

necessarily imply more than a specific unity, or an identity in kind; and it might consist with Sabellianism or Tritheism, expressing in the one case a numerical, and in the other a specific, unity. It would not, however, in any sense, consist with Arianism, the heresy against which the Nicene Creed was directed; and it is plain at least, that this distinction, though employed by Curcellæus and Whitby to evade or mystify the testimony of ante-Nicene writers in favour of the orthodox doctrine, cannot be applied to the explanation or perversion of the Nicene Creed, since the Nicene fathers not only asserted that the Son was *ὁμοούσιος* with the Father, but also, moreover, that He was begotten of the substance (*ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας*) of the Father, and, of course, had a substance not only the same in kind, but numerically one with His.

The second question respects the accuracy of the Nicene phraseology, in declaring the Son to be of one and the same substance with the Father, as expounding a real scriptural truth. The substance of what we learn directly in Scripture concerning the Son is this, that the names, titles, attributes, and works of the one supreme God, are ascribed to Him; that they are ascribed to the Son in no inferior or subordinate sense from that in which they are ascribed to the Father; and that thus there subsists, in some most important and essential respects, an identity between them. This great fundamental truth is, of course, to be established only by a careful examination of the precise and exact meaning of scriptural statements,—an examination that must be conducted according to the principles and rules of sound criticism and the ordinary laws of language. *Every* thing depends upon the result of this examination—the materials which *it* furnishes. When the precise meaning of the scriptural statements bearing upon this subject has been ascertained, it is then proper to consider what is the substance of the doctrine taught upon the point, and to examine in what way, or by what propositions, the real scriptural doctrine may be most fully, most clearly, and most accurately expressed. This is, indeed, the process by which our whole system of theological opinions ought to be formed; and there is need for special care and caution in conducting this process, in regard to topics which can be known only from Scripture, and with respect to which there has been much difference of opinion as to the meaning of Scripture among those who pro-

fessedly admit its divine authority. But if it be indeed true that the names, titles, attributes, and works of God are ascribed in Scripture to the Son, and that not in any inferior or subordinate sense, but in the same sense in which they are applied to the Father; and if we find also in Scripture that the Supreme Being is jealous of His own honour, and will not give His glory to another, we are fully warranted in concluding, upon the authority of Scripture, that the Son is not comprehended in the class of creatures; that He belongs to a totally different order of beings; that He is of the same rank or order as the Father. This is just the same as saying that He has not a created nature or substance, but a divine nature or substance: or, in other words, that He possesses *that* nature or substance, because of the possession of which the Supreme Being is distinguished from, and raised infinitely above, all other beings.

The divine nature can be but one, and the Son, therefore, is possessed of the one divine nature. The unity of the divine nature, however, as distinguished from the nature of a creature, might be only a specific and not a numerical unity, and this nature might be possessed by more than one divine being; but the Scriptures plainly ascribe a numerical unity to the Supreme Being, and, of course, preclude the idea that there are several different beings who are possessed of the one divine nature. This is virtually the same thing as teaching us that the one divine nature is possessed only by one essence or substance, from which the conclusion is clear, that if the Father be possessed of the divine nature, and if the Son, with a distinct personality, be also possessed of the divine nature, the Father and the Son must be of one and the same substance; or rather,—for it can scarcely with propriety be called a conclusion or a consequence,—the doctrine of the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father is just an expression or embodiment of the one great truth, the different component parts of which are each established by scriptural authority,—viz., that the Father and the Son, having distinct personality in the unity of the Godhead, are both equally possessed of the divine, as distinguished from the created, nature. Before any creature existed, or had been produced by God out of nothing, the Son existed in the possession of the divine nature. If this be true, and if it be also true that God is in any sense one, then it is likewise true,—for this is just according to the established meaning

of words, the current mode of expressing it,—that the Father and the Son are the same in substance as well as equal in power and glory.

The third question respected the propriety and the wisdom of adopting the position that the Father and the Son are of one and the same substancē, and making it a test of orthodoxy. The Nicene fathers professed to take the word of God as their rule or standard, though they likewise give us their testimony that the doctrines which they embodied in this creed had been generally held by the church since the apostles' times. We are told by Athanasius, that when they commenced their deliberations they had some intention of embodying their decision upon the doctrines of Arius in the words of Scripture; but that, upon more careful consideration, especially of the fact that Arius professed to receive all the statements of Scripture as well as they, that he put his own construction upon them, and gave an interpretation of them in accordance with his own views, they directed their attention to the object of devising certain statements, which should be possessed of these two properties: first, that they accurately embodied the substance of what Scripture teaches upon the subject; and, secondly, that they involved a denial or contradiction of Arian views so clearly and explicitly, that no Arian would receive them, and which should thus be accurate tests of truth and error upon the subject. This was the object they aimed at, and I am persuaded that in this object they substantially succeeded. The first of these properties, of course, was of primary and fundamental importance; but the other also, if attained, would be of great value in effecting objects which the existing condition of the church, and a regard to the interests of truth, rendered it imperative on them to aim at. I have already shown, that, assuming it as fully established by an exact and critical examination of the precise meaning of scriptural statements, that the Son is truly, and in the highest sense, God, possessed of the divine nature,—this doctrine, viewed in connection with what the Scripture also teaches concerning the unity of God, is accurately expressed by declaring, as they did, the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son;—and I now, therefore, further assume that the great doctrine which forms the distinguishing peculiarity of the Nicene theology is really sanctioned by the word of God, and, of course, may be rightfully asserted and maintained.

The Arians of the fourth century professed to dislike the Nicene Creed for this, among other reasons, because it deviated from the language of Scripture, and introduced new words and phrases which the word of God has not explicitly sanctioned; and many since have continued to object to this and other similar documents upon the same ground. The objection is a very frivolous one; and when it does not proceed, as it too often does, from a dislike to the doctrines which the creeds and confessions objected to inculcate, is founded upon very obvious misapprehensions. So long as men, all professing to take the Scripture as their rule, deduce from it opposite doctrines, or put inconsistent interpretations upon its statements, it will be indispensably necessary, if they are to attempt to ascertain how far they agree with, and how far they differ from, each other, that they employ, in expressing their convictions, words different from those which are used in Scripture. It may be objected, that this implies that men can form or devise more clear, explicit, and unequivocal declarations of doctrine than the word of God furnishes. It must be admitted that this is implied in it; but it may also be maintained, that this is, in a certain sense, true, without any disparagement to the word of God, and its perfect sufficiency for all the objects which it was designed by its Author to effect. Different doctrines are revealed in the word of God with different degrees of clearness and fulness; and it was manifestly not God's purpose to make His word so clear and explicit, in regard to all the doctrines it contains, as to preclude the possibility of men possessed of intelligence and substantial integrity taking different views of the meaning of some of its statements. Men of talent, learning, and piety have denied that the New Testament teaches the doctrines commonly called Calvinistic; but no sane man has ever yet denied that the Westminster Confession teaches these doctrines,—a fact which may fairly be regarded as establishing the conclusion, that *in some sense* the latter teaches them *more* clearly and explicitly than the former. It is possible for men to ascertain whether other men agree with them in holding Calvinistic doctrines, and it is desirable and important that this should be ascertained; but this manifestly cannot be done while they confine their communications with each other to the use of mere scriptural language. So, in like manner, when Arius broached the doctrines which have since been called by his name, it became necessary for the church

in general to make it manifest whether or not they approved of his views; and if not, what they regarded to be the doctrines really taught in Scripture upon the point, as distinguished from, and opposed to, his errors. Arius professed, as they did, to believe all that was said in Scripture concerning the Son; and hence it became necessary that, if Arianism was to be condemned, and the truth opposed to its errors to be fully and explicitly set forth, other words than those contained in Scripture should be employed—words which, beyond all reasonable doubt, should convince all men competent to judge of them, that those who adopted and concurred in them, denied that the Son was a creature, or had a created and inferior nature; and, on the contrary, maintained that, while undoubtedly a distinct person from the Father, He was possessed of one and the same divine nature, and yet was not a second or distinct God. This they professed to do, by asserting that He is of one and the same substance with the Father; and the history of the Arian controversy, lasting as it did during the greater part of the fourth century, proves that they succeeded, to a very large extent at least, in the object they aimed at.

The most direct and proper ground on which the declaration of the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father can be assailed is, by showing that this position does not accurately embody or express the substance of what is taught or indicated in Scripture upon the subject. This is the only objection that is entitled to much consideration, and, if established, is of course at once and conclusively fatal; a property which no other objection can possess. It would, however, be also a serious, though not necessarily a fatal objection, could it be proved that, as the Arians sometimes alleged, the word *ὁμοούσιος* was of equivocal signification,—that its proper meaning could not be very clearly ascertained or very fully established. All they could adduce to give plausibility to this allegation was, the fact that the word had been used in the preceding century in a Sabellian sense by Paul of Samosata, and that, in consequence, the disuse of the word had been recommended by the orthodox Council of Antioch which condemned him. And it is quite true, as was already remarked, that the word does not include or suggest a condemnation of Sabellianism, or an assertion of the opposite truth of a real personal distinction in the Godhead; but this was not the purpose

for which it was employed by the Nicene fathers, or for which it has been since employed by the orthodox church. It was intended to embody a condemnation of Arianism, and an assertion of the great scriptural truth which is opposed to it. The Arians not only knew that this was its intended object, but they saw and felt that this object it was admirably fitted to effect; for it is a very remarkable fact, that amid all the discussions which took place upon this subject, Arians and semi-Arians uniformly manifested a most intense and unwavering dislike to the word *ὁμοούσιος*, and to the doctrine which it so explicitly and unequivocally declared. Most of the different sections into which the Arians and semi-Arians split in the course of the fourth century, laboured to devise, and ostentatiously paraded, the highest and most exalted terms which they could consistently apply to the Son, and some of them professed to adopt most of the terms applied to Him in the Nicene Creed. The semi-Arians in general professed to concur in the condemnation pronounced by the Nicene Council upon those who asserted that there was a time when He was not, or who maintained that He was a creature, made out of nothing. Some of them went so far as to profess to regard Him, not only as God, but as the true God: in short, they professed to say, in regard to Him, almost everything which the Nicene fathers had said; but none of them ever would admit the doctrine of the consubstantiality.

During some portion of the fourth century, through the influence of the Emperors Constantius and Valens, a large part of the professing church was overrun with Arian or semi-Arian heresies; so that it was said, "Unus Athanasius contra orbem,"—and that Jerome declared,* that the whole world groaned, and wondered that it had become Arian. During the period, many Arian and semi-Arian councils were held, and a considerable number of creeds were adopted by them. We have still extant several creeds, for example, prepared under Arian and semi-Arian influence, in councils held at Antioch, Sardica, Sirmium, and Ariminum; and the great facts concerning them are these: first, that they all, without exception, omit the word *ὁμοούσιος*, or any expression of similar import; and, secondly, that there are some of them with respect to

* Jerome *adversus Luciferianos*.

which this single omission is the only very intelligible or palpable difference between them and the one at Nice,—so that there are even some of them in regard to which it has been ever since a subject of controversy, whether they ought to be regarded as orthodox or not. The more bold and honest Arians said that the Son was *ἑτεροούσιος*, of a different substance from the Father; others said that He was *ἀνόμοιος*, unlike the Father; and some, who were usually reckoned semi-Arians, admitted that He was *ὁμοιούσιος*, of a like substance with the Father; but they all unanimously refused to admit the Nicene phraseology, because they were opposed to the Nicene doctrine of the true and proper divinity of the Son, and saw and felt that that phraseology accurately and unequivocally expressed it, though they sometimes professed to adduce other objections against the use of it. They made many attempts to appear to come as near as possible to the orthodox doctrine, without really committing themselves to its fundamental distinctive principle; but the word *ὁμοούσιος* acted like Ithuriel's spear in detecting all their shifts and manœuvres, and in holding them up to the world as opposers, whatever they might sometimes pretend, of the true and proper divinity of the Son of God and the Saviour of sinners. It was like the anchor that held the orthodox faith in steadiness and safety amid the fearful storms of more than half a century, which elapsed between the first and the second œcumenical councils. It was a barrier against which neither force nor fraud could prevail, and which, in so far as anything of the kind could effect it, may have been said to have kept God's truth pure and undefiled, until the calamity had overpast, and a period arrived more favourable to the open profession and maintenance of the true doctrine which He has made known concerning His Son. I do not know that the history of the church presents to us another instance in which the wisdom and expediency of any particular doctrinal deliverance have been so fully established by experience. The history of the fourth century most fully proves that the Nicene fathers acted wisely,—that is, acted under the guidance and direction of Him who is the God only wise,—when they embodied in their creed or declaration that the Son is consubstantial with the Father. The Arians were never able to pervert it into an accordance with their views, but were obliged ever to admit that it unequivocally condemned them. It thus fully served the purpose for which it was intended, and

acted as a discriminating test between truth and error. The Lord blessed it, and made it the means of preserving His truth when it was exposed to imminent danger; and it continues to this day, in the symbolical books of almost all orthodox churches, to be regarded as a precise and accurate exponent of the great doctrine of our Lord's true and proper divinity.

There is, indeed, one slight deduction to be made from the statement now given, of the beneficial effects of the assertion of this doctrine, and the use of this phraseology,—*i.e.*, from the proof from experience of the wisdom and expediency of the adoption of it as a test of orthodoxy. There do seem to have been some persons in the fourth century who, while holding the substance of the orthodox doctrine in regard to the person of Christ, in opposition not only to Arians but to semi-Arians, had difficulties about adopting the word *ὁμοούσιος*; so that while it fully served the important purpose of detecting and excluding all Arians, it did not quite so fully effect the object—which is also of great importance in a matter of this sort—of uniting and combining all who agreed with the sacred Scriptures, and with each other, in regard to the substance of the doctrine. This was no doubt a partial evil, and it was to be regretted, both for the sake of truth and for the sake of the individuals themselves. The number of these individuals, however, who held the substance of the Nicene doctrine, but objected to the phraseology in which it was expressed, was very small,—and the evil, therefore, was very inconsiderable; while the advantage was incalculable that resulted from the possession and the use of a definite phraseology, which shut out *all* the supporters of error, combined *nearly all* the maintainers of truth, and formed a rallying-point around which the whole orthodox church ultimately gathered, after the confusion and distraction occasioned by Arian cunning and Arian persecution had passed away.

It is interesting to notice that some of the most zealous champions of orthodoxy during the Arian controversy knew how to temper their zeal for fundamental truth with a reasonable forbearance for the difficulties and infirmities of individuals; and that they did distinguish between differences as to the substance of the great doctrine of our Lord's true and proper divinity, and differences about some minor points in the mode of explaining it, and in the phraseology employed in doing so. It is generally said, that the adoption of the word *ὁμοιούσιος*, of a *similar* substance,

as distinguished from *ὁμοούσιος*, of the *same* substance, is the discriminating characteristic of the semi-Arians—of those who wished to appear to come as near to orthodoxy as possible, without actually adopting it; and this is, to a large extent, though not universally, true. Athanasius and Hilary, two of the most zealous defenders of the Nicene Creed, have both distinctly admitted that there were men in their time who scrupled to employ the word *ὁμοούσιος*, and preferred that of *ὁμοιούσιος*, who yet held the substance of the orthodox doctrine upon the subject, and were therefore to be treated as brethren in the faith—weak brethren, it might be—but still not as enemies of the truth. It was reckoned, and justly, a mark of some measure of error or misconception, a just cause of suspicion which required to be purged away, that men should object to asserting an identity of substance between the Father and the Son, and prefer asserting only a similarity. Still this was not to be held to be of itself conclusive against their orthodoxy. Hilary, one of the ablest and most strenuous defenders of the Nicene doctrine, laboured to show that *ὁμοιούσιος* was not only in fact used in preference to *ὁμοούσιος* by men who were in the main orthodox on the subject of the person of Christ, but, moreover, that it fairly admitted of a good and orthodox sense, *i.e.*, of substantially the same sense as *ὁμοούσιος*. He says: “Caret igitur similitudo naturæ contumeliæ suspicione: nec potest videri Filius idcirco in proprietate paternæ naturæ non esse, quia similis est; quum similitudo nulla sit, nisi ex æqualitate naturæ: æqualitas autem naturæ non potest esse, nisi una sit. Una vero non personæ unitate, sed generis. Hæc fides pia est, hæc conscientia religiosa, hic salutaris sermo est, unam substantiam Patris et Filii idcirco: non negare, quia similis est similem vero ob id prædicare, quia unum sunt.”* “Similarity of nature, then, is far from suspicion of unsoundness; nor can the Son appear to be non-participant of His Father’s nature, merely because He is like Him, since there is no similarity except from equality of nature, and there cannot be equality of nature except it be one—one, indeed, not in unity of person, but of kind or species. This, then, is a pious faith—this a religious conscience—this a sound

* Natalis Alexander, *saec. iv.*, Diss. xv. The Greek of the passage from Athanasius, and reference to Hilary are given in Gieseher, § 81, vol. i., p. 200 of Cunningham’s translation; and § 83, pp. 345–6 of Davidson’s. Vide Hampden’s Bampton Lectures, Lec. iii.

mode of speaking, not to deny one substance of the Father and the Son, because it is like; and to assert that the substance of the Son is like that of the Father, because they are one.”

Athanasius has the following statement upon this subject, which is honourable to him, and fitted to teach us a useful and important lesson. “This,” says he, “may suffice for refuting those who assail the Council of Nice, and attack all its proceedings. But with respect to those who receive the other decisions of the council, but have a difficulty about the *ὁμοούσιος*, we ought not to treat them as enemies: for we are not to identify them with the Arians, or to proclaim open war against them, but to discuss the matter with them as brethren, because they have really the same doctrine as we, and dispute only about words; for since they profess that the Son is of the substance of the Father, and not of any other substance,—that He is not a creature, but the true and natural offspring of the Father, and that He existed with the Father from eternity,—they are not far removed from the *ὁμοούσιος*.” It was certainly an act of great weakness,—originating, probably, to some extent in pride or prejudice, not very creditable to the parties themselves, and decidedly injurious to the interests of truth,—that men who honestly believed all this should scruple about the word *ὁμοούσιος*; but cases of an analogous description have occurred in all ages in which there has been anything like free investigation. They have occurred not only in regard to this doctrine, but also in regard to others; and where the cases really are analogous,—*i.e.*, where there is good ground to think that the substance of the true scriptural doctrine is honestly believed,—they ought to be spoken of and treated in the way of which Athanasius has here set us an edifying example.

Sec. III.—The Nicene Creed—the Eternal Sonship.

The propositions which are directly and immediately taught us in Scripture on the subject of the Godhead are these: that there is one God—that the Father is God, that the Son is God, and that the Holy Ghost is God; and from these propositions, directly taught in, and conclusively established by, Scripture, we draw the inference that these three—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost—are the one God. The Scriptures bring these three before us as distinguished from each other, and as distin-

guished from each other in a way that bears some analogy or resemblance to that in which three different persons among men are distinguished from each other, so that they might be marked out by the application to them of the distinct personal pronouns, *I, Thou, and He*; and upon this ground we consider ourselves fully warranted in saying, as is said in our Confession of Faith, in the sense which has already been fully explained, that in the unity of the Godhead there be three persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. When it is further said in the Confession, that these three persons are “of one substance, power, and eternity,” this, of course, is intended to set forth some of the leading positions which are implied in or result from, and thus explain the great general doctrine that they all possess the one Godhead, or the one proper divine nature. If God be one, and if the Son be God, and the Holy Ghost be God, they must possess equally with the Father the one undivided and indivisible divine essence or substance, and they must possess equally all divine perfections, such as power and eternity; or, in the language which has been commonly employed by orthodox divines, the three distinct persons in the one Godhead or divine nature are consubstantial, co-equal, and co-eternal.

To this general description of the Trinity in unity, or of three persons possessing the one divine nature or essence, and the same divine perfections, it is added in the Larger Catechism (Quest. 9), that they are “distinguished by their personal properties.” Now, this statement introduces an idea over and above what is necessarily implied in the position that they are three distinct persons. All that is implied in the general position, that they are three distinct persons, so far as we are warranted and qualified to explain it, is this: that they are distinguished from each other in a way somewhat analogous to that in which three different persons among men are distinguished from each other, so as to admit of the distinct personal pronouns, *I, Thou, and He*, being applied to them respectively; and the true ground of the position is this general consideration, that the scriptural representations upon the subject are manifestly fitted, and *of course* were intended, to convey to us this general conviction and impression. The position that they are “distinguished by their personal properties,” conveys to us something fuller and more specific than this, with respect to the nature, or rather the manifestations and conse-

quences, of the distinction; and *if true*, it affords ground for this position, that there is something which may be predicated of each of the persons that cannot be predicated of the rest. These two things are correlatives. *If it be true* that the three persons are distinguished by their personal properties, then it follows necessarily that there must be something about each of them that cannot be predicated of the others; and, *e converso*, if it can be proved that there is something predicable of each of them that cannot be predicated of the others, then we are fully warranted in deducing from this fact the general doctrine *necessarily involved in it*, that they are distinguished by their personal properties. Now we hold, and undertake to prove, that the Scripture warrants us in maintaining that there is something predicable of each of the persons which cannot be predicated of the others; and when we have proved this specifically and in detail, we consider ourselves fully warranted in laying down the general position that they are distinguished by their personal properties, which is nothing more than embodying in a general statement the substance of scripturally proved facts. Accordingly, the Larger Catechism, after asserting that they are “distinguished by their personal properties,” puts the question, “What are the personal properties of the three persons in the Godhead?” and the answer is, “It is proper to the Father (*i.e.*, it is a peculiar, distinguishing property of the Father, predicated of Him, and not of the other two persons) to beget the Son, and to the Son to be begotten of the Father, and to the Holy Ghost to proceed from the Father and the Son from all eternity;” or, as it is expressed in the Confession, “The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.” Now, what is here asserted concerning the Father and the Son, and their mutual relation, as well as distinguishing properties, constitutes the substance of the doctrine which has been generally held by the church in all ages under the name of the eternal generation of the Son by the Father, or the eternal Sonship of Jesus Christ; and it has been held just because it was believed that it could be fully proved from Scripture that the Son was eternally begotten of the Father.

The Nicene fathers did not stop short with asserting, in opposition to Arius, that the Son was of one and the same substance with the Father; they further declared that He was begotten—

not made or created—that He was begotten of the Father, and of the Father's substance, and that thus He was "God of God, θεός εκ θεού, light of light, true God of true God." This is manifestly an assertion of a doctrine different from that of the consubstantiality, and additional to it; and the same general questions may be propounded concerning this additional doctrine as those which we have already considered under the former head. This doctrine plainly implies in general that the second person in the Godhead stands in the relation of a Son to the first person, with reference to His divine nature; that there was a generation or begetting, by which the Father in some sense communicated the divine nature, essence, or substance to the Son, and the Son of course derived or received it from the Father, so as to be even as God—a Son and begotten. This was clearly the doctrine which the Nicene fathers intended to teach, and it has been generally received ever since by most orthodox churches, under the designation of the eternal Sonship or filiation of Christ, or the eternal generation of the Son, or *Logos*. Bishop Bull discusses it under the head of the *subordination* of the Son to the Father, as to His *origo et principium*, and shows that both the ante-Nicene fathers and the post-Nicene, while asserting the perfect equality of the Father and the Son in nature and in all perfection, were accustomed to speak of the Father as being the ἀρχή, the αἰτία, the *auctor* of the Son, the *origo* or *fons* (πηγή) of the divinity which the Son possesses. The use of the word *subordination*, however, even when thus explained and limited, has been generally avoided by orthodox writers, as fitted to suggest ideas inconsistent with true and proper divinity, and to give a handle to the Arians. As the leading idea intended to be conveyed is just the communication from eternity in some mysterious and ineffable way of the divine nature and substance by the Father to the Son; and as the main ground on which the doctrine rests is the position, that Christ is represented in Scripture as being a Son, and as being generated or begotten, even as God, or in respect to His possession of the divine nature and perfections,—it is more common, and certainly more warrantable and becoming, to speak of the doctrine under the designation of the eternal Sonship or filiation of Christ, or the eternal generation of the Son by the Father.

I have said that this doctrine of the eternal Sonship or filiation of Christ, or the eternal generation of the Son (the same un-

doubtedly which the Nicene Council intended to teach in the quotations given from their creed), has been generally received ever since by most orthodox churches. At the same time, it must be admitted that there have been writers of eminence who have held the true and proper divinity of the Son, and His consubstantiality with the Father, but have rejected the doctrine of His eternal generation. They have been led to reject this doctrine partly from some abstract metaphysical reasonings,—which, however, I am persuaded can be proved to carry with them no more real weight in opposition to the eternal generation of the Son than other abstract reasonings of a similar kind possess, in opposition to His proper divinity,—and partly from a sensitive shrinking from what may appear presumptuous speculations upon a mysterious subject without clear warrant, as they think, in Scripture. These persons are accustomed to say, that all that is clearly revealed upon this subject in Scripture is,—that the Father is God, that the Son is God, and that the Holy Ghost is God; and yet that they are not three Gods, but one God. If this be indeed all that is revealed in Scripture, then here we should stop, and content ourselves with explaining, illustrating, and defending this position; and this, as I formerly showed, is quite enough to warrant us in asserting the consubstantiality of the three persons in the Godhead. But as, on the one hand, we ought to beware of trying to be wise above what is written; so, on the other hand, we must guard against laying aside, or leaving out of view, anything which has really been revealed upon this point. In either case equally we are failing in making a right use and improvement of the word of God. Some of the fathers indulged in unwarrantable and presumptuous speculations about the relations of the persons in the Godhead; and this was carried to a far greater excess, and exhibited much more offensively, by the schoolmen, who were accustomed to discuss many questions concerning this subject which assuredly the word of God affords us no materials for deciding, and which may justly be regarded as not only presumptuous, but profane. This, combined with other causes, has led some modern writers to lean somewhat to the opposite extreme; and to leave out, or to refuse to take up, positions which there is good ground to believe that the word of God sufficiently warrants. Calvin, disgusted with the presumptuous speculations of the schoolmen, and having to contend in his own day both with

Sabellian and Tritheistic heretics, expressed a wish* that the names usually employed in discussing this subject were buried, and that men would be contented with believing and professing that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are one God; and yet that the Son is not the Father, or the Spirit the Son, but that they are distinguished from each other by their personal properties; and in accordance with this feeling, he certainly spoke with some degree of doubt or suspicion of the eternal Sonship of Christ, though there is no sufficient ground for maintaining, as has been sometimes done, that he positively denied or rejected it.

It must be admitted that the fundamental truth upon this point,—that which stands clearly and prominently first, both in respect to the fulness of its scriptural evidence and its own intrinsic importance,—is the doctrine that the Son is God—truly and properly God—of one and the same substance with the Father, and equal in power and glory; and it may be admitted that men who believe this, and believe nothing more upon the point, may have correct views in the main of the leading principles of the scheme of redemption. Still, the Nicene fathers taught, and most orthodox churches have concurred with them, that there was another and a more specific additional truth revealed in Scripture upon this subject, and possessed of no inconsiderable intrinsic importance,—that, namely, of the eternal generation of the Son. Of those who, admitting the proper divinity of the Son (for it is with them only we have at present to do), have not admitted His eternal generation, some have contented themselves with saying that they saw no sufficient scriptural evidence of this latter doctrine, and therefore did not receive it into their creed; while others have gone further, and have maintained positively that the doctrine is false, nay, even that it is inconsistent with the scriptural doctrine of His true and proper divinity. Some of this latter class,—and especially the late Professor Moses Stuart of Andover, one of the first Biblical critics of the present day,—have taken some credit to themselves for being the most judicious defenders of Christ's proper divinity, and have imagined that they derived important advantages in the management of this great cause from casting off the doctrine of the eternal Sonship. The defenders of the eternal Sonship of Christ do not imagine that it can be established

* Inst., Lib. i., c. xiii., sec. v.

by any other evidence except scriptural testimony; but they believe that the scriptural testimony in its favour is sufficient and satisfactory; that there is no reason whatever why it should be rejected or explained away; and that the doctrine, instead of weakening or subverting that of Christ's proper divinity, tends greatly to confirm and illustrate it, as well as to throw light upon other important doctrines.

Those who positively deny or reject the doctrine of Christ's eternal Sonship, usually adopt a line of argument in opposing it, precisely analogous to that employed by Arians and Socinians in arguing against Christ's divinity. They begin with trying to prove by abstract reasonings, *a priori*, that the doctrine cannot be true; and then they proceed to what is in a great measure superfluous,—if they have really succeeded in establishing their first position,—to show that the scriptural statements on which the proof of the doctrine is commonly based are not sufficient to prove it. We have already admitted that the clearest and most fundamental truth upon this point is, that Christ is truly possessed of the divine nature, and of all divine perfections. All who hold this doctrine—and it is admitted by both parties in the discussion about the eternal Sonship—must of course admit that nothing can be truly predicated of Christ which contradicts, or is inconsistent with, His true and proper divinity. Now, the opponents of this eternal generation by the Father assert that this generation implies that the Father existed before Him in point of time, and that therefore He was not co-eternal with the Father; and also, that the derivation of His existence and substance from the Father by generation, in any sense, is inconsistent with that necessary existence which is an essential attribute of divinity. I am not called upon to enter upon a minute and formal investigation of this difficulty, and can only point briefly to the principal considerations by which it can, I think, be satisfactorily solved.

The fallacy of the argument lies in this, that it proceeds upon the assumption that generation,—and what it involves or implies when applied to the divine nature,—must be the same as when applied to men, and that the same or an analogous inference may be deduced from it in both cases. This is a mode of arguing which *all* the defenders of the proper divinity of Christ reject, when they are called upon to maintain that doctrine against *its* opponents. Arians and Socinians are accustomed to argue that,

as three persons among men are three different intelligent beings, so three persons in the Godhead must be three beings, or three Gods; and the answer which is reckoned sufficient by *all* defenders of our Lord's divinity is, in substance, that it is unwarrantable to argue in this way from the human to the divine nature; that what is true in regard to the one, may not be true, and cannot be proved to be true, in regard to the other; that we speak of three persons in the unity of the Godhead, just because this is the nearest approach we can make, by the exercise of our feeble faculties, and in the use of human language, to embodying or expressing a combination of a unity with a threefold distinction,—a combination which is clearly intimated to us in Scripture. In like manner, it appears to be intimated in Scripture—for we are entitled, in discussing this preliminary objection, to assume this—that the *Logos*, or second person of the Godhead, stands to the first *even as God* in the relation of Sonship, nay, in a relation expressly described in Scripture as Sonship; and we are fully warranted in putting aside as presumptuous and inadequate any preliminary objection to this doctrine, based upon difficulties which manifestly rest upon the application to a relation subsisting in the divine nature of notions derived from a relation called by the same name, because in some respects analogous, subsisting among men. We do not admit, and it cannot be proved, that generation in the divine nature *must imply* priority of existence in the begetter with relation to the begotten, or merely contingent as opposed to necessary existence in the Son; and in this way it may be shown that the preliminary objection to the eternal generation of the Son may be disposed of in the same way, and just as conclusively, as the preliminary objection to His proper divinity derived from the admitted unity of God.

Nay, there is one important aspect in which the answer to the objection in the former case has an advantage over the answer to the objection in the latter; and it is this: a distinction of persons—the subsistence of three persons in the unity of the Godhead—have not, *as phrases or expressions*, explicit scriptural sanction. They are used, and warrantably used, just because they seem best adapted of any expressions which human language furnishes, to embody or indicate what the Scripture unfolds to us upon the subject; whereas, if the doctrine of eternal generation has any foundation in Scripture—and that it has, we are entitled, as I

have said, to assume hypothetically at this stage of the argument—then we have the idea of Sonship expressly applied to the relation subsisting between the first and second persons of the Godhead. And, of course, we are thus entitled to allege that the relation which actually subsists between them,—*whatever may be its precise nature, however imperfectly it may have been revealed to us, and however inadequate our faculties may be to comprehend it*,—that this actual relation is that which truly and properly constitutes Sonship, or is the original idea or archetype of filiation. And, if so, it manifestly follows that we ought to regulate our conceptions of what sonship is and implies, not from the defective and imperfect representations of it given in the relation of fathers and sons among men, but from the original and only true idea of it as subsisting between the first and second persons of the Godhead. This view brings out most palpably the unwarrantableness and inexcusableness of deducing inferences from what generation or sonship involves or implies among men, to what it must involve or imply when regarded as subsisting between the persons of the Godhead. The eternal generation of the Son, then, just means the communication from eternity, in some ineffable and mysterious way, of the divine nature and essence by the first to the second person of the Godhead, in virtue of which the relation of proper paternity and proper sonship subsists between them, and is accordingly set before us in Scripture in the only way in which it could be unfolded, in language applicable to a human relation, which is, in some respects, though not in all, analogous to it. The proper Sonship of Christ, instead of suggesting any considerations inconsistent with His true divinity, most naturally and immediately suggests His being truly of the same nature and substance with the Father, and equal in power and glory.

As it may be truly said of the doctrine of the Trinity in general, that when it is once proved that it *may* be true,—*i. e.*, when it is once shown that it cannot be proved to involve a contradiction,—there is no difficulty in proving from Scripture that it *is* true; so it may with equal justice be said of the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ, that when it is once shown that it cannot be proved (for, of course, the *onus probandi* lies upon those who allege the objection) to involve anything necessarily inconsistent with His proper divinity—His co-eternity and co-equality with the Father—then there is no great difficulty in finding in Scripture

enough to establish its truth. The evidence depends mainly upon an investigation of the true meaning and application of the phrase, the Son of God, as it is used by the inspired writers; and more particularly, upon the decision of the question whether this designation is *ever* applied to Christ as God, or with an exclusive reference to His divine nature. If it appears that Christ, as God, is on any occasion represented in Scripture as the Son of God, then the controversy is settled; for this is nearly all that is meant by His eternal Sonship—that, as God, or in His divine nature, He stands in the relation of a Son to the first person of the Godhead. The opponents of the eternal Sonship of Christ allege, some of them, that the designation, Son of God, as applied to Him in Scripture, is descriptive, not of His nature, but only of His office as Messiah or Mediator; others, that it is properly descriptive of His human nature, upon the ground of His miraculous conception; while others, again, admitting, like the latter class, that it is a designation not merely of office but of nature, hold that it is applied to Him merely as a general description of His peculiar position and dignity, and intimate relation to God in His complex person, as *θεανθρωπος*, or God and man in one person. This last is the view taken of its import by Professor Moses Stuart of Andover,* who has laboured with great zeal to refute the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ, and whose erroneous views upon this point materially detract from the value of his other labours in establishing the proper divinity of Christ in opposition to the Socinians. The discussion of this subject, of course, opens up a wide field of critical investigation into the true meaning and import of a large number of the most important and interesting passages in the New Testament. On this field I am not called upon to enter; and it is the less necessary, as there is a very accessible book, published a few years ago, in which the whole subject is most fully and minutely discussed with great ability, and in an admirable spirit—I mean Treffry on “The Eternal Sonship of our Lord Jesus Christ,” where the doctrines which I have endeavoured briefly to state and explain are, I think, established by unanswerable evidence from the word of God.

It is important to keep in view, in surveying the scriptural evidence, that, if it clearly appears that *in any instance* the idea

* Commentary on Romans, c. i., p. 63.

of generation or sonship is applied in Scripture to our Saviour, with reference exclusively to His divine nature or His eternal relation to the first person of the Godhead, this is quite sufficient to establish the doctrine, even though it should appear that there are also passages in Scripture in which the designation, Son of God, is applied to Him with reference to His office and not His nature, or if to nature as distinguished from office, with a reference to His human nature, or to His complex person as *θεανθρωπος*, as distinguished from His divine nature, simply as such. It has been common among some divines to bring out and illustrate different grounds or modes of filiation, as they call it, said to be applied to Christ in Scripture, or various reasons on account of which He is there styled the Son of God, such as His miraculous conception, His mission and office as Messiah and Mediator, His resurrection from the dead, and the peculiar intimacy of fellowship which He enjoyed with the Father, and the pre-eminent power and glory to which He has been raised. Treffry's admirable work shows that some of these alleged modes of filiation or grounds of Sonship have no foundation whatever in Scripture,—*i.e.*, are not adduced and represented there as the reasons why Christ is called the Son of God; and that, in regard to all of them, the evidence is much more defective and uncertain than might at first sight appear,—that, in short, the ordinary and general, if not the exclusive, application of the title, Son of God, to Christ, describes or indicates a relation subsisting between Him and the first person of the Godhead from eternity. But even if we were to admit that all the different inferior modes of filiation which divines have enumerated were sanctioned by Scripture, the question would still remain, whether it does not also, *in addition*, exhibit and sanction another and higher mode of filiation, by representing Christ as being the Son of God with reference to His divine nature, apart from any other view, either of His nature or of His official position and privileges. If this mode of filiation, if this species and ground of Sonship, be sanctioned by Scripture, as we have no doubt it can be proved to be, then is the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ, or the eternal generation of the Son or *Logos*, fully established, whatever other inferior modes of filiation may be also brought before us in Scripture; and thus, of course, it becomes our duty to believe upon the authority of God, that there has subsisted from eternity, between the first and

second persons in the Godhead, a relation analogous in some respects to that subsisting between a father and a son among men, implying, as the human relation does, identity of nature and equality of order or dignity, but, of course, not implying priority in time as opposed to co-eternity, or contingency and dependence of existence as opposed to necessary and unchangeable existence, or, indeed, anything inconsistent with the full possession by the Son of true and proper divinity, and all which this involves.

There are not a few in our own day, who, under a profession of adhering strictly to the simplicity of Scripture, and indulging in no speculations which the word of God does not warrant, reject the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of the Saviour. The question, of course, must be decided by an appeal to Scripture, which alone can give any information upon a subject so mysterious, and so immeasurably raised above the cognizance of our unaided faculties; but we cannot help thinking, that just as Arians and Socinians come to the examination of the scriptural evidence of our Lord's proper divinity with their minds biassed by a previous conviction, upon grounds of abstract reasoning, that the one divine nature cannot be possessed by two distinct persons, so the opponents of the eternal generation of the Son come to the examination of the scriptural evidence upon this point with their minds biassed by a previous conviction, that there cannot subsist between two distinct persons in the Godhead a relation in *some* respects analogous to that subsisting between a father and a son among men.

We are persuaded, then, that the Nicene fathers were supported by the word of God, as well as by the testimony of the early church, in declaring that the Son was not only of one and the same substance with the Father, but also that He was eternally begotten by the Father of His own substance; and though we would not put this doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son upon the same level, in point of intrinsic importance, with that of His consubstantiality or true and proper divinity, yet we believe that it is much more important than many seem willing to admit, as throwing most interesting and valuable light upon many particular statements and general doctrines of Scripture, and especially as enabling us more fully to understand and realize the great doctrine which may be said to constitute the gospel of our salvation,—viz., “that God so loved the world as to give His only

begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life;” and that “God spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all:” “Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and gave His Son to be a propitiation for our sins.”

Sec. IV.—The Nicene Creed—Procession of the Spirit.

There was nothing said in the original Nicene Creed about the Holy Ghost, except the simple mention of His name, because, up till that time, the Scripture doctrine concerning Him had not been made a matter of controversial discussion; but in what is commonly known as the Nicene Creed,—and which is the proper Nicene Creed as enlarged by the second general council held at Constantinople in 381,—the Holy Ghost is described as “the Lord and Lifegiver, proceeding from the Father, and with the Father and the Son to be worshipped and glorified, who spake by the prophets.” Now, this was intended to assert the consubstantiality and co-equality of the Holy Ghost with the Father and the Son, as a distinct person; and, in addition, to predicate of Him, as a distinguishing personal property, that He proceeds—*εκπορευεται*—from the Father. At a later period, the Latin or Western Church introduced into the creed the statement, that He proceeds not only from the Father, but also from the Son. This doctrine of the procession of the Spirit from the Son as well as from the Father, the Greek or Eastern Church refused to adopt; and the discussion of this topic was one main cause that led to the final separation of the Eastern and Western Churches, and has always continued to form a leading subject of controversy between them. The reformed churches have all adopted the doctrine of the Latin or Western Church upon this subject, and have maintained, as is done in our Confession, that the Spirit proceeds not only from the Father, but also from the Son. What we have at present to do with is only this, that it is a peculiar distinguishing property of the Spirit,—a fact predicated of Him and not of any other person in the Godhead,—that He proceeds—*εκπορευεται*;—*i.e.*, has the divine nature or essence communicated to Him by the other persons, or derives it from them in a mysterious and ineffable way, of which Scripture affords us no materials for saying anything,

except that, while it implies communication on the one part, and derivation on the other, it is different from, and is left in a somewhat more general and indefinite position than the "begetting and being begotten," which represents the distinguishing personal properties of the Father and the Son, and, at the same time, constitutes their mutual relation.

This is the sum and substance of all that is revealed to us in Scripture concerning the distinction in the divine nature,—concerning the three distinct persons who possess in common the one divine nature,—in so far as their true and proper divinity, or their eternal power and Godhead, are concerned; and we have now only to advert to another great truth revealed to us in Scripture concerning the second of these three persons,—viz., that He was made flesh, that He became man,—and to what is implied in and results from this.

CHAPTER X.

THE PERSON OF CHRIST.

THE subjects which we have been considering, in connection with the Arian controversy and the Nicene Creed, come under the head of Theology, in the most restricted meaning of the word, as descriptive of that branch of divine truth which treats directly of God, or the Divine Being; and, accordingly, they are often discussed in the older systematic works under the head *De Deo Uno et Trino*. It is an important feature of the information which God in His word gives us concerning Himself, that in the unity of the Godhead there are three distinct persons, the same in substance, and equal in power and glory; and men who know not or who deny this, cannot be said to know the true God as He has made Himself known to us. The topics involved in the controversies, to which we now proceed very briefly to advert, come under the head of what, according to the modern divisions generally adopted upon the continent, is called Christology, as distinguished from Theology in the most restricted sense of the word, and were usually discussed in the older systems under the head "De persona Mediatoris." They respect the constitution of the Saviour's person, not as He existed from eternity with the Father, but as He was when on earth working out the salvation of sinners, and as He now is in heaven at God's right hand.

So far as the Socinians are concerned, the controversy is virtually terminated by the proof of Christ's true and proper divinity. Though some ancient heretics denied Christ's humanity, and though one or two modern Arians have held that the super-angelic creature whom they regard as the Son, or *Logos*, informed or dwelt in Christ's body, and thus served as a substitute for a human soul; yet it may be said, practically and substantially, to be universally admitted that Christ was truly and really a man, possessed of a true body and a reasonable soul. It is right that we should dwell upon the abundant evidence which Scripture affords of this