given to Wagner and Browning in their respective spheres is typical of the experience of those who tell their fellows something really new.

Similarly it seems to be one of the conditions or principles of Divine Revelation that the supply of divine truth is in advance of the general demand. A new conception of God's nature or character, or a new application to practical life of knowledge already grasped by the intellect is revealed to one or a few, and they awaken in others the desire for it, until, by slow degrees, the thought or the appeal to conscience permeates through all grades of mind, becoming at last the instinctive conviction of all, a part of the atmosphere of knowledge and morals into which we are born.

The Bible—the narrative of the revelation of God to man—exhibits many illustrations of this phenomenon; but in none is it so clearly and unmistakably marked as in the successive stages of the revelation to man of what is called the Name of God. The Name of God has been defined as “a symbol unveiling His nature” (Liddon), or as “all that has been revealed as to His Person and character” (A. A. Robinson). These definitions are sufficient for our purpose; and, broadly speaking, before Christ came, there had been two revelations given to the chosen people of the Name of God: that of “God Almighty, El Shaddai,” given to Abraham, and that of “Jehovah” given to Moses. What the Fourth Evangelist says in speaking of the revelation given by the Incarnate Son is as true of the ages that had gone before: “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared Him.” We know now that the first awakening of consciousness in primitive man of the “Power, not himself, that makes for righteousness” was due to the operation of the Personal Logos, Word, or Reason of God, and that from that

Personal Logos proceeded likewise the revelations that are recorded in history, revelations ever growing more and more distinct.

The point, however, on which I desire now to lay emphasis is that the successive revelations of the Name of God usher in epochs of human thought on things divine. They are just in advance of their time, they state the lesson to be learnt by generations following, they do not sum up the conscious experience of the generations preceding; so that we may say that from Abraham to Moses the chosen people were learning by degrees the significance of the covenant name, "God Almighty," and, when they had in some measure grasped that, then from the time of Moses to the end of the old dispensation lawgiver and prophet, psalmist and sage were teaching them the sublime conception of monotheism conveyed in the name "Jehovah"; and it may be added that in like manner has the Christian Church for nearly 1900 years been learning the "name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

We may remark, in passing, that this fact, that the last revelation, until superseded, is always ahead of the thought of humanity, supplies one illustration or example of the divine origin or inspiration of the Bible. It is as with Israel in the Wilderness of the wanderings, when "the ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them three days' journey to seek out a resting place for them." We, to-day, always find the New Testament ahead of us in our advances in things spiritual, moral or social. Our prophets and philanthropists and reformers are constantly proclaiming what, in their conceit, they think to be new commandments, and lo, it is always "an old commandment which we had from the beginning," though we saw it not.

With regard to the matter now under consideration—

the revelation of the doctrine of the Trinity—while the declaration of the Name of God given by our Lord is final, at least so far as this dispensation is concerned, yet the knowledge and apprehension of that Name—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—which the Church has is an ever increasing, an ever widening, an ever deepening one. And this is not merely a case of ordinary growth and advance in knowledge, but is a natural and inevitable result from the relation in which the Church, collectively and individually, stands to the Persons of the Godhead.

The exact wording of Christ's declaration is significant: "Make disciples of all the nations, *baptizing them into the name* of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Baptism, then, is not so much the communication to the soul of a germ of new life, however true that may be, as the incorporation of the personality into a new life, a life all-embracing, vast, ineffable. We "were all baptized into one body" (1 Cor. xii. 13), even "into Christ" (Gal. iii. 27); so "we have become united with Him" (Rom. vi. 5). As members we are brought into the life of the Body; as tendrils or branches we derive our strength from the Vine or Olive into which we have been grafted; as stones our significance and value depend upon the dignity and beauty of that Temple of the living God which collectively we are; as "sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty" we have been adopted into His Family; and we have been made free, as citizens, of the Kingdom of heaven, the rights and privileges of which we jointly, not separately, inherit.

In like manner the revelation of God as Father, Son and Holy Ghost is not a proposition or formula imposed on us from without, by an authority external to ourselves rather is it a spiritual condition, an environment of spiritual existences, a spiritual relationship into which we are brought individually, and as a Church collectively, at our

baptism, and which it is for us to apprehend and profit by according to our spiritual capacities. The case is exactly analogous to what we call the natural life. A child is, at its birth, introduced into the physical life, with all its many and various elements that minister to growth and activity, and is also brought into a more or less complicated social order and intellectual surroundings, and it has to make the best it can of all these physical and social and intellectual conditions of being.

This way of looking at the revelation of divine truth—and indeed all Christian doctrine is summed up in the revelation of the Trinity—seems to afford, if not a solution of many problems, yet a mitigation of some difficulties and misunderstandings. It helps us to understand, on the one hand, why it is that the doctrine of the Trinity means so much more to some men than it does to others, and, on the other hand, inasmuch as the life of the Church is continuous like that of an individual human being, it gives an explanation of the growth and change in the current teaching of the Church from time to time on this particular point of dogma. It is a fact that each generation of thoughtful Christians differs somewhat in its practical treatment of the doctrine from the generation that has gone before. The practical apprehension of the Trinity, like a child's knowledge of its human relationships, grows with the spiritual growth of each individual Christian, and it varies with the varying circumstances of the Church.

Let us speak first of the various presentations of this doctrine by the Church. The life of the Church is not exactly analogous to that of the earthly life of an individual human being. In our life here we pass through the very differing mental characteristics of infancy, childhood, youth, manhood and old age. But it is not so with the Church of Christ; she is, as Hooker says, "a body that dieth not"; and though it be true that she is

ever moving onward "towards the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," yet we instinctively feel that the characteristics of infancy and youth cannot be correctly predicated of the Church of Apostolic times. This paradoxical statement, it is safe to say, could not, with any plausibility, be made of any other institution. But the Church is not a human institution; she partakes of the unending timeless life of Christ whose Body she is; and He "is the same yesterday and to-day, yea and for ever." And so the added centuries by which her life in time is measured bring with them neither decay of vigour, nor decadence of apprehension; and, on the other hand, she had not the weakness or irresponsibility of youth when single years or decades were the units of her duration on earth.

To those who do not believe in the divine origin of the Christian Church this way of speaking will seem not only fanciful but absurd; and yet this way of regarding the Church's life enables us to appreciate properly the varying presentation, by successive generations of Churchmen, of "the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints." We are hereby guarded from two dangers: firstly, the temptation to regard the views of any one age as the standard of orthodoxy, a golden age of theology towards which the early centuries struggled, and from which later ages have degenerated; and secondly, the temptation—more to be feared in our own day than the other—to depreciate all early theology as being necessarily crude, immature, and unscientific. On the one hand, an appeal to the first four, or any number of, General Councils seems equivalent to saying to the Holy Spirit of God, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further." It is surely an unwise faithlessness that would set bounds to the guiding influence of the Spirit of truth. On the other hand, we must, as Christians, believe that "hitherto hath the Lord helped us," that the promise of Christ has not failed, and that our fathers, no

less than we ourselves, were guided into truth in what they thought and said about the Trinity, as about other things.

What I mean is this: when we pass in review the net results of the conflict of thought of each successive generation of men in the Church, we note something more than so many illustrations of the saying of the Preacher, "He hath made everything beautiful in its time." We observe how questions about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit rise one after the other for solution, one at a time. Now this aspect of the Name of God, now that seems to monopolize attention, to the exclusion of every other consideration; and looking back, at a long interval, we are able to report progress, we can note something so decided as that the decision of the Church becomes an axiom in the Christian consciousness,¹ we can mark some limits set to our inquiries in this direction or in that, or we can observe some thought material provided for the use of another age of men.

A reference to the language of the New Testament itself will perhaps give an illustration of what has been said. There are some four or five passages in the Epistles in which a knowledge of the revelation of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is indicated; e.g., "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all" (2 Cor. xiii. 14; cf. also 1 Cor. xii. 4; Eph. iv. 4-6; 1 Pet. i. 2; Jude 20, 21). Now we are so accustomed to think of the Epistles of the New Testament as material for theological speculation that we forget that, in another point of view, they are the writings of men who, like ourselves, were living in the spiritual environment of the Trinity, in conscious relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They differed from us, however, in this, that they seem to have been unaware of the existence of intellectual difficulties in the new Name of

God revealed by Christ. To ask the question, Was St. Paul orthodox on this matter? or St. Peter? or St. Jude? is evidently absurd. Yet if we had not their writings before us, it is doubtful if we, with our intellects rendered suspicious by the controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries, would use the language they do. Nevertheless their words are true words, and the age of the great councils which formulated the doctrine of the Incarnation, precisely and logically, in the language of their time, and for which we thank God, did not close the process of the learning of the Name of God. The subtle questionings of the Middle Ages, the moral struggle of the Reformation, the scientific revolution of the nineteenth century, all stand for so many endeavours, conscious or unconscious, to learn the name of God.

And yet, after all, knowledge, to be of any use, must be such as has profited ourselves personally. The most excellent food will yield no nourishment to him who cannot assimilate it. The armour of Saul may be of the finest brass, but David cannot "go with them" against the Philistine, "for he has not proved them." And so in the Holy War around Mansoul, that which enables a man to stand in the evil day is that knowledge of the Name of God which comes to him from the felt needs of his life. He who really knows God as Father, Redeemer, Sanctifier is well enough, though he might be puzzled to express his faith in the language of the schools.

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