

A LETTER
ON
THE PERSON AND DEITY
OF
THE HOLY GHOST.

BY
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PERSON AND DEITY OF THE HOLY GHOST.

THE occasion of the following letter was the painful necessity of refusing to receive into Christian fellowship in the Lord's Supper one who proved, on inquiry, to be unsound in this very important point of the Christian faith stated above. There have ever been seasons in the history of the Church when a necessity has arisen for making a stand for some particular truth, which Satan has tried either openly to invalidate or covertly to obscure, or, more frequently, to lead the children of God to neglect or despise. Of late the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ has been the point of controversy, and the faith of many shaken almost to the centre on questions arising concerning His proper divinity and proper humanity, or their union in His one blessed, undivided and spotless Person. In this day the important truth of the Person, Deity, and indwelling of the Holy Ghost, as that which constitutes the life and vigour of the Church, is very loosely held even by many

who zealously assert the Deity and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The vague assertion of the necessity of the *influence* of the Holy Ghost, instead of His own personal presence and power, has doubtless much tended to help on the fearful error of those who deny His distinct personality and Deity, whilst they allow, in words, the existence of the Holy Spirit, or the Spirit of God. In full accordance with the judgment of the writer, that the Church should demand confession in the faith of the Trinity, as that confession which is to be made unto salvation,—with his permission we use this letter for the common profit of the Church, in the furtherance of our common faith.

The writer is fully aware, and indeed has stated in the letter, that what he says is very far short of a complete statement of the truth on this point. So far as it goes it is most valuable; but we look to the truth on this point being followed out, both in its exposition and practical bearing, in some future papers.

MY DEAR SIR,

I felt myself much drawn to you from the little intercourse we had on Sunday, so that the apprehension, as it grew upon me, of anything that might prove a necessary hindrance to further intercourse, I need not say was painful to me.

I have since further meditated on the subject that was then between us, and have committed the guidance of my mind upon it to the Lord; but I feel only more confirmed in the judgment which I then had, and I have remembered the words of the Apostle, "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them."—I desire now to write a little on the subject, as I promised you.

I believe the glory of God as He is, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, might have been learnt from the Scriptures of the Old Testament. But I will instance only Isaiah vi.

There the seraphims cry, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts!" The New Testament Scriptures show us that Christ and the Holy Ghost might have been apprehended in this vision and audience, which the Prophet then had; for, says St. John, referring to that chapter, "these things said Esaias, when he saw His (*i.e.* Christ's) glory, and spake of Him." And St. Paul, referring afterwards to the same, says, "Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the Prophet unto our fathers." (See John xii. 41; and Acts xxviii. 25.)

But I instance merely this place; for I have no design to go into the Divine testimonies to this truth which might be derived from the Old

Testament. But when the work of the Son was accomplished, and He had risen from the dead, and was about to depart unto the Father, the full manifestation of God was made, for then the due time for this had come ; and the commission to the Apostles was this : “ Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”

And this was just the time, as I have observed (as doubtless everything in Scripture is perfect), for the revelation of this glory. The work had now been done by the *Son* which had been given to Him by the *Father* to do, and the *Holy Ghost* was about to be sent down to make that work effectual in and to the Church. Therefore the Church was now to be brought into the knowledge of God, and baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

But so likewise is the Church *blest* in Him ; the benediction pronounced upon the saints formally and fully running thus,—“ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all.”

And from these things, if we had nothing further, we know Him “ with whom we have to do,” in whose name we have been thus baptized, and

in whose grace, love, and communion, we thus have our life and blessing.

But there is much more than this. The Scriptures of the New Testament throughout *assume* that which the form in baptism thus distinctly *declares*. There is not the constant repetition of the already declared truth in a full, formal manner; but there is the constant *assumption* of it, and the presenting of it in its *moral* power.

I will just instance the passages which on the moment, without an effort, occur to me.—

“For through *Him* we both have access by one *Spirit* unto the *Father*.” (Eph. ii. 18.)

“And the *Lord* make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: to the end He may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, *even our Father*, at the coming of our *Lord Jesus Christ* with all His saints.” (1 Thess. iii. 12, 13.)

“And *the Lord* direct your hearts into the love of *God*, and into the patient waiting for Christ.” (2 Thess. iii. 5.)

“Elect according to the foreknowledge of *God the Father*, through sanctification of the *Spirit*, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of *Jesus Christ*.” (1 Peter i. 2.)

“He saved us, by the washing of regeneration,

and renewing of the *Holy Ghost* ; which *He* shed on us abundantly through *Jesus Christ* our Saviour." (Titus iii. 5, 6.)

In passages like these, the truth already declared in baptism is *assumed* and shewn further out in its *moral* power and relation to us ; and we learn that, as saints, we are vitally concerned in the actings of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. And we are saints by thus knowing God (having fellowship with the power and grace of our God) through His own actings—the only way in which He ever can be known ; for man's thoughts will never discover Him, and will therefore leave him but a worshipper of idols still. And this should teach the Church of God, that she dare not recognize any one who does not thus stand with her in the knowledge of God, in whose name she has been baptized, and with whose blessing she is blessed. I am confining myself here rather to the doctrine of the Word concerning the Holy Ghost ; for that was the subject between us. We did not so much speak of the Deity of the Lord Jesus.

As to the Person of the Holy Ghost, I would then further say, that a full revelation of Him is made, not only in the baptismal and benedictory forms ; but also, though in another manner, by our Lord to His Apostles in John xiv.—xvi., and

there, too, I would again say, *in due time*, as we may thus see. When our Lord spake those words, it was just after He had told His disciples that He was about to be withdrawn from them. Such a declaration filled them (as it well might, for they had given up all *companionship* with Him, not as yet knowing Him in resurrection) with sorrow; and in these chapters He brings them the consolation. And the consolation He brings them was twofold.

1st.—He tells them that His present departure was not final separation, but that He was going away only to prepare a place for them in the Father's house, and that He would return and receive them to Himself. This was great consolation, but this was not all; for—

2nd.—He tells them that in the meantime, while He was thus absent from them, and abiding with the Father, He would send the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, to be with them, and that He would do wondrous and blessed service for them, such even as His own presence with them could never accomplish. What this promised service of the Holy Ghost for the Church was, I will not here detail—it is graciously spread out before us in these chapters of St. John, as well as in the other Scriptures of the New Testament. But here it stood revealed by the Lord to His Apostles,

that the Holy Ghost was to be with them, and in them, when He Himself had returned, and was abiding with the Father. Such is the revelation of the Person of the Holy Ghost to the Church, such the blessed promise from the departing Son of God, that the *Spirit of truth* should come to make effectual to the Church the testimony which He, the *Son*, had given to the *Father*, and to seal upon their hearts all the life, and joy, and power of that calling, which had been prepared for them before the world was.

Here the Church rests—here she abides in peaceful assured joy, knowing that *God* in all His fulness is for her, that her security depends on no creature-strength, but that God Himself began, did continue, and is now ending her salvation, that what in covenant had of old been *planned* for her, God manifest in flesh had wrought out, and God the Holy Ghost is now making effectual, to the joy of all who believe. This is the blessed way in which, if I may so speak, Scripture vindicates the baptismal form; this is the way in which the name of God, there fully and formally published, is made known in life and power. I would further say, that without this there would be a giving of God's glory to another. For not only is equal honour required for the Son (John v.), but the Holy Ghost stands with the Father

and the Son, as we have seen, in the work which is doing for poor sinners, the divine work of salvation. The subjection of the Son to the Father, and again of the Holy Ghost to the ascended and glorified Son of Man, is abundantly exhibited in Scripture, and more than exhibited, for we are instructed in the *need* of these things. The Lord says, "The Son can do nothing *from* Himself;" and again, speaking of the promised Comforter, "He shall not speak *from* Himself" (John v. 19; xvi. 13); both passages intimating distinctly these subjections. And we learn the *need* of this wondrous and blessed economy. What could have cancelled the offence of Adam, the offence of a creature seeking to be as God? What could have preserved the honour of the throne of God while extending pardon to the seed of this Adam, but Jehovah's fellow being Himself smitten, and He that was in the form of God emptying Himself. This we learn was the needed way in which God could be just and the justifier of sinners. (Rom. iii.)

And what power less than that of God could make the work effectual to us? Having begun in God, are we to be made perfect in the creature? He that has been sent to be with the Church, while travelling here in weakness and patience during the dreary night of her Lord's absence, is

the Spirit Himself, the Lord, who during that night is sought unto and trusted in, to direct our "hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ."

I know there may be perplexities in the thoughts of the saints at times, on many of the great matters of revelation, and Satan is busy to corrupt the mind from the simplicity that is in Christ. But his advantages are gained, because he finds something in us. I am *conscious* of this. It is the god *of the world* that blinds the mind; it is the *evil* heart that departs from the living God. At the root of many of our difficulties there is a real, though it may be undetected, desire to keep God at a distance. Just (as has been observed by another,) as with the children of Israel in the wilderness. It was not because the manna was not pleasant, for we are told it was as coriander seed, sweet as honey; but still they loathed it; and why? It came from the hand of God—it brought God too nigh to them. And in like manner, the world is at enmity with the doctrine of the cross; and why? It brings God too nigh to us; it brings Him to us in such amazing light of love as overwhelms us; it is too much for the narrow heart of man; it rebukes his selfishness, and he seeks relief from it in the law of works. This is illustrated in the young man in Matt. xix.

It was because he was *covetous* that he was asking, "What good thing shall I do?" And so the Godhead of Him who now dwells in the Church is a truth that in like manner brings God blessedly nigh to us.

I have not here so much spoken of the person of our Lord Jesus, because, as I have observed, that was not so much the subject of our conversation. But I would just observe, that the revelation of the Son with the Father and the Holy Ghost, in the Godhead, is made to us also in the baptismal form, and in that particular (as in the other which I have above considered), all subsequent Scripture vindicates that form, *assuming* the truth therein contained, and showing out its *moral* life and power. The work which the Lord has accomplished for the Church, and the affections which the Scriptures claim for Him from her, brings her before Him as God her Saviour. Some speak of a *subordinate* Deity, of God in an inferior order; but the Church knows no such mythology, as indeed I cannot refrain from calling it. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is *one* Lord;" and "the Son of God is come to give us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

But the Church has also learnt the subjection of the Son—that He said in the volume of the book (in covenant, before the world was), “Lo, I come;”—that, like the *voluntary* servant in Israel, (and how *voluntary*, if in any sense He had been debtor as an inferior!) He has had His ear bored for perpetual service. (Exod. xxi.; Psa. xl.; Isa. l.) Blessed be His name for such unsearchable riches of grace! But all this only verifies His true Deity, verifies the revelation, that He stands with the Father and the Holy Ghost in that name which is God, and in which, to know, love, serve, and worship Him, we have been baptized.

I do not desire, dear Sir, to multiply thoughts needlessly on this subject, though I confess to you it is not grievous; for it is a sweet occupation to go over and over again those ever-blessed revelations of Him who is ours in covenant everlasting love, who has displayed His full name to us. But my direct purpose now is to show you the grounds why I assuredly judge that the Church of God must, in order to her fellowship, require a confession to the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. This is God, because this is the revelation; for without revelation of Himself, He is not to be known. No thoughts of ours will do anything more than (at their best) leave us refined idolaters. God must witness Himself to

us; and that He has done in His actings for His saints in the work of their everlasting salvation, and which actings have brought out to them that blessed One with whom they have to do, in whose name they have been baptized, with whose blessing they are blessed—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

I would just add here what I have omitted (for I have followed my thoughts very much as I was led, without order), that the Holy Ghost is not personally put before us in the way that “the Father” and our Lord Jesus are in the New Testament generally; for the Holy Ghost is now *in* the Church, the life of her worship, and the strength of her service; by His indwelling, He is making known to us the glory of the ascended Son (or His *Lordship*), and the *Fatherly* character and love of our God. Hence all the Epistles open somewhat in this way, “To the Church which is in God the *Father*, and in the *Lord* Jesus Christ, grace be unto you, and peace, from God the *Father* and the *Lord* Jesus Christ.” But in the Apocalypse, where the revelation was conveyed by the ministry of an angel, the salutation runs thus—“Grace be unto you, and peace from *Him* which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the *seven spirits* which are before the throne; and from *Jesus Christ*, the faithful Witness,

the first-begotten of the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth."

But I will not go further, dear Sir. I had thought to have sent you this on ———, but I have been unexpectedly interrupted. You will, I trust, believe that I had but the kindest thoughts toward you. You may judge me, after reading this, to be narrow-minded and bigoted, insisting on that which I have learnt by tradition from my fathers. But I do pray that this may not be your last thought upon it, but that you may stand in the confession of the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, with those who have in every age of the Church since Jesus ascended and sent down the Holy Ghost, approved themselves as the saints of God, and witnessed and lived for their Lord in this evil world, and who have gathered all their joy and strength for present service, and all their confidence and ground of hope for future rest and glory, from the blessed and gracious God who has thus revealed His full name to them, and given Himself to them and for them.

Yours very truly (in the remembrance that
Jesus is my Lord),

I. G. B.