

The Truth as to The Trinity

With Special Reference to a pamphlet by C.A.Coates

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Foreword

If the reader should consider what follows too argumentative, let him not forget that the Apostle Paul frequently made use of this method in his epistles. Argument not only exposes the fallacy of a writer's contentions, or shows how insufficient is the basis upon which they rest, and to what false conclusions they lead, but shows also that a doctrine may be demonstrably untrue because one-sided and exaggerated, or destructive of some truth clearly taught in the Scriptures.

The Truth as to the Trinity

A controversy of a very serious nature has arisen amongst some of God's people, which cannot be viewed with indifference, nor ought the true issue to be left in doubt. It affects our thoughts as to the Trinity, and therefore is of a fundamental character. The question raised is this: Do the names Father, Son, and Holy Spirit apply to the eternal relationship of the three Persons in the Godhead, or do they simply refer to the three-fold character in which God has been pleased to reveal Himself to men? Or, to put it in other language; do the titles "the Son" and "Son of God" apply to Christ before Incarnation or only subsequent to Incarnation?

But let us quote the exact words in which the doctrine which we are about to consider is formulated by those who deny the eternal Sonship of Christ.

Mr J.T. of New York, who, we believe, was the first to promulgate the doctrine in recent years, in writing to a friend, says:

"We know, too, that there are and were three Persons in the Deity. No one with whom we are walking denies these things. They are not in question, but rather: Does Scripture warrant us in saying that the relationships taken by Divine Persons with each other, so that God should be known and His counsels in Christ (involving Sonship in Him and His own) carried into effect, are the relationships of Deity in the past eternity?"

Again he says:

"I have shrunk from applying such relationships to Divine Persons as in absolute Deity."

The first statement quoted is somewhat involved, but it seems clear, especially in the light of the second quotation, that what is asserted is this: The titles Father, Son, and Holy Spirit do not enter into the life and being of the Godhead as such; the relationship they imply is in view of God's revelations of Himself to man. In other words, although the three Persons existed, the names Father, Son and Holy Spirit had no meaning and no reality until Incarnation. Or to put it, again, in another form: Sonship had no application to Christ in any real sense, apart from prophetic utterances, before He was born of Mary.

In order that there may be no misunderstanding, we quote from another advocate of this doctrine. The following appears in a pamphlet by C.A.C., p 4:

“Does Scripture apply the title Son to Him as in the form of God in the past eternity? Will the reader,” he adds, “please note carefully that **this** is the subject of consideration.”

In both cases, we notice, the writers make their appeal to Scripture, and those who accept their teaching make a great deal of the fact that such an expression as “the eternal Son” is not found there. Mr J.T., in the letter referred to, somewhat discounts this, for while making a similar assertion he is careful to add: “The absence of the term ‘eternal Son’ in Scripture, although important to notice, is not the determining factor, but the **general teaching of Scripture.**”

We accept this challenge, and in contending that the doctrine under consideration is not according to the Bible, it is to the general teaching of Scripture we shall make our appeal. For although in this controversy a great deal has been made of the fact that the words “eternal Son” are not found, such an argument is usually worthless. It is, indeed, not seldom the last refuge of ignorance. We are not told, in so many words, that the Church is the Bride, nor is it stated in definite terms whether or not the Church goes through the “Great Tribulation.” To decide these points we need to know the difference between Israel and the Church, and the peculiar character and calling of each. Our Lord found the truth of resurrection in the Pentateuch, but the word itself does not occur.

No doubt many an earnest Christian has sometimes longed for a list of things that are prohibited, as well as things which are permitted, but such a list cannot be found in the New Testament, nor would it have been of much help had such a list been given, for unworldliness is far more than merely abstaining from certain pleasures or going to certain places. And so it has often happened that the Church has given names to certain doctrines, not because the name itself is to be found in Scripture, but because the doctrines represented by the names are to be found there. Thus the word Trinity is not a Bible word. Nor, be it noted, are we ever told **in so many words**, that there are three Persons in the Godhead. That is, the word **Person** is never used in this connection. We ourselves are not objecting to its use, but we feel justified in insisting that it is not a Biblical expression because it is in frequent use by those who are building so much upon the fact that “eternal” is not a Biblical expression in relation to the Son. Where in the Bible do we find such a formula as: “In the Deity there are three Persons”?

The Bible does not give us the truth in neat formularies, nor does it treat us to precise definitions. Had it been constructed on this principle, no doubt we might have been saved much trouble, and escaped a good deal of controversy, but such a method would have been harmful rather than helpful. It would have been putting a premium on laziness. Only by diligence, and by taking pains can its deeper meaning be discovered. No doubt it contains many plain statements easy to be understood by the ignorant and those who are out of the way, so that he who runs may read, but only those who search its pages as for hid treasure can gather its richer spoil, and discover its deeper meaning.

All this bears upon the matter in hand. It is not enough for brethren to tell us that certain words are not found in Scripture, for if we are to be bound by literalism let us apply it all round. If we do not read of the “eternal” Son, neither do we read anywhere that He **became** the Son, or

that He **became** the Word. Nor are we much impressed when they insist again and again upon not going beyond Scripture, when it is evident that what they mean is beyond the mere letter of Scripture. That their doctrine comes short of the teaching of Scripture we will, with God's help, now proceed to show.

The difference between "The Son" and "Son of God," and between "only begotten" and "begotten."

In the pamphlet and letter already referred to, we fail to discover any allusion to the distinction which Scripture makes between "the Son" and "Son of God." Had the advocates of the doctrine under consideration affirmed that in certain passages in Scripture the title "Son of God" has reference to our Lord as Man and to what became true in Incarnation, no objection could have been taken. It certainly is so in Luke 1:35, and possibly in John 1:34. But the title "the Son" is in a different category. This will become obvious by comparing two Scriptures—Luke 10:22 and Eph 4:13. The first passage reads thus: "No man knows Who the Son is, but the Father." The second: "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, **and of the knowledge of the Son of God** unto a perfect man." Now, if "the Son" and "the Son of God" were alike or if one could be used instead of the other, as if there were little or no difference, then Scripture would be involved in a contradiction. For in the one case no man knows the Son; nor is it stated that "the Son" is ever made known; whereas in the other, the object of ministry is to make the Son of God known. "The Son" is the co-relative of the Father, and suggests that He was "the Son" before Incarnation. For surely what Christ became in Incarnation is made known. He became Man for that purpose, and to reveal the Father, but He Himself as "the Son" remains unknown. Not unknown that He is "the Son," but all that He is as "the Son," in His own glorious eternal Person, is not the subject of revelation.

John 5 confirms this. Again and again we have "the Father" and "the Son" spoken of in equal terms. Not equal terms in the sense that there is no difference whatever, otherwise the terms Father and Son would have no meaning. But they are spoken of together and in such a way that not only is time excluded as well as Incarnation, but as showing that the two titles are, so to speak, bound together and belong to each other. Take the profound statement of v. 26: "For as the Father has life in Himself, so has He given to the Son to have life in Himself." How can we introduce the thought of time here, or limit this to Incarnation? Had he who was the Son no life in Himself before being born of Mary? For the life spoken of here must be more than the human life which Christ received as born of the Holy Ghost of the Virgin. The very construction of the sentence involves this. The words are: "For AS the Father has life in Himself, SO has He given to the Son to have life in Himself." Had the Father no life in Himself prior to Incarnation? When did the Father begin to have life in Himself? Whenever that was, then it was the Son began to have life in Himself. Such is the only construction that can be put upon the statement. And it furnishes the strongest *prima facie* evidence that both Father and Son, **as such**, existed from all eternity.

Will the reader notice that three titles are used of our Lord in these verses. "The Son," "Son of God" (vv. 25/6) , and "Son of Man" (v. 27), and each is used in a different connection. "The Son" as equal in rank with the Father. The two are found in the closest juxtaposition. "The Son of God" in connection with that which takes place in time, and with resurrection, which is the

outstanding proof that He is the Son of God (John 11 and Rom 1:4). “Son of Man” stands in relation to judgment. Both “Son of God” and “Son of Man” are in relation to time. Not so “the Son.” But we shall have occasion to return to this chapter again, as it has a most important bearing upon the subject under consideration.

We have only space for a very brief reference to “begotten” and “only begotten.” But here again we observe an important distinction in Scripture.

“Begotten” almost invariably refers to some position or place Christ fills as Man. We are of opinion, though we do not wish to dogmatise, that the salutation “Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee,” stands in relation to three different and very distinct actions and periods. First, in relation to Incarnation; second, in regard to Resurrection; and thirdly, when He “brings again the first begotten into the world,” in other words, the Kingdom. (See also Col 1:15 and 18, and Rev 1:5.)

Whereas “only begotten” tells us what that One is to the Father, and has always been. There never was a moment when He was not the “only begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father.” Are we to suppose that the Son was never in the bosom of the Father until after He was in the bosom of Mary? Far be the thought.

Tritheism is not the Truth of the Trinity or of the Godhead.

Few things have astonished us more, of late, than the discovery that many of our brethren are what is known as Tritheists. That is, in their notions of the Deity they picture to themselves three Persons identical in every respect. In other words, to all intents and purposes, as far as their theories go, for they would not be willing perhaps to acknowledge it, they seem to have in their minds three Gods.

This fact stands out on page after page of Mr C.A.C.’s pamphlet. Before quoting from him, let us see how the matter is described by another. After referring to two opposite mistakes into which some have been in danger of falling, namely Tritheism, on the one hand, and Sabellianism on the other, the writer proceeds:

“The first of these mistakes is known by the name of Tritheism, a supposing that there are three Gods. This belief has never been formally maintained, **but it is unconsciously the creed of a great many persons** who have no wish to dispute the teaching of the Church (or of the Bible). They think of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost as three separate beings, possessed of the same glorious attributes, and bound together by mutual love and concord, accommodating and serviceable in many ways to each other’s schemes but **independent of each other**, and not necessary to one another’s existence or completeness.” (emphasis **mine**.)

After asserting the truth that “God is One” the writer proceeds:—

“For the threefold personality of God does not contradict His unity in any way:**it shows the manner or condition of it.** There are not three independent units side by side, on a

level with each other, each almighty, each eternal, **each finding in Himself the source of His own life.** The unity of the three blessed Persons is not a similarity of character and qualities and powers ... three Beings each of Whom is a God. (Will the reader carefully note the exact language employed here—"a God" not "God." Each is God, but not "a God."). It is true though inexpressible, unity of Three Persons ... **incapable of existence apart from one another.** The life of all three is one and the same life, **and it has but one source, not three.** The **very titles by which They are known** to us, imply this. They are not proper names, like those of heathen divinities, **but titles of relationship**, which involve each other, and would be meaningless alone. Fatherhood is impossible without sonship, and sonship without fatherhood."

We would like to quote more of this admirable and, in every way, accurate statement. It is thoroughly scriptural as we shall presently proceed to show; and, if so, what becomes of the doctrine that there was no Trinity in any real sense until Christ became Man—no Son, no Father and, consequently no Holy Spirit? For there could not be one without the others. If we can establish the existence of one in eternity, then we establish the existence of all.

But first of all let us compare the statements of Mr Coates with what is set forth in the foregoing quotation. Objection might not be taken to certain of these statements apart from the doctrine they stand connected with, but they leave the impression that C.A.C. does think of the Deity not only as apart from Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but as three separate beings, independent of each other. On p. 7 we read:

"He was with God in full equality from eternity, for He was God. He was with the Father as to presence and place eternally, having a personality distinct from the Father, but co-equal with Him." (We can only remark in passing, fancy using the title Father in such a connection, when according to the whole trend and teaching of the pamphlet God did not exist as Father. Where is there any sense of reality in this?)

On p. 8 we read:

"In eternal Deity He was on absolute equality with the other Persons of the Godhead."

P. 11,

"Before He was given and sent He was eternally God."

P. 13,

"As to presence, place, and glory, Divine Persons were together, co-equal and co-eternal."

P. 24,

"Every thoughtful believer must realise that He could not be **the God** of Another co-equal Divine Person when both are viewed in absolute Deity."

P. 25,

“The Persons of the Godhead are eternally the same.” “But names of revelation were certainly not needed within the sphere of Deity.”

P. 29,

“There were three Divine Persons in eternity.”

Referring to a certain statement, C.A.C. remarks,

“It deprecates that in speaking of the first, second, and third Persons of the Trinity it should be implied that ‘in eternity, or in the Deity, as such there could be any such relative positions.’ Each Person of the Deity, as we say, is co-equal, co-eternal, co-existent, albeit distinct.”

“As in eternal Deity He was underived, unbegotten, co-equal, and co-eternal with the other Divine Persons.”

Such are some of Mr C.A.C.’s statements. Could Tritheism be set forth in plainer language? If words have any meaning we are here taught that there are three Persons, all equal, all the same, each God, without any distinction or difference whatever. As already quoted above, C.A.C. thinks of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost (though he does not even think of them under these names) as

“three separate Beings, possessed of the same glorious attributes, but independent of each other and not necessary to one another’s existence or completeness.”

So independent are they in Mr C.A.C.’s mind that he asserts:

“The Names Father and Son are ever presented in Scripture in relation to the divine **mediatorial system**. They belong to the **sphere of revelation**, and **not to that of God’s essential Being**.” (p. 21).

Again we say, if Mr C.’s thoughts are to be construed by his words, then he teaches that there are “three independent units side by side, on a level with each other, each almighty, each eternal, each finding in Himself the source of His own life.” In contrast with this, Mr C. asserts, as quoted above, “The Persons of the Godhead are eternally the same.” According to him there are no names by which to describe these Divine Persons, and they have no relative positions. We do not mean that the expressions C.A.C. uses with regard to our Lord, such as “eternal Deity,” “co-equal and co-eternal,” are untrue or even inappropriate in their proper place, but, as he uses them, they convey a wrong impression. Just as many things might be said of the humanity of our Lord, which would not be inaccurate in themselves but might be used to belittle or deny His true Deity. It is quite true to say there is only one God or that God is one, but that may be pushed to such an extreme as to become Unitarianism. So C.A.C.’s references to the Deity amount to Tritheism and virtually nullify any true conception of the

Trinity. He speaks of the Persons of the Godhead “being eternally the same.” Further on he describes them as all alike. How can this be? Why **three**, if each is like the other, and in every respect the same? Had C.A.C. understood the truth of the Trinity, he would have been saved from such unbalanced statements. It is not enough to say there are three Persons in the Deity. It is only as one understands the Trinity that one can form any right conception of the Deity. It is just at this point the doctrine we are considering fails completely, because it is utterly inadequate, inasmuch as it makes the revelation of the Trinity refer to man alone instead of seeing that it belongs to the very nature of God, and was true irrespective of any revelation whatever.

Results of C.A.C.’s Teaching.

1. Mr C.A.C. is inconsistent and even contradicts himself. He will not apply **names** to Divine Persons in eternity, but apparently he has no objection to apply **numbers**!! He speaks of Them as first, second and third. On p. 14, he says “It had been known to the Father and to Himself (the Son) in the inscrutable glory of Deity.” Yet on p. 18 he declares: “We cannot carry the names Father and Son even back into the Old Testament.” Why then does he carry such names back into a past eternity? On p. 19 he tells us, “the thought of God is presented to us in the Father,” and a little later he quotes the words of Scripture: “To us there is one God, even the Father.” (1Cor 8:6.) Yet on p. 20 he states just as emphatically: “Of course, there is no change in God: what He is now, He ever was and ever will be.” If there is no change in God, and the thought of God? is presented to us in the Father, then how could there ever have been a time when God was not the Father? He must have been always God the Father, or else not God. The very Scripture he quotes proves this. “To us,” says the Apostle, “there is one God, the Father.” (This is the correct quotation not as C.A.C. gives it “even the Father.”) But the verse contains a very important addition, namely, “Of Whom are all things.” That is, the Father is the origin and source of everything. The introduction of the word Father here, is of the utmost significance and to omit it would completely destroy the force of the passage. The Apostle does not state that God, that is, in the Trinity of His Being, is the source of all, but that God the Father is. May we ask C.A.C. when this began? Only concurrently with Incarnation? Who could think it? There can be only one meaning to the statement, namely, that whenever God began to be the source of all, that is when Fatherhood began. Of the Father it is, Paul affirms, “Of Whom are all things.” We shall see later how this agrees with other Scriptures. Therefore if as C.A.C. says, and says truly, “There is no change in God.” (p, 20), then He was always the Father, for the Father is the source of all things.

The very nature of God demands such a thought. Things do not begin with God. Things do not occur to Him like they occur to us. His life is one eternal present, one eternal NOW. Time does not enter into His life. One day is with Him as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. When sin entered He did not have to turn round and enquire what should be done. He did not have to consider plans. And to suppose that He only began to be the Father less than 2000 years ago is not only contrary to all Scripture, but to all reason and to all right thoughts of the being and nature of God.

2. But the teaching of C.A.C. and those who agree with him involves us in inextricable

confusion and difficulty. We are shut up to the thought of God sending God. There is no escape from it. According to this teaching there was no Father to send, and no Son to be sent. Where is there any such thought in Scripture, either of God sending God, or of the second Person of the Trinity (as we speak) coming entirely of His own accord and by his own independent action? Any such idea is entirely contrary to the whole trend of Scripture. Everything is undertaken and done by the Son in subjection to the Father. “A body hast **Thou** prepared Me,” are the words of Scripture. And these words are uttered prophetically by the Spirit of Christ, long before Christ became Man.

The Sending of the Son and the Sending of the Spirit.

These brethren would have us read Scripture **backwards**. They say that the word “sent” is only used after He has already come. That is, the words, “The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world,” must be read, as true after the event. But why read **backwards**? Why adopt some other method than the simple straightforward method? If a father wrote to some relatives in Australia and said, “I am sending my son out to you,” would he mean that the lad only became his son on his arrival? Why introduce a difficulty where none exists, simply to bolster up a theory? Almost every form of words which could possibly be employed to express being sent, in the ordinary meaning of the words, is used in relation to the Father sending the Son. In John 10:36, it is: “Whom the Father has sanctified and **sent into** the world.” “Sanctified and sent” not “sent and sanctified.” When was the Son sanctified? How is it possible to impose any time limit? Was he not set apart by the Father from all eternity—the Lamb foreordained before the foundation of the world? Moreover it states He was not merely “sent,” but “sent into the world.”

The Meaning of “Sent.”

But we are not left to any conjectures of our own. Happily we can determine the meaning of “sent” with reference to the Son by the meaning of “sent” with reference to the Spirit. Twice, in John 14 and 15 is the word “send” used with reference to the coming of the Comforter. “Whom the Father will send” and “Whom I will send.” Even if it could be argued that the Spirit was only the Comforter after He came, this does not in the least weaken our contention, for He is spoken of as the Holy Ghost. Now did the Holy Ghost only begin to exist as the Holy Ghost after He came? If not, then why, when we read of the Son being sent, should it mean one thing, but when the same words are applied to the Spirit it should mean another? In face of such a reference to the Spirit we are faced with this dilemma, that the Spirit existed—for no one doubts, I suppose, that He did exist before the Incarnation—but Father and Son as such, did not exist! So that we become involved again in an inscrutable difficulty, namely, the existence of one Person of the Trinity, apart from the other two.

Further in Galatians 4:4 we read: “God sent forth His Son.” We are asked to read this as if it were written, “He Whom God sent forth became His Son in Incarnation.” But a verse or two lower down we have another “sent forth,” referring to the Holy Spirit. “God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts.” Now was not the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God’s Son **before** He was sent to us? Even if we are to limit the Spirit of God’s Son, as referring to Christ, to Incarnation, or to His Baptism, yet He was that **before** He was sent to us. Then why

put one interpretation upon “sent forth” when it has reference to God’s Son and quite a different interpretation when it refers to the Holy Spirit? For undoubtedly the “sending forth” here, as regards the Spirit, has reference to **us** and not to Christ.

All this shows conclusively that the erroneous theory as to “sent” cannot be upheld. When Scripture declares “The Father sent the Son,” it means precisely what it says. It means we are to understand that the Son existed as such before He was sent. Just as it means the Spirit already existed before being “sent forth.”

The Pre-Existence of Both Father and Spirit Before Incarnation.

Few would be prepared to deny that the Holy Spirit is referred to in Scripture as existing before the Incarnation. Thus we have one Person of the Trinity existing and named. Surely this would be very remarkable, not to say unaccountable, without the existence of the other two. We shall proceed to show that the Father is referred to in such a way in more than one passage, as to leave no doubt of His eternal existence also.

1Cor 8:6.

We have already had occasion to glance at this verse, but there is something more to be said about it. The apostle is speaking of the many gods in relation to idolatry, and then proceeds to say, “But to us there is but one God, the Father, of Whom are all things and we for Him.” (margin). Just before this, in v 4, he has said: “There is none other God but one.” In the light of this the statement in verse 6 is very remarkable. If we take the two statements together, we have, on the one hand, the unity of the Godhead, and on the other, that God is the Father. Looked at separately we see that the unity of the Godhead is one thing, the Trinity is another. But, far from teaching what C.A.C. or J.T. would have us believe, it teaches just the opposite. What is stranger is, that in one place C.A.C. asserts the truth when he says “the thought of God is presented to us in the Father,” and on the same page quotes the above passage, but he does not seem to realise the implication of his own words.

Will the reader notice that the apostle Paul does not stop at God, neither does the passage run “one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” We should have expected either one or the other. But the statement is, “To us there is but one God, the Father.” Nor is it here as simply the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is neither God in unity, nor God in the full revelation of the Trinity. But the stupendous truth is asserted as to the place and position of the Father. Because what can be said of Him could not be said of either of the other Persons in the Trinity, and that is why they are not mentioned.

The passage then states, not simply that there is one God—the Apostle had already stated this in verse 4—but “there is but one God, the Father.” And then these most significant words are added: “Of Whom are all things and we for Him.” What is the force of this? “The Greek preposition *ek* (of) expresses the source of being, the origin of all things.” Now, when did the Father become “the source of being, the origin of all things?” Was it only at the Incarnation? How preposterous is such an idea. No reading **backwards** will avail here. For what is stated here is in the most distinct and absolute way predicated of God the Father alone and as such.

He is declared to be the source of all things. Such a declaration could not apply to time merely.

Thus we have the Father as well as the Holy Spirit in relation to eternity. This necessitates the existence of the Son. The Persons cannot be separated. It cannot be supposed that one, or even two, existed alone.

But this Scripture does not stand by itself. Let us refer to

Ephesians 3:14-15.

“For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom every family in heaven and earth is named.” There is no dispute, we believe, as to “every” being the better rendering. There is a dispute as to whether, “Of our Lord Jesus Christ,” after Father should be there. But it does not really affect the argument, though the omission of the words would tend to strengthen it rather than otherwise. But the point is, the Father is the Father of **every** family in heaven and earth. Now when did God **begin** to be the Father of every family? These families date back long before Incarnation. The Father was the Father when “the Morning Stars sang together and all the Sons of God shouted for joy.” Are we not beginning to see, in spite of what C.A.C. asserts to the contrary, the Trinity does go beyond the “sphere of revelation” and does relate to “God’s essential Being?” And that we may receive “with adoring reverence,” as another has said, “the glimpses of the inner life of God accorded to us in Holy Scripture. Here and there we are shown (as it were) an opened heaven and the Godhead is revealed in its ‘essential Trinity.’”

What about Eph 4:6, one God and Father of all, Who is above all, and through all, and in you all?” When was this first true of God the Father? Did it begin in time?

But let us before leaving this particular point, refer to

Acts 1:7 and Mark 13:32.

“It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father has put in His own power.” Does not such a statement render it impossible for us to restrict the thought of the Trinity to revelation and to time? Will the reader notice that our Lord does not say “which God has put in His own power,” nor “which God has put in the Father’s power,” but, “which the Father has put in His own power.” Now “times and seasons,” even looked at as regards this scene, to which they refer, carry us further back than the manger at Bethlehem. And as regards God Himself, when had they a beginning? I mean, of course, as he thought of them.

And Mark 13:32 is a cognate passage. When did the Father begin to know the day and the hour? And what have either of these passages to do with Incarnation? Angels are brought in. And the Father is spoken of, not God.

From all this we see there is the clearest evidence in Scripture for the existence of God the Father and God the Holy Spirit before the Incarnation of the Son. Did Father and Spirit exist, we ask again, without the Son? Impossible! The activities of the Spirit as a Divine Person are

manifest everywhere in Scripture—in Creation; in its testimony to Christ through the prophets, and in Redemption. And as to the Father, in addition to the evidence already given, we have our Lord's statement "My Father works hitherto and I work." To argue that there were no names given until the New Testament to the Three Divine Persons in the Godhead proves nothing. In the first place it is absolutely untrue as regards one of them, as we have seen; and secondly, one might ask, Was God not Jehovah until revealed as such? Was He not almighty until He said to Abraham, "I am the Almighty God?" (Gen 17:1.) If He was both before revelation, why was He not the Father before revelation?

Three Passages of Scripture.

Let us now briefly consider three important passages of Scripture in relation to the topic we are discussing. First John 5:17-27. Reference has already been made, in passing, to this Scripture, but as there is scarcely another passage more enlightening than this one as to the nature of the Trinity, a few further remarks are called for.

And to begin with, we have a statement of our Lord's which could only be made by One Who had a part in Deity, "My Father works hitherto and I work." This statement is made without qualification or reservation. How far we are carried back, it is not for us to say, but, in any case, all through Old Testament times the Father was working.

But Who is the I? "I work." In the passage before us we have three different titles employed to describe Him. He is "the Son"; the Son of God"; and the "Son of Man." Now these three titles are not the same nor are they used without discrimination. The first is used as the co-relative of the Father, as we have seen. He was eternally "the Son" as the Father was eternally the Father.¹ As "the Son of God" He takes that place in relation to creation and to man which the Father has not taken. As such He is supreme God's representative to man, and man's representative before God. And this one is truly man. He is "Son of Man." Such is His glory. He fills every sphere. He works, He quickens dead souls, He raises the dead, He judges.

But there are distinctions drawn between the Son and the Father. For Father and Son mean what the names signify. If there were no distinctions and differences they would be meaningless. In v 19 we read "The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do," but He can do all that the Father does. Now here in a few words are given to us, as far as we can understand it, the most profound insight into the mystery of the Deity and of the Trinity. On the one hand, the Son can do all that the Father does. He is both Creator and Quickener. "The Son quickens whom He will." But on the other hand, He can do nothing of Himself. This agrees with the other Scriptures to which we have referred. where we have seen, the Father spoken of as the originator and source of all things. We never read of anything which the Son has put in His own power or anything He has put in the Father's power, but we do read this of the Father.

"The Father judges no man but has committed all judgment unto the Son." When was this committed to the Son? How can we bring in the thought of time here.

Footnotes

[2] Our Lord speaks of it as a fact at that moment. He did not have to wait until His exaltation as Man. Lower down in v. 27 we are told the reason—"because He is the Son of Man." But first of all, we have, "has committed all judgment unto the Son." He became the Son of Man to give effect to this; just as He became Son of Man to be lifted up; but He was ordained to be the judge before then, just as He was foreordained to be the Lamb of sacrifice before he appeared in this world at all.

But we have yet to consider the verse which perhaps is more crucial than any of the others, important as they are. Verse 26 runs as follows: "For as the Father has life in Himself; so has He given to the Son to have life in Himself." As before stated, it is impossible to apply this to Incarnation. In the first place, there is a most marked distinction between verses 26 and 27. In the latter, Christ is referred to as "Son of Man" but not so in the former. The statement here is not "The Father has given to Him to have life in Himself because He is the Son of Man." The life given is as between the Father and the Son. The Son, as the Son, derives everything from the Father. [3] How can we think of Father and Son in any other way? The very construction of the sentence proves this beyond all manner of doubt. "AS the Father has life in Himself, SO has He given to the Son to have life in Himself." When did the Father begin to have life in Himself? Was this ever true of the Father apart from the Son? And the same question may be asked of the Son. When did He begin to have life in Himself? And it proves another thing beyond all manner of doubt, namely that the relationship of Father and Son is eternal, for who could introduce a point of time into verse 26? The Son is co-eternal and co-existent with the Father in life and being. Will the reader carefully observe that the verses do not read like this: "The Father has given life to the Son of Man and authority to execute judgment." Verse 27 stands on a different footing altogether from verse 26. The titles used in the two verses are different. Verse 26 is complete in itself. The next verse is a supplementary statement. The fact is the truth of verse 26 shatters completely the false ideas both of the Deity and the Trinity contained in C.A.C.'s pamphlet. And the connection in which the title, "the Son" stands, sufficiently demonstrates that it cannot be limited to manhood, and is a further proof that in Scripture, as we have already shown, "the Son" means one thing and "the Son of God" another. We are to know "the Son of God," the head and representative of all created things and the image of the invisible God, but no man "knows Who the Son is," sufficient proof of itself that this title cannot be limited to Incarnation or we should know him. As one of considerable authority has said with reference to the statement of verse 26:—"Language clearly spoken of the eternal Son, not merely of the Man Christ Jesus." The same writer goes on to say "The whole of this passage (verse 26 of John 5 and similar statements) is one which our Lord clearly spoke of Himself in His Divine nature, and of His relation to the Father in that nature which He had in common with him, yet no language can more expressly mark a distinction of personal action and personal attribute."

But let us turn to another Scripture,

Hebrews 1:2.

God "has in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, Whom He has appointed heir of all

things, by Whom also He made the worlds.”

Now we are asked to believe that as it was in Incarnation God spoke to us in His Son, therefore “Son,” it is argued, has no relation either to being appointed heir, or to creation. That is, we are asked to read back into the verse something that is not there. But why? Simply to bolster up a theory. No one could deduce such a theory from the words as they stand. The statement that the Son was appointed heir (that is as the Son) and that God made the worlds by the SON is as emphatic as that God spoke to men by the Son. For when was Christ appointed heir? Who can introduce time here? And Who is the heir? Can anyone be heir but the Son? And is an heir usually appointed before he exists? If Mr C.A.C. and his friends are fond of reading things backwards we are not going to be so foolish as to suppose that in every statement God makes concerning His beloved Son He requires us to read into it something that is not there. The doctrine we are examining requires us to think of three Persons, all equal, all the same, whenever we think of them prior to the Incarnation, and the consequence of this would be that we should have to interpret the verse under consideration as meaning that God made the worlds by God, or, that One Person in the Godhead made use of another. We challenge C.A.C. or anybody else to produce a single text which presents the matter in this way. Certainly the one before us does not suggest any such idea. It says distinctly and clearly that God made them by His Son. “Son” stands in relation to creation in this chapter as distinctly as it stands connected with Incarnation, Revelation, and the Kingdom by and by. And this is ever the way the matter is presented in Scripture. In connection with Creation, it is either the Word or the Son. Never One Person in the Deity, as such, using another Person in the Deity, as such. The matter is presented from this standpoint in John 1 and Col 1 as well as in Hebrews 1. In the former, Creation is attributed to the Word, not simply to God, but to One in Whom God found expression. He Who created was God, of course, but that is not the point. The point is that Scripture never presents Deity as consisting of three Gods acting independently. It always preserves in a most careful manner the unity of the Godhead, as it also discloses the Trinity as essential to the Godhead, and further that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not one and the same in every particular, though one in essence and substance, but certain things can be said of the Father which cannot be said of either the Son or the Holy Spirit.

So in Col 1 the words of verse 16, “By Whom were all things created,” refer back to “the Son of the Father’s love” of v. 13.

But let us consider this passage a little more closely. Col 1:12-19 being the third Scripture we wish to refer to

Col 1:12-19.

To understand the full force of the passage, we must notice that it opens with a reference to the Father: “giving thanks unto the Father.” This governs the entire passage. It is of the utmost importance to observe this. The Son, therefore, of verse 13 is the Son of the Father’s love. And it is to Him that it refers when it says “In Him were all things created.” “All things were created by Him and for Him.” No one could think of Him simply as the Second Person in the Godhead in this connection. How could all things be created for the Second Person as distinct

from the other two? But it is perfectly in keeping with the rest of Scripture to think of Creation being for the Son and Heir, as indeed the language of Hebrews 1:2 expressly states.

Then we come to verse 10 about which translators and commentators differ. We are not qualified to enter into a discussion involving the question of MSS. But if we read the passage according to its grammatical construction, and according to the requirements of the English language, there seems ample justification for the insertion by the translators of our A.V. of the words "the Father" in v. 19.

As we have said, "the Father" of v. 12 governs the entire passage. Christ is referred to in verse 13 as the Son of the Father's love. Why should verse 19, with which there is an unbroken connection, be wrenched entirely away from all reference to the Father, and be made to stand on a separate basis altogether? Why should it be made impersonal, and read, "In Him all the fulness was pleased to dwell?" It is a rendering as indefinite as it is unfortunate, and really is meaningless. The whole passage has reference to the Father and the Son. And what greater proof of the Father's love to the Son could there be than that which is furnished by verse 19?

Some have thought, no doubt, that the doctrine of the verse, as it stands, is not quite sound, or according to truth. We believe this to be an entire misconception. There is nothing derogatory to the Son, as the Son, in what is stated. As between Father and Son the statement of the verse is perfectly in keeping. To think otherwise would mean that we have scarcely apprehended the truth of the Trinity. Moreover, the doctrine is in perfect accord with other statements of Scripture. If there is "one God, the Father, of Whom are all things" (and this could not be said in the same way of the Son, and never is said), what difficulty is there in stating that "It pleased the Father that in Him (the Son) should all fulness dwell?"

In any case, the passage is entirely opposed to the ideas set forth in C.A.C.'s pamphlet. We give thanks unto the Father because He is the source of all, and we are translated into the Kingdom of the Son of his love, and then the vastness of that Kingdom comes before us. Are we to confine the thought of the Son to a single statement and dissociate it from all which follows? Does not Son apply as much to Image as to Firstborn. And if so why not to the next verse, "By Him were all things created, etc.?" Is the English of the Bible different from all other English? We do not mean as to its superlative excellence, but as to its meaning and construction? Why are we constantly invited to read into Bible statements something which is not there? The Son of the Father's love created all things for the Father's pleasure, just as much as when He died upon the Cross for our redemption and it pleased Jehovah to bruise Him. When did all fulness first dwell in Him? Was it only in Incarnation? When did He create all things in heaven and in earth, including thrones and dominions, or when was it that all things were first held together by him? He was the Son of the Father's love from the commencement.

On p. 24 C.A.C. remarks,

"He (God) could not be **the God** of another co-equal Divine Person when both are viewed in absolute Deity."

In what a hopeless dilemma does such a statement place us, when taken in conjunction with the doctrine that the Trinity does not refer to Deity or to eternity! How then are we to understand Heb 1:2? Who did create? and by Whom? Mr C.A.C. will not admit that it was by the Son, yet, as quoted above, he says “God could not be the God of another co-equal Divine Person.” By whom then, we ask again, did God make the worlds? God, we are told, is not **the God** of another co-equal Divine Person, and therefore it could not be by the Second Person that God made the worlds. And yet it was not by the Son. And thus, as we have said, we are left in a hopeless dilemma.

We have dwelt at some length upon the passage in Colossians 1 because the real crux of the whole matter is the proper understanding of the Trinity. If the truth of this were grasped, such doctrines as are being propagated would be impossible. The fact is, the truth lies in the very opposite direction to that in which C.A.C. and J.T. are seeking it. The fact of the Trinity has to do with the very life of the Godhead. As one has said, in language better than any we could employ:

“There never was a moment when God was incomplete, as He would have been without Son or Spirit. The whole three Persons are co-equal. God would be still incomplete if Son or Spirit were not in everything ‘such as the Father is’ ... The union of the Three is not one of barren necessity. It is a free and living union in which all are bound together by an absolute outpouring of each to other in love. We may think of the joy which the Father has in giving—in communicating without reserve to the Son ‘all the fulness’ (Col 1:19) of His being ... and it is the joy of the Son to receive—to feel the infinite flow of the Father’s love concentrated in Himself, and ... the gladness with which He welcomes most those wishes of the Father which will cost most to Himself ... It is the glory of them all to be One ... by a moral living for and in each other, in a mutual devotion such as serves as an example for men.” (emphasis ours)

Thus, as before quoted from the same writer. “the Godhead is revealed in its ‘essential Trinity.’” But the writer is speaking of eternal relations not merely of what became true in time.

The Eternal Word.

Something must be said, before bringing these remarks to a close, as to an additional error, for not only is the eternal Sonship of Christ denied, but, along with it, that He is the eternal Word, That is, it is affirmed that the title Word had no meaning or application before Incarnation but refers to what was revealed here.

C. A. C. refers at length to this on pp 27-8 of his pamphlet. His argument is that “the intelligible expression in Him of every divine thought was in Manhood, and that it awaited His Incarnation to be expressed.” Such a declaration is little short of amazing. No one, of course, doubts that Christ was the Word in Manhood, and in that condition expressed God as He had never been expressed before, but to assert that there was no intelligible expression before, betrays an ignorance which one would hardly have expected in a student of Scripture.

He states on p. 27 that an intelligent expression of God “required intelligent beings to receive

the communication.” Were there then no intelligent beings before the Word became flesh? This is a poor compliment indeed to such men as Abraham, David, and Isaiah, not to speak of angels!! C.A.C. would have us believe that “thrones and dominions and principalities and powers” are without intelligence! For had they been intelligent there would no doubt have been some communication, for it required intelligent beings to receive it. The very fact that they happen to be intelligent, then, is *prima facie* evidence, C.A.C, being witness, that there was some expression of God.

What about Abraham? Our Lord tells us, and surely He knew, that Abraham rejoiced to see His day and that he saw it and was glad. How did he see it, if there was no expression? How about Isaiah? John tells us that Isaiah “saw Christ’s glory and spake of Him.” How was that possible if what C.A.C, says is correct? To what lengths will a man go when he is merely advancing some theory of his own!

And what about Creation? C.A.C. tries to persuade his readers that God was not expressed in Creation, What then caused the morning stars to sing together and all the Sons of God to shout for joy? Did angels and all created intelligences have to wait untold millenniums without any expression of God? That is what C.A.C.’s argument amounts to.

Yet he has to admit, because Scripture plainly says so, that Creation made known “God’s eternal power and Divinity.” Was this no expression of Him? If not, how could it become a ground for God’s judgment, for in that part of Romans 1, where the expression occurs, the argument is that it is on this very ground the heathen are responsible. “Because that which may be known of God is manifest to them, **for God has shewed it unto them.**” How? “By the things that are made.” “**So that they are without excuse,**” we are told. How could they be without excuse if creation had not been an expression of God? Or, how without excuse, if they had not been intelligent creatures?

The fact is the whole force of the use of the title Word in John 1:1-3 stands related to the statement, “All things were made by Him.” The title is found in conjunction with creation because creation is one way in which God has been expressed. Strange indeed would it be if, while every workman is in some measure expressed in his work, it should be otherwise with God. Are we to suppose that when Adam was placed in Paradise that he saw no expression of the goodness, beneficence, and wisdom of the One Who had planted that garden of delights for His benefit and placed him there? We, at all events, think differently, and agree with the words, Milton puts into his lips:

“These be Thy glorious works, Parent of good.”

That the **full** revelation of God awaited the time when the Word became flesh, no one disputes. Creation could not fully declare His heart. It needed One here in flesh and blood, and yet Who was acquainted with all the secrets of the Father’s bosom, fully to make known a love so great that only the Cross could adequately express it. About this, we trust, all are agreed. That is not the point. What C.A.C. and those who agree with him insist upon is that Christ virtually **became** the Word in Incarnation, and in order to bolster up such a theory, the attempt has to be made to prove that there was no real expression of God before then. The attempt

utterly and hopelessly breaks down.

Every expression of God is in Christ, whether in Creation, Redemption, Government, or Judgment. That is why He is spoken of as the Word, and this is so in all four relations. In Rev 19, when He comes forth to judge and govern, He is called the Word of God. But Scripture never says He **became** the Word, just as it never says He **became** the Son. He was eternally both. Why does Scripture say “The Word **became** flesh” if He was not the Word until He did become flesh? It seems to suppose there is no difference between John 1 and 1. John 1. No distinction between “In the beginning” and “From the beginning.” John 1 begins in eternity and comes down to time, not the other way about.

There are two passages of Scripture where we might have expected to be told that Christ **became** the Son or **became** the Word had such a statement been according to truth. In Philippians 2, that pathway of descent is traced for us from “being in the form of God” until we reach “the death of the Cross,” but there is no mention of becoming “the Son” or of becoming “the Word.” Yet it does tell us He took the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men, and became obedient unto death, but never a hint either in His humiliation or exaltation that He became “the Son.” But we do read of “the glory of God the Father” although “Son” is not once referred to. Another indirect proof that God the Father was God the Father before the events recorded in this chapter happened. Nor is it otherwise when we turn to another passage—Acts 2. Here again we read of Jesus being made both Lord and Christ, but not that He was made “the Son.” He Who ever was “the Son” is officially declared to be both.

An Old Error.

The dear brethren in the Lord who have adopted the false view we have been discussing seem unaware that instead of being “new truth” or “fresh light,” it is really a very old error. An error which dates from comparatively early times, but has re-appeared occasionally since, yet it has in every instance been refused by God’s people. In one form of it, it passes under the name of Sabellianism. On p. 5 of his pamphlet C.A.C. repudiates the accusation that his doctrine has any resemblance to Sabellianism, with scorn. Let us see whether he can so easily dispose of his accuser as might appear.

Error seldom re-appears in exactly the same form. We do not pretend, for a moment, that these brethren hold all that Sabellius held, or that he held all that they hold, but there is an unhappy resemblance nevertheless. For example, part of what Sabellius taught was this: that “in Himself (that is, in God as God) He was none of these.” That is, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit had no relation in eternity to God as God. “They only express a three-fold relation of the one God towards us, as displayed in three manners of dealing. It is but Sabellianism exaggerated to maintain ... that they are but three phases or aspects of God, names for God as observed from different points of view. God not being conscious of **being** Father, Son, and Spirit, but only of being thought so. According to this form of the theory, the difference between the Persons only began **when there was an intelligent creation to see the difference** ... ‘The Unity (or rather the Unit)’ said Sabellius ‘has come to **be a Trinity by expansion.**’ It is not therefore, **the original and eternal condition of God.**” It is hard to see the difference between some of these expressions and those made use of by C.A.C. There

seems to be an important distinction insomuch as Sabellius seems to have been more of a Unitarian, stressing the unity of the Godhead, and the others admit three Persons, but as regards the explanation of the Trinity their views seem identical. Let us place the statements of each side by side.

Sabellius:

“The difference between the Persons only began when there was an intelligent creation to see the difference.”

C. A .C. referring to the Trinity and an intelligent expression of God,

“The **intelligible** expression in Him of every divine thought was in Manhood and **that it awaited** His Incarnation to be expressed.” An intelligent expression of God “required **intelligent** beings to receive the communication.” (See pp 27-8). (Emphasis ours.)

Sabellius:

“The Unity has come to be a Trinity by expansion. It is not therefore the original and eternal condition of God.”

C. A .C.

“The names Father and Son are ever presented in Scripture in relation to the divine mediatorial system. They **belong to the sphere of revelation and not to that of God’s essential Being.**” (p. 21.) (Emphasis ours.)

What could be clearer than that in these essential respects the teaching of Sabellius and C.A.C. are identical? [\[4\]](#)

Who can exaggerate the seriousness of such false teaching! Yet it is accepted and even gloried in by many to the intense sorrow of others!

The seriousness of it has been enhanced by the revision of ‘**The Little Flock**’ Hymn Book, on the basis of these errors, and in which they have become stereotyped. Every trace of the expression “eternal Son” has been removed. Who could have believed such a thing possible?

No longer are we permitted to sing:

“Son of God, Thy Father’s bosom,
Ever was Thy dwelling-place.”

The entire hymn—one of the finest in the book, sung by generations of brethren with joy and gladness and in the highest spirit of worship—is completely wiped out. So is 302, presumably because the third line runs, “Thyself of God the eternal Son.”

The sad catalogue could be enlarged, but we have no heart to pursue the subject. They might

at least have left the hymn book alone, and simply avoided the use of hymns, which seem now so distasteful to themselves, if they pleased. Or they might have had the good sense and good taste to alter the title, so that people should not be deceived into thinking that they were purchasing or using the 1903 edition. As it is, there is nothing **externally** to indicate any radical change. To such an extent is this true that the prefatory notes of 1856 and 1881 are retained, while in a new one, dated this year, there is not a word to indicate a change in doctrine, or why certain hymns are omitted! If this is not calculated to deceive the unwary, we know not how better it could be done.

And what right had a particular committee of Brethren to retain the title of a hymn book which is in common use, and yet alter its character? Not only is an erroneous doctrine (repudiated by the majority of Brethren) allowed to affect the revision, but about 120 hymns found in the 1903 edition have been omitted, while some 85 new hymns have been inserted. We have been unable to discover any hymn of outstanding merit in this new selection. Seeing this hymn book is the common heritage of Brethren, what prescriptive right certain persons possessed seriously to alter its character and yet continue to call it by the same name, we do not know. For several generations some of the godliest and most enlightened men and women have found the hymn book to be their joy and inspiration, as well as a vehicle of their highest worship, and a means by which they could express their deepest adoration and devotion. If they were to return to earth they would scarcely recognise it in its present form, and certainly they would be aghast to find that every reference to the "eternal Son" had been removed from its pages. What has been done is nothing short of an affront to the living and the dead! An unpardonable liberty has been taken with what was common property. If such alterations as have been made were required an entirely new hymn book was called for, and not the mutilation of one already in constant use by others who repudiate this erroneous doctrine.

But we have done. This doctrine of the denial of the eternal Sonship, does away with the eternal relations of the three Persons of the Deity as a Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It robs God of Fatherhood and Christ of the relationship of Son, except within very narrow limits. We are actually asked to believe that such a stupendous relationship as Father and Son within the Godhead is actually less than 2000 years old! The bosom of the Father is emptied, except from a certain point in time of comparatively recent date. Scripture is made unintelligible, for many of its statements are to be modified, or entirely altered by reading into them something which is not there. Eternal life, if not actually denied, is robbed of nearly all its meaning. For an eternal love and an eternal relationship are of its very essence. If we have part only in that which began in time, how can it be eternal life?

In that wondrous prayer in John 17 we see that believers, while having no part in Deity, are associated with the Father and the Son in the closest relationship. That this relationship is eternal in character, the entire chapter indicates. The love which gives character to that relationship is eternal. It is expressed in the words: "Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world," followed by other words of the utmost significance: "That the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

How can one possibly place a time boundary to such a prayer? We breathe throughout it the very atmosphere of eternity. We are in the presence of Divine Persons, and these Persons,

Father and Son. The opening words leave us in no doubt as to this: “Glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee.” And then to show that time has no place, the speaker refers to the work the Father has given him to do as if it were already accomplished, though this was not so as to fact (v. 4).

“Thou hast loved them as Thou hast loved Me.” The love referred to here, of which Christ was the object, is neither the love of one Person in the Deity for another, nor is it simply love for Christ as Man. Neither thought would give us any true conception of the love here spoken of. For to talk of the love which one Person in the Deity had for another would convey nothing to our minds. Nothing is known to us which would enable us to make any comparison, and so we could not form any conception of it. Whereas to think of it, on the other hand, merely in relation to time, and to the humanity of Christ would be to lower our conception of it. The solemn fact is, this doctrine lowers our conception of everything. It is too dreadful to contemplate. For ourselves, we reject it with abhorrence as being altogether derogatory to the Son. As J. N. Darby writes:

“And this it is that makes the notion of Sonship in Christ only when incarnate [that is, limiting His Sonship to Incarnation] so destructive to the very elementary joy of the Church, and abhorrent to those who have communion by the Spirit in the truth.” (Operations of the Spirit of God , Coll-Writings, vol. III., page 135 [p.73 in later editions]).

The truth is found as presented in the words of another. He speaks of receiving

“with adoring reverence the glimpses of the inner life of God accorded to us in the Holy Scriptures. Here and there we are shown (as it were) an opened heaven and the Godhead is revealed in its ‘essential Trinity.’ God is seen to have been eternally and absolutely the Father before time began.”

[2] It is impossible: to bring the thought of time into such statements. The fact is, in John’s writings, time is frequently eliminated altogether. Because we are in the presence of a Divine Person—the Son.

[3] In this there is no suggestion of inferiority but rather of dignity.

[4] As a great Bible student has said: “There would be a Father and a Son in God even were there no creation to bless

and no creature to love.”

Footnotes

[1] We have already shown from Scripture that the Father as such was eternal.