



The Property
OF THE
INDEPENDENT CONGREGATIONALIST
SOCIETY.
BARTON SQUARE, SALEM.

DEPOSITED
— IN THE —
LIBRARY —
— OF THE —
ESSEX INSTITUTE.

500
#12-1871
1-15

110

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

ON THE COMMON

MODE OF DEFENDING

THE

DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY,

AND THE

UNION OF THE TWO NATURES IN

JESUS CHRIST.



BY G. CLARK.



BOSTON:

PUBLISHED BY ISAIAH THOMAS, JR.

1817.

522

#12,112

MODE OF DEFENDING THE TRINITY.



THERE perhaps never was a doctrine or tenet the subject of man's investigation, or which has been offered to the contemplation of the human mind, more apparently doubtful than the doctrines of the Trinity in Unity, and the union of the divine and human natures in Jesus Christ; and when I say they are highly disputable, I regard this declaration with great seriousness; because it appears most evidently, that those doctrines make no part of the subject of Divine Revelation: on the contrary, that their whole support, or pretended support from thence, is, upon one or all of the following grounds.

1. Upon arbitrary surmises.
2. Upon voluntary and unfounded deductions, and inferences.
3. Upon disingenuous and artful comparisons.
4. Upon capricious or misconceived expositions.
5. Upon interpolations, or alterations of the Sacred Records.
6. Upon palpable mistranslations of them.
7. Upon dogmatical postulata, in many instances contrary both to Reason and Revelation.

1st. *Upon arbitrary surmises.* Instances of this kind are very plentiful.—We may advert to the use which is made of the Hebrew word *Aleim*.—We are told that this word directs our views to a *plurality* of persons in the Deity; and this is contended for by Trinitarians, in direct opposition to the evidence of the Seventy translators, in every instance—who uniformly render it by the *singular* noun Θεός—against the frequent examples we have of the use of it of single persons, Exod. vii. 1.—1 Kings xi. 4. 33.—Psal. xlv. 6, 7, &c.—against the almost constant use of it with singular verbs, and pronouns—against the authority of the apostle Paul, Heb. i. 8, 9. and against the authority of Christ himself, who uses a *singular* noun as the true translation of it, Mark xii. 29.

We may also advert, in proof of this charge of surmise, to the use which is made of the pronoun *Us*, Gen. i. 26. "Let us make man," &c. And this against the laws of reason

and common sense, which assure us that God doth not consult any one—that he cannot consult himself. It is plainly a mere figurative mode of speech, by which God, who worketh all things according to *the council of his own will*, is represented as consulting and deliberating, before he determines.

These are arbitrary surmises, in that the Scriptures never declare that the word *Aleim*, points out a plural personality in the Deity; or that when God said, Let *us* make man, the first person in the Godhead spake to the second and third.—If this charge be denied, let it be done by shewing, that the Scriptures somewhere prove, that by the plural form of the word *Aleim*, is intended rather a plurality of persons, than of powers; and that the use of the plural pronoun, is not a figurative mode of representing to us the wisdom of the Divine determination.—And let the proofs which shall be adduced to these points be plain and opposite or we shall not be able to withdraw the charge of surmise and conjecture.

But the most dangerous of these surmises, is to be found with those, who contend for the supreme Deity of our blessed Lord, because *no one else* could have merit sufficient to atone for the sins of mankind—*no one else* would be equal to the arduous task—*no one else* could prevail with the Deity for pardon and reconciliation! This is an arbitrary and an implicit surmise, if there ever was one. It is *arbitrary*, because it stands aloof both with reason and Scripture; it is *implicit*, because the least examination would shew its impious absurdity, and refuse it credit. *Holy Scripture* knows it not; the Scriptures *never* say that God wanted full satisfaction—that he wanted one of infinite merit to redeem mankind; whereas if this were a truth, it would be of such singular importance, that *every page* of the Divine Writings would teach it; it would not be left to the uncertain fate of inference and deduction. It is a dogma which *reason* totally reprobates:—*Reason* tells us, as the Scriptures do, that God is willing to receive the returning sinner, without an adequate satisfaction; which could have no other end, but to exclude Divine mercy. Reason tells us, that God could not satisfy himself—that if Christ were the true God, he would as much want satisfaction as the Father and the Holy Ghost—that Divine justice is *one*; and that even admitting the Trinitarian hypothesis, the justice of God the Son would be the same, and would as much want satisfaction as the justice of the Father and Holy Ghost. And here reason would add, that it is impossible the greatest and best of all Beings, the wonderful cause and origin

of all things, could be made subject to his own law, and could be a criminal ; and that if it were possible, it would be useless ; because God may as well pardon without satisfaction, as pardon with a satisfaction made by himself.

2d. *Upon voluntary and unfounded deductions and inferences.* As that, because Christ restored the dead to life, and did other acts of omnipotence, he must therefore be GOD, without considering, or without believing the positive and unequivocal declarations of Christ and his apostles, that the power which he exercised was not his own, but the omnipotence of GOD, who had sent him. The Scriptures do indeed ascribe to him the works of Omnipotence ; but the same Scriptures tell us that all power in heaven and earth was *given* to him—that the works which he did were not his, but the *Father's* who sent him—that he *could do nothing of himself*, that the *Father* who dwelt in him *did the works*—that they were brought into effect by the *finger or spirit* of God. And that the MIRACLES, and WONDERS, and SIGNS, which evidenced the mission of our Lord, were *miracles*, and *wonders*, and *signs*, which GOD *did BY HIM.* Acts ii. 22.

3d. *Upon disingenuous and artful comparisons.* By shewing, for instance, from one of Paul's epistles, that Jesus Christ has the appellation GOD, and that in another he is denominat-ed a *Man* ; and so proving that he is both *God* and *Man*. Or by shewing that God is called a Saviour, and Christ is called a Saviour, and therefore concluding that he must be God. Or by shewing that he must be God, because the same acts are ascribed both to Christ and to God ; not considering that our Lord's appearances were in the Divine authority and power ; and not considering, that for the same reason, the same names and acts have been in the Scriptures applied and ascribed to Moses and to God.

Thus, Numb. xii. 3. "Now the *man* Moses was very meek" &c. Here Moses is called a *Man*. Compare this with Exod. vii. 1. "And the Lord said unto Moses, see I have made thee a God, *Aleim*, to Pharaoh ; and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet."

So, Numb xii. 11. Moses is prayed to by Aaron.—"Aaron said unto Moses, Alas, my Lord, I beseech thee, lay not the sin upon us wherein we have done foolishly, and wherein we have sinned," &c. And Exod. x. 16, 17. "Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron in haste, and he said, I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you ; now therefore, forgive I pray thee, my sin this once," &c.

The deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt, is attributed to Moses and to God ; Exod. xxxii. 7. "And the Lord said unto Moses, Go get thee down ; for thy people which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves." And Exod. xxxiii. 1. Deut. v. 6. "I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt," &c.

Moses is also joined with the Supreme Deity as the object of faith, Exod. xiv. 31. "And the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord and his servant Moses."

Deut. xi. 13. Moses is represented as using language of himself, which if used by Christ, would be considered as a very ample proof of his supreme Godhead. "And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto *my commandments*, which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, and to serve him with all your heart, and with all your soul : that I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, &c. And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle," &c.

4th. *Upon capricious or misconceived expositions of words and language.*—The word *Immanuel*, for instance, which is in plain English God *with us*, is made to signify that Christ is both God and Man—whereas the word conveys no such meaning, signifies no such thing ; but points out to us what it expresses—that when Christ was in the world, God was with us : not because Christ was God, but because "God *was in* CHRIST reconciling the world unto himself," 2 Cor. v. 19. Or as it is elsewhere expressed more emphatically— "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost, and and with power ; who went about doing good, &c. for God was *with HIM*," Acts x. 38. And so Zacharias, Luke i. 68. "Blessed be the LORD GOD of Israel for having *visited* and redeemed his people, having raised up an horn of salvation for them in the house of his servant David."

And when our Lord declares his inferiority to the Father, we are told that he speaks as mediator, that he speaks of himself as he was man, not as he was God—And thus they make our blessed Lord to be perpetually on the quibble ; sometimes speaking as mediator, sometimes as God, sometimes as man, sometimes as both God and man ; by which means the excellency of our Lord's character is exceedingly degraded.

Besides, every man of common sense must see and feel how trifling and impertinent such declarations as these are, when considered as answers to rational arguments.—The Scriptures do not, in any one instance, distinguish the wisdom

or power of Christ as he is God, from his wisdom and power as he is man ; or from his wisdom and power as God-man or mediator. And if the Scriptures do not so distinguish, where is our authority to do it ?

Again, it is said upon the authority of Phil. ii. 6. that Christ is equal with God—But what do they mean by being equal with God ? Do they mean by the term *God* here, the whole Godhead ? No ; for Christ being one in the Godhead, he would then be equal with the whole Godhead, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and so equal with himself ; which is nonsense say they.—The meaning then must be, that the person of the Son, was equal with the persons of the Father and Holy Ghost.—But here again we may inquire, what authority we have to say that the Father and Holy Ghost, in exclusion of the Son, are called by the absolute term *GOD* ?—And may we not ask, if this is the fact, why we are not told so ? Why we were left to find it out by a train of uncertain deductions ? I say uncertain deductions—for, where is an infallible rule ? Where is our certain authority ? Who told us it was so ? Is it in the Scriptures ? Is it in Reason ? Is it in some General Council, or Synod ? Or, is it the empty fabrication of some visionary speculatist, or metaphysician.

And sometimes the meaning of the Scripture is misconceived ; as 1 John v. 20. where Christ is supposed to be denominated the true God and eternal life ; whereas that passage plainly means, that Christ hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true, that is the true God ; and that we are in him that is true ; that is, we are in the true God—How ? Why, IN or THROUGH Jesus Christ—And this true one, in whom we so are in or through Christ, is the TRUE GOD and eternal life—See our Lord's own words, John xvii. 3, “ *This is eternal life, to know thee the only TRUE GOD, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.*”—The unlearned reader should be informed, that the word *even*, in the passage 1 John v. 20. is not in the original text, but is supplied by the translators, and totally subverts the apostle's meaning.

So, “ The church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood,” Acts xx. 28.—As though he who only hath IMMORTALITY, should have shed his blood for the restoration of mankind—Impious idea ! The Trinitarian starts back with horror, and denies the position.—He says God did not die—he tells us it is called the blood of God, because God was personally united to flesh and blood.—But the Scripture

never speaks of any such personal union—And it may with much more propriety be contended, that it is called the blood of God, because the death of Christ, the shedding of his blood, was the effect of the goodness and love of God.—“God (says the apostle) commended his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” And Rom. iii. 24, 25, “The redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God hath *set forth* to be a propitiation, through faith *in his blood*.” Those who are dispossessed of prejudice, will, without much difficulty, estimate the comparative merits of these two observations.

And 1 John iii. 16, “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us.” This is supposed to prove the Deity of Christ, because the text intimates that God laid down his life for us;—but it is to be observed, that the words “*of God*,” are not to be found in the best Greek manuscripts, nor in the very printed Greek text we generally use—But if the words are genuine, the sense is very clear, as speaking of the love of God, because he (Christ) laid down his life for us; and would then be exactly parallel to *verse* 9 and 10, in the next chapter. “In this was manifested the love of God towards us; because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.—Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”—The love of God being expressed in sending his Son to submit to death for our advantage.

5th. *Upon interpolations and alterations of the Sacred Records.*—As in the instance of John v. 7, and 1 Tim. iii. 16, two of the Trinitarian bulwarks: both of which have every thing against them, which can render any thing suspicious and exceptionable.

6th. *Upon palpable mistranslations of them.*

7th. *Upon dogmatical postulata, unsupported by Scripture; and in many instances, contrary both to Reason and Revelation.*—And this is to be seen in such declarations as teach, that the union of the man Christ was with the SECOND PERSON in the Trinity, when the Scripture in every instance represents that union to have been with the FATHER—and in such as teach that this union was a *personal union*, whereas the Scripture represents it as an union by the *indwelling* of God.

This is also the case where they would teach us, that *two natures* can be *one person*; the one *mortal*, the other *immor-*

tal: the one *passible*, the other *impassible*: the one *finite*, the other *infinite*.—That one of these “*the human*” was a mere nature, without a person—and yet Christ is represented by them as frequently speaking in his human capacity.

That *persons* in the Trinity, are not to be considered in the common sense of *persons*,—by which they destroy the Divine personality altogether;—and yet that one of these *persons* served for two natures in one Christ.

That **THREE** *persons* subsist in **ONE** common *nature*; and that this is essentially necessary to be known—which is indeed passing strange, when we consider that the Scriptures so frequently and expressly speak of the absolute *Unity* of God, and yet leave us no express declarations that in that unity is a Trinity!

A reader unused to theological disquisitions, will stand aghast, and enquire how it is possible that men should believe positions so much above reason, without rational evidence of the fact? It may also be asked, whether those who so earnestly contend for the Trinity, do under these circumstances really believe it?—It has been very much doubted whether men can seriously and sincerely say one thing (as to speculative points of religion) and believe another—It seems to me very probable that men may do so—and I think it has been, in a great measure, the case with Trinitarians—For while men have endeavoured to support an equality of the Son and the Holy Ghost, with the Father, they have in their general views, ideas, and practice, paid Divine honours to the Father as the *supreme*;—and although they contend for the personality and equality of the Holy Ghost, they rather pray to the Father to send his Holy Spirit upon them, than to the Holy Ghost to influence them:—This may appear strange, but it is no more strange than true. It is pretty well known that Christianity has been greatly corrupted from its original purity and simplicity; darkness has been called light, and light darkness; the world has long been immersed in a thick cloud of ignorance and superstition.—But amidst all this darkness and ignorance, this I verily believe to be a fact, that in true and undisguised sentiment the whole Christian world has been and is, Unitarian.—Truth is great, and will prevail in the heart of the sincere Christian, although his tongue may deny it—and it is to the *mind*, as the seat of truth and error, that God looks, I am inclined to think that there never yet was a Trinitarian, who did not in his mind pay that honour and distinction to God even the Father, that he did not to either the Son or the

Holy Ghost.—The ascription of *supreme* honour and glory is invariably to the GREAT FATHER of all: although the tongue pleads for the consubstantiality, and co-equality of the Son and Holy Ghost. And this observation may serve as an apology for our Trinitarian brethren, and does them the justice of an excuse, without any imputation upon their sincerity: For if the prejudices of education will force an implicit faith, and external confession, contrary to the powerful impulse of truth upon the mind, in acts of religious worship; we have only to admire the goodness of him who keeps the mind uncontaminated by error, amidst the various opinions and inventions of men.

The ill effect, however, of the doctrine, is but too visible in the weapons it furnishes the deist with—in the doubt and distress it occasions to many honest minds—and in the horrid ideas* that attend an inadequate knowledge of it.

The question between us, is not whether there are, or are not, certain expressions in the Old and New Testament, which might be accommodated to the doctrine of the Trinity, there no doubt are; and it would perhaps be difficult to conceive a doctrine, which particular passages of the Scriptures might not be accommodated to. But the question is, Do the Scriptures, in any one instance, expressly teach that there are *three* persons in the *one* undivided essence of the Trinity? The answer is palpable—they do not; and therefore it comes not to the point before us, to contend, that a passage in Moses, and a passage in Paul put together, might be so understood as to indicate, at first sight, the Deity of Christ.—Nor does it fill up the proof, first of all to take for granted that the doctrine of the Trinity is a doctrine of Revelation, and then to shew that a passage in Paul does not *contradict* it.—Where is the passage which declares that in God are three distinct *persons*? Or that the Son is *one* in *essence* with the Father? Or with the Holy Ghost? Or that the Son and Holy Ghost are in any other sense one? Where is it said, or supposed, that the Father is the *first* person of the Trinity, the Son the *second* person, the Holy Ghost the *third*? Does it appear in

- * “ Christ is ascended up to Heaven,
- “ The Comforter to us is given :
- “ One God’s divided in three,
- “ Without which none can saved be.”

See a Grub-street poem, in the hands of half the old women and children in the kingdom, called *Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained*.

Holy Writ, that the Son and Holy Ghost are as constantly the objects of prayer and praise as the Father is? Or does not supreme adoration appear there to be the prerogative of the Father only? Does it there appear, that the Son is the foundation of wisdom, power and goodness; or is the Father the single indisputed source of these perfections? In all the past ages of the world, where is the Holy Spirit represented as acting or speaking as Him who is supremely God? Do the Scriptures ever represent him in the personal character of God? or as any thing distinct from God? Or rather do they not speak of the Spirit as the power, influence, or energy of God? Or do they not represent the one living and true God, as acting and speaking *in* and *by* his Spirit? If the Son were the supreme God, equally God with the Father; if the Holy Spirit were the supreme God, equally God with the Father—would not the Son, would not the Holy Spirit, appear throughout the Scriptures in those characters? Would the Supreme Being be constantly represented as one, and that one *as having* a spirit, if that spirit were as supremely God, as he is God whose spirit it is? Do not the Scriptures represent God simply and absolutely as speaking of the *Spirit*—but do the Scriptures ever represent God simply and absolutely as speaking of the *Father*? And why is not this the case, if the Spirit is equally supremely God with the Father? Does not the Old Testament throughout speak of the Spirit, or the spirit of Jehovah, as the spirit of Aleim? Does not this particle *of*, indicate that the Spirit belongs to, and is not a person co-essential with Jehovah? And does not this shew that the Spirit is not the Supreme Being, in the sense in which Jehovah is the Supreme Being? Are not love, benevolence, wisdom, power, goodness, mercy, attributed to the Father? But are benevolence, wisdom, power, or mercy, even ascribed to the Spirit? Is it ever said that the Spirit is omnipotent? omniscient? or merciful? just? or good? Or are Christians ever denominated the church, the people, or the servants of the Holy Ghost? And are not all these deficiencies proofs, that ideas of co-equality, co-essentially, distinct personality in the DEITY, Trinity in Unity, and Unity in Trinity, are children of the imagination, the offspring of fanciful philosophy, equally destitute both of evidence and of truth?

And with regard to the DEITY of our Lord—Let it be shewn where he ever spake of himself as possessing more essences than one? As having in *two* natures or essences, *one* person? Or as being in his own person the very and eternal

GOD, and a MAN, the work of God's hands? Or where he has distinguished himself as GOD, from himself as MAN? And if no proof can be given where he so spake of himself, let some plain and indisputable proofs be adduced where his apostles or disciples have so spoken? Let it be shewn where, distinguishing his manhood from his Godhead, our Lord claimed equal dominion, equal supremacy with the Father? And where he has spoken of the Holy Ghost as one in essence, dominion, and supremacy with the Father and himself? Let it be made out satisfactorily, that when he declared the superior greatness of the Father, and that he derived his wisdom, his power, and his authority from him, either that he meant nothing, or that he did not speak of himself, but only of a part of himself? And that when he declared "The Father is greater than I," he meant that the Father was *greater*; but was nevertheless no more than *equal*? In a word, let it be shewn that the Great and Eternal God, possessing one understanding, one mind, one will; the first person in that Deity was full of wrath, the second person in that Deity was full of mercy, and the third person was willing to assist the second in quenching the flames kindled by the wrath of the first.— Let it be shewn that Divine justice is one—and that the second person, assisted by the third, actually satisfied all the demands of justice in the first. But let it be also shewn that the justice of the third was satisfied by the intervention and mediation of the second; and that the justice of the second was ever satisfied at all, either by a sacrifice and offering made *of himself, by himself, to himself* or by what other means; or shew that no such satisfaction was required? And then that the justice of the second, which was the same with the justice of the first person, was not so rigid as the justice of the first, that is, that he was not so rigid as itself was? These things done, the author will yield the palm to TRUTH, and confess its inscrutable and unconquerable power; but 'till this be done, he must resist the influence of Errors so apparently opposite to common observation and common sense—Errors which have nothing to recommend them but mystery and tradition, except that they are the high road to the temples of WEALTH and POWER.*

* The latter part of this sentence refers to the ecclesiastical establishment in England: It is hoped, that the same conditions of preferment, which are required there, will long be unknown in this country.











