

just; but for how much of it I am still accountable to God, I hardly dare to acknowledge to myself. Is it bodily pain? How often was that brought upon me by my own imprudence or folly! Was it passion? Heaven has given to every human being the power of controlling his passions, and if he neglects or loses it, the fault is his own, and he must be answerable for it. Was it pleasure? Why did I indulge it? Was it dissipation? This is the most inexcusable of all; for it must have been occasioned by my own thoughtlessness or irresolution. It is of no use to discover our own faults and infirmities, unless the discovery prompts to amendment. I have thought if, in addition to the hour which I daily give to the reading of the Bible, I should also from time to time (and especially on the Sabbath), apply another hour to communicate to you the reflections that arise in my mind upon its perusal, it might not only tend to fix and promote my own attention to the excellent instructions of that sacred book, but perhaps also assist your advancement in its knowledge and wisdom.

At your age it is probable that you have still greater difficulties to understand all that you read in the Bible than I have at mine; and if you have so much self-observation as your letters indicate, you will be sensible of as much want of attention, both voluntary and involuntary, as I here acknowledge in myself. I intend, therefore, for the purpose of contributing to your improvement and my own, to write you several letters, in due time to follow this, in which I shall endeavor to show you how you may derive the most advantage to yourself, from the perusal of the Scriptures.

It is probable, when you receive these letters, you will not, at first reading, entirely understand them; if that should be the case, ask your grand-parents, or your uncle or aunt, to explain them; if you still find them too hard, put them on file, and lay them by for two or three years, after which read them again, and you will find them easy enough. It is essential, my son, in order that you may go through life with comfort to yourself and usefulness to your fellow creatures, that you should form and adopt certain rules or principles for the government of your own conduct and temper. Unless you have such rules and principles, there will be numberless occasions occurring in which you will have no guide for your government but your passions.

In your infancy and youth you have been, and will be, for some years, under the authority and control of your friends and instructors; but you must soon come to the age when you must govern yourself. You have already come to that age in many respects; you know the difference between right and wrong, and you know some of your duties, and the obligations you are under to become acquainted with them all. It is in the Bible you must learn them, and from the Bible how to practice them. Those duties are to God, to your fellow creatures and to yourself. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy strength, and thy neighbour as thyself." On these two commandments, Jesus Christ expressly says, "hang all the law and the prophets;" that is to say, the whole purpose of Divine revelation is to inculcate them efficaciously upon the minds of men.

You will perceive that I have spoken of duties to yourself, distinct from those to God and to your fellow creatures; while Jesus Christ speaks only of two commandments. The reason is, because Christ and the commandments repeated by him, consider self-love as so implanted in the heart of every man by the law of his nature, that it requires no commandment to establish its influence over the heart; and so great do they know its power to be, that they demand no other measure for the love of our neighbour, than that which they know we shall have for ourselves. But from the love of God, and the love of our neighbour result duties to ourselves as well as to them, and they are all to be learned in equal perfection by our searching the Scriptures. Let us, then, search the Scriptures; and in order to pursue our inquiries with methodical order, let us consider the various sources of information that we may draw from in this study.

The Bible contains the revelation of the will of God. It contains the history of the creation of the world, and of mankind; and afterward the history of one peculiar nation, certainly the most extraordinary nation that has ever appeared upon the earth. It contains a system of religion, and of morality, which we may examine upon its own merits, independent of the sanction it receives from being the Word of God; and it contains a numerous collection of books, written at different ages of the world, by different authors, which we may survey as curious monuments of antiquity and as literary compositions. In what light soever we regard it, whether with reference to a revelation, to literature, to history, or to morality—it is an invaluable and inexhaustible mine of knowledge and virtue.

I shall number separately those letters that I mean to write you upon the subject of the Bible, and as after they are finished, I shall perhaps ask you to read them all together, or to look over them again myself, and you must keep them on separate file. I wish that hereafter they may be used to your brothers and sisters as well as to you. As you will receive them as a token of affection for you during my absence, I pray that they may be worthy to be read by them all with benefit to themselves, if it please God that they should be able to understand them.

From your affectionate father

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS.

## The Bible Christian.

MONTREAL, MARCH, 1848.

### THE DOCTRINE OF THE PLURALITY OF PERSONS.

Many excellent people suppose that the doctrine of a plurality of persons in the divine nature can be legitimately drawn from certain expressions which occur in the book of Genesis. It is contended that it must be inferred from the use of certain plural nouns as names of Deity. It is urged that as those nouns are constructed with other parts of speech, sometimes of the plural number, and sometimes of the singular number, that, therefore we are to conclude there is a plurality of persons in the Divine unity. Thus in the first verse of Genesis it is written: "In the beginning God [Elohim—lit. Gods] created [sing. num.] the heaven and the earth." But the first answer we make to this is, that if the literal reading in such cases be insisted on, it would prove a plurality of Gods; and this is admitted on all hands to be contrary to the whole scope and teaching of the scriptures. And we answer further, that there is no plural meaning necessarily involved in the plural form of expression now referred to. It is simply what Hebrew grammarians style the plural of *majesty* or *excellence*. Professor Stuart in his Hebrew grammar says:—"For the sake of *emphasis* the Hebrews commonly employed most of the words which signify *Lord, God, &c.*, in the plural form, but with the sense of the singular." Another reply we give to this argument to show its unsoundness is, that the same form of expression is applied not only to certain distinguished men, but to false divinities: it is applied to Moses (Ex. vii—1), to Samuel (1 Saml. xxviii—13, 14), to Dagon, an idol (Judges xvi—23, 24, and 1 Saml. v—7). These three considerations are surely sufficient to satisfy us of the futility of such an argument for a plurality in the divine nature. But we can cite good Trinitarian authority against it. John Calvin himself has pronounced the sentence of insufficiency against this first stone which is produced to construct the fabric of Trinitarianism.—"Moses," he says, "uses *Elohim*, a word of the plural number; from which it is usual to infer that there are three persons in the Godhead. But this proof of so important a doctrine appears to me by no means solid; and therefore I will not insist upon the word, but rather warn my readers against such violent interpretations."

It is farther urged that from the use of plural pronouns, in reference to the Deity, in three or four instances, we are to infer a plurality of persons in the divine nature. Thus God is represented (Gen. i—26) as saying:—"Let us make man, &c." But shall we infer a doctrine from these three or four passages which would contradict or obscure the simple teaching of ten thousand other passages in the scriptures where the Deity is represented, and referred to, by pronouns of the singular number? Can we not see in such language just a majestic mode of expression such as was usual with the monarchs of the ancient times, and customary amongst them still? Artaxerxes, King of Persia, is described in scripture (Ezra iv—18) as adopting similar language: "The letter which ye sent unto us hath been plainly read before me." And what is more common with sovereigns of the present day than to issue their individual

commands in this mode: "It is our royal will and pleasure, &c.;" yet no one would ever think of inferring a plurality of persons in the Monarch who speaks thus. The proper way of regarding such expressions is to look upon them as of an anthropomorphic character, giving the conception of the historian's mind with regard to the divine proceeding, rather than a literal statement of that proceeding. To suppose the Deity really speaking involves the idea of organs of speech, which we know that God, who is a spirit, doth not possess. Such modes of representation are adopted in accommodation to our faculties, and are necessary to convey any distinct idea to our minds. Moses wrote the passage before us, yet Moses always maintained the absolute unity of God, which circumstance is full proof that no plurality of persons was ever hinted at by it. Neither the Jews of old, nor the Jews of modern times, ever interpreted such ex; ressions in any way inconsistent with the doctrine of God's strict unity. Surely their testimony in such a case is not to be overlooked. Here again, however, we shall cite the authority of a learned Trinitarian in setting this portion of Trinitarian proof aside. Concerning the text: "And God said, let us make man, &c.," Dr. Geddes remarks: "Of the Jewish writers some are of opinion that God here addresses himself to his surrounding angels, as a King to his Council of State. . . . Others, with whom agree some of our best modern critical commentators, find in the phrase "Let us make" no more than an emphatic and majestic mode of expression." . . . As a critic, I will not only say that the word *noshe* does not necessarily imply a plurality, and I believe that it is found even in the Hebrew writings applied to a single mortal, namely, in Song of Solomon i—11.—"we will make for thee a collar of gold,"—where, I am persuaded, that "we" means only Solomon himself. . . . Nor is it peculiar to the Hebrew: it is quite familiar to the Arabs. The Mussalmans are certainly no Trinitarians, yet nothing is more common in the Koran than God's speaking in the plural number. . . . I am, therefore, strongly inclined to think that the *noshe* of Genesis implies no plurality of persons.

### TRUTH AGAINST THE WORLD.

A PARABLE OF PAUL.

[From the Dial for October, 1840.]

One day Abdiel found Paul at Tarsus, after his Damascus journey, sitting meek and thoughtful at the door of his house; his favorite books, and the instruments of his craft, lying neglected beside him. "Strange tidings I hear of you," said the sleek Rabbi. "You also have become a follower of the Nazarene! What course shall you pursue after your precious conversion?" "I shall go and preach the Gospel to all nations," said the new convert gently. "I shall set off to-morrow." The Rabbi, who felt a sour interest in Paul, looked at him with affected incredulity and asked, "Do you know the sacrifice you make? You must leave father and friends; the society of the Great and the Wise. You will fare hard and encounter peril. You will be impoverished; called hard names; persecuted; scourged; perhaps put to death." "None of these things move me," said Paul. "I have counted the cost. I value not life the half so much as keeping God's Law, and proclaiming the truth, though all men forbid. I shall walk by God's light, and fear not. I am no longer a slave to the old Law of sin and death, but a free man of God, made free by the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus." "Here," rejoined the Rabbi, "you have ease, and fame; in your new work you must meet toil, infamy, and death." "The voice of God says Go," exclaimed the Apostle, with firmness, "I am ready to spend and be spent in the cause of Truth." "Die then," roared the Rabbi, "like a Nazarene fool, and unbelieving Atheist, as thou art. He that lusts after new things, preferring his silly convictions, and that whim of a conscience, to solid ease, and the advice of his friends, deserves the cross. Die in thy folly. Henceforth I disclaim thee. Call me kinsman no more!" Years passed over; the word of God grew and prevailed. One day it was whispered at Tarsus, and ran swiftly from mouth to mouth, in the market place, "Paul, the apostate, lies in chains at Rome, daily expecting the Lions. His next trouble will be his last." And Abdiel said to his sacerdotal cronies in the synagogue,

"I knew it would come to this. How much better to have kept to his trade, and the old ways of his fathers and the prophets, not heeding that whim of a conscience. He might have lived respectably to an easy old age at Tarsus, the father of sons and daughters. Men might have called him RABBI in the streets."

Thus went it at Tarsus. But meantime, in his dungeon at Rome, Paul sat comforted. The Lord stood by him in a vision and said, "Fear not, Paul. Thou hast fought the good fight. Lo I am with thee to the end of the world." The tranquil old man replied, "I know whom I have served, and am thoroughly persuaded that God will keep what I have committed to him. I have not the spirit of fear, but of love, and a sound mind. I shall finish my course with joy, for I see the Crown of Righteousness laid up for me, and now my salvation is more perfect, and my hope is higher than when first I believed."

Then in his heart spoke that voice, which had spoken before on the mount of Transfiguration; "Thou also art my beloved Son. In thee am I well pleased."—Theodore Parker.

Since the introduction of our religion, human nature has made great progress, and society experienced great changes; and in this advanced condition of the world, Christianity, instead of losing its application and importance, is found to be more and more congenial and adapted to man's nature and wants. Men have outgrown the other institutions of that period when Christianity appeared; its philosophy, its modes of warfare, its policy, its public and private economy; but Christianity has never shrunk as intellect has opened, but has always kept in advance of men's faculties, and unfolded nobler views in proportion as they have ascended. The highest powers and affections which our nature has developed, find more than adequate objects in this religion. Christianity is indeed peculiarly fitted to the more improved stages of society, to the more delicate sensibilities of refined minds, and especially to that dissatisfaction with the present state, which always grows with the growth of our moral powers and affections. As men advance in civilization, they become susceptible of mental sufferings, to which ruler ages are strangers; and these Christianity is fitted to assuage. Imagination and intellect become more restless; and Christianity brings them tranquility, by the eternal and magnificent truths, the solemn and unbounded prospects, which it unfolds. This fitness of our religion to more advanced stages of society than that in which it was introduced, to wants of human nature not then developed, seems to me very striking. The religion bears the marks of having come from a being who perfectly understood the human mind, and had power to provide for its progress. This feature of Christianity is of the nature of prophecy. It was an anticipation of future and distant ages; and when we consider among whom our religion sprung, where, but in God, can we find an explanation of this peculiarity?—Dr. Channing.

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