

Section Two—Basic Doctrines of the Faith Chapter 16: Personal Distinctions in the Trinity

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Syllabus for Lecture 19:

1. State the opinions of Socinians, Arians and Orthodox, concerning the generation and filiation of the Son.

Turretin, Loc. iii, Qus. 27, 29. Hill's Divinity, bk, iii, ch. 10. Dr. S. Hopkins' System, Vol. i, p. 362, and so on. Dick, Lecture 29. Cunningham's Hist. Theol., ch. 9, Sect. 3. Knapp, Sect. 43. Alexander Campbell, "Christian System," ch. 4.

2. What were the opinions of the ante-Nicene Fathers, concerning the subordination, of the Second and Third Persons, the three-fold generation of the Son, and the distinction of Logo" endiaqeto" and Logo" Proforiko"?

The same citations. Knapp, Lecture 42. Neander, ch. Hist., Vol. i, p. 585.

3. Prove the eternal generation of the Son; refute the common objections, and overthrow the Socinian and Arian explanations thereof.

Same citations. "Letters on the Eternal Sonship of Christ," by Dr. Samuel Miller, iii, iv. Watson's Theol. Inst., pt. ii, ch. 12, Sect. 5.

4. What is the difference between the generation of the Son, and the Procession of the Spirit? Can the latter be proved eternal?

Same citations.

The discussions and definitions of the more formal and scholastic Theologians, concerning the personal distinctions in the Godhead, have always seemed to me to present a striking instance of the reluctance of the human mind to confess its own weakness. For, let any read them with the closest attention, and he will perceive that he has acquired little more than a set of terms, whose abstruseness serves to conceal from him their practical lack of meaning. It is debated whether the personal distinction is real, or formal, or virtual, or personal, or modal. Turretin decides that it may best be called modal—i. e., as a distinction in the

modus subsistendi. But what those modes of subsistence are, remains none the less inscrutable; and the chief reason why the term modal is least objectionable, seems to be that it is most general. After all, the mind must be content with these facts, the truth of which it may apprehend, although their full meaning cannot be comprehended by us; that there is an eternal and necessary distinction between the essence and the persons, the former being absolute, and the latter relative; that the whole essence is truly in each person, with all its attributes; that yet the essence is not divided or distributed between them, but single and indivisible; that the distinction of persons is one truly subsisting, subsisting eternally by the very necessity of the divine nature, and not merely relative to our apprehensions of it; and that the persons are not convertible the one into the other, nor the properties of the one predicable of another.

Personal Properties.

Each Person has its peculiar property, which is not indeed constitutive of, but distinctive of it. The property of the Father is to be unbegotten; of the Son, generation; and of the Spirit, procession. Hence, three characteristic relations—in the Father, paternity; in the Son, filiation; and in the Holy Spirit, spiration. That there are such properties and relations, we know; what they are, we do not know.

2. Order of the Persons.

We find ourselves speaking almost inevitably of First, Second, and Third persons, implying some form of order in the persons. No orthodox Christian, of course, understands this order as relating to a priority of time, or of essential dignity. To what, then, does it relate? And is there any substantial reason for assigning such an order at all? We reply, there must be, when we find that where the three persons are mentioned by Scripture, in connection, as in Matt. 27:19, etc. they are usually mentioned as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and not in reversed order; that in all allusions to the properties and relations of the three, the Father is always spoken of (e. g., the word Father) by some term or trait implying primary rank, and the other two, by some implying secondariness; as Christ is His Son, the Holy Spirit His Spirit; they are sent, He the Sender; and in their working, there is always a sort of reference to the Father's primariness (if I may coin a word), directing their operation (John 5:26; 10:38; 14:11; 17:21; Heb. 1:3).

View of Greek Fathers Thereon.

But if it be asked, what is the primariness, the answer is not so easy. It was the usual answer of the ante Nicene, and especially the Greek Fathers, that it indicated the order of derivation, that the personality of the Son is from that of the

Father, not the Father's from the Son; and so of the Holy Spirit. (And so far, it must be allowed, the fair force of the Scripture facts just stated, carries them properly enough.) The Father they regarded as *anaitio*", as *phgh Qeou*, or Arch Qeou, the Son and Holy Spirit as *aitiatoi*, as *Qeoi ek Qeou*, and as deriving their personal subsistence from the eternal act of the Father in communicating the divine essence to them in those modes of subsistence. And this view was embodied in both forms of the Nicene Creed, of A.D. 325 and 381, where the Son is called, "God of God, Light of Light, and very God of very God"; language never applied to the Father as to the Son. Their idea is, that the Father, the original Godhead, eternally generates the person, not the substance of the Son, and produces by procession the person, not the substance of the Holy Spirit, by inscrutably communicating the whole indivisible divine substance, essentially identical with Himself in these two modes of subsistence; hence eternally causing the two persons, by causing the two additional modes of subsistence. This statement, they suppose, was virtually implied in the very relation of terms, Father and His Son, Father and His pneuma, by the primariness of order always assigned to the Father, and by the distinction in the order of working. And they relied upon view to vindicate the doctrine of the Trinity from the charge of tritheism. You will probably think, with me, that its value for this last purpose is questionable, for this reason: that the modes of subsistence of the persons being wholly inscrutable, the true answer to the charge of tritheism is to be found for our minds, in that fact, coupled with the Scriptural affirmation, that God is one as truly as the persons are three. No explanation of the derivation of one subsistence from another really brings us any nearer to the secret, how it is one and three. But the answers, which the advocates of this Patristic view presented to objections, seem to my mind much more consistent than Dick would intimate. Was it objected, that they represented the Second and Third Persons as beginning to exist, and hence robbed them of a true self-existence and eternity? These Fathers could answer with justice: No, the processes of personal derivation were eternal, immanent processes, and the Father has a personal priority, not in time, but only in causation; e. g., the sun's rays have existed precisely as long as he has; yet the rays are from the sun and not the sun from the rays. And the Second Person may be derived as to His personality, *Qeo" ek Qeou*, and yet self-existent God; because His essence is the one self-existent essence, and it is only His personality which is derived. They regard self-existence as an attribute of essence, not of person. Was it objected that these derived personalities were unequal to the First Person? They answer: No, because the Father put His whole essence in the two other modes of subsistence. Was it said, that then the personal subsistence of the Second and Third was dependent on the good pleasure of the First; and, therefore, revocable at His pleasure? They answered, that the generation and procession were not free, contingent acts, but necessary and essential acts, free indeed, yet necessitated by the very perfection of the eternal substance. You will perceive that I have not used the word subordination, but derivation, to express this personal relation. If you ask me whether I adopt the Patristic view, hence cleared, as my own, I reply, that there seems to me nothing in it inconsistent with revealed

truth; yet it seems to me rather a rational explanation of revealed facts, than a revealed fact itself. On such a subject, therefore, none should dogmatize.

Logo" Endiaqeto", Etc.

It may be well to explain, also, how the Rationalizing Fathers connected their theory of the Trinity with this generation of the Son. Attempting to comprehend the Divine essence through the analogy of the human spirit, and according to the Platonic metaphysics, they said that the Son or Logo", is God's Reason or intellectual action; and the Holy Spirit His yuch, or emotive and vital activity.

In the ages of eternity the Son was the Dogo" endiaqeto" or Ratio insita, God's reason acting only by self-comprehension, according to Prov. 8:22; John 1:2. When, in time, God began to effectuate His decree in works of creation and providence, He became the Logo" proyoriko", or ratio prolata. When at length He was born of the flesh for man's redemption.

He became the Logo" ensarkiko", incarnate. Hence, the Father maybe said to have made three productions of the Son—one from eternity, one when, in time, the Son was sent out as Agent of God's working, one when He was born of the Virgin.

3. Is Christ's Generation Eternal?

This is the transition point, to enable us to comprehend the views of the Arians concerning Christ's generation. These heretics usually admitted the justice of the metaphysical explanation of God's immanent acts. But, said they, as the human mind has not one, but a numerous series of acts of intellection, nohmata, so a fortiori, the infinite mind of God. There is, of course, some primary nohma and this is the eternal, immanent Logo" of John 1:2. There are other nohmata in the divine mind, and some one of these is the one embodied, in time, in the creation of the Son, "by whom He made the worlds." Hence they endeavoured to reconcile the creation of the Son out of nothing, with the eternity of a Logo". How worthless all this is, I need not say.

Scripture Language Thereon.

The Arians, like all others, heterodox and orthodox, find in the Scriptures ascriptions of a peculiar Sonship of Christ, needing some explanation. And we might as well array the more general of these Scripture representations here, as at a later stage of the discussion. I shall then pursue the method of bringing the several explanations of the Arian, Socinian, and orthodox, to the test of these Scriptures.

The Messiah is called the Son of God, directly or indirectly, once in the Old Testament, and about one hundred and sixteen times in the New Testament, and the Father receives that title two hundred and twenty times; while no creature is ever called the Son of God, in the singular number, except Adam. Luke 3:38. And there the peculiarity is accounted for by the fact that it was the Evangelist's purpose to show that Adam, like Christ, had no human father. Christ is God's beloved Son (Matt. 3:17; 17:5; Mark 1:11, etc). He is the Son who alone knoweth the Father (Luke 10:22; John 10:15); and who reveals Him. He claims God as "His own Father," in such a sense as to make the Jews believe that He made Himself equal with God (John 5:17–19). He is a Son to be honoured as the Father is (John 5:23). He doeth whatever He seeth the Father do (John 5:19). He is one with the Father (John 10:30). He is in the bosom of the Father, though incarnate (John 1:18); and is the only-begotten of the Father (John 1:14); and "prwtotoko" pash" ktisew"(Col. 1:15). Here, surely, is evidence of some peculiar relation other than that borne by God's rational, or even His holy creatures generally.

Arian Exposition.

Now, says the Arian, this Divine Creature is called the Son, and only begotten, because He is the first Creature the Father ever produced out of nothing, and the only one whom He produced immediately, by His own agency; all subsequent productions, including those of the Holy Spirit, being through the agency of this Son. He is called Son, moreover, because He has received a peculiar adoption, is deputed God to other creatures, and a splendid creature image of the divine glory. He is also called Son, as being born by miraculous power of a virgin, and being constituted God's Messenger to fallen man. And last: He is Son, as being the Heir, by adoption, of God's throne and glory.

Socinian Explanation.

The Socinian makes Jesus Christ only a holy man: and in his eyes His peculiar Sonship means nothing more than that He was born of a virgin without human father, that He was adopted by God, and endued with most eminent spiritual endowments, that He was sent forth as God's chosen mouth piece to call a fallen race to repentance and obedience; and that He received the privilege of an immediate glorification, including His resurrection, ascension, and exaltation to God's throne.

A Peculiar View of Some Trinitarians.

But among Trinitarians themselves there are some, who give to Christ's Sonship a merely temporal meaning. They believe that the Second and the Third persons are as truly divine as we do; they believe with us, that there is a personal distinction, which has been eternal; but they do not believe that the terms generation and procession were ever intended by Scripture to express that eternal relation. On the contrary, they suppose that they merely denote the temporal functions which the persons assume for man's redemption. Such appears to have been the view of the Hollander Roell, of Dr. Ridgeley, in Eng; of Emmons and Moses Stuart, of New Eng.; and of the notorious Alex. Campbell.

Socinian Explanation Fails.

Now, to begin with the lowest scheme, the Socinian: it utterly fails at the first blush of the contest. It does not explain why Christ is called the Son, while all other creatures are called sons in the plural only. It does not explain why He was the beloved Son, why He comprehended and revealed the Father, why He was of equal honour, and identical substance, rather than other holy creatures. It utterly fails to explain why He is only begotten; for Adam was begotten by God's direct power, not only without father, but without mother. His endowments and His mission only differed, according to Socinians, in degree from those of other prophets, who were, therefore, in this sense, as truly sons as He. And finally, His resurrection and glorification leave Him behind Enoch and Elijah, who were translated.

Arian Explanation Fails.

The Arian scheme also fails to explain how His Sonship made Him one with the Father, and of equal honour; how it capacitates Him to be the revealer and image of the Father's person and glory in a manner generically different from all other creatures; and how it proves Him only-begotten. It leaves unsatisfied the declaration, that while they were ktisia" He was prwtotoko"; and begotten before every creature; so that He would be produced in a totally different way from, and produced before, the whole creature class to which, on their scheme, He belongs! And last, like the Socinian scheme, it leaves wholly unexplained how a creature (therefore finite) could be competent to the exercise of all the works he seeth the Father do, and to a divine glorification.

Only An Eternal Generation Meets the Texts.

Against the third view I would urge the general force of the passages I collected above. It may at least be said, that if it were not intended to teach that the permanent personal distinction was that of filiation, the Scriptures have been singularly unfortunate. But I shall proceed to cite other authorities, which are

more decisive of the point. In doing this I shall be also adding to the overthrow of the Arian and Socinian views by an a fortiori argument. For if a scheme of temporal filiation, coupled with the admission of a true and eternal, though unnamed, personal distinction, will not satisfy the meaning of the texts; still less will the scheme of a temporal filiation which denies the eternity and divinity of the Second person.

Because Christ Is Son, When Sent.

A. In a number of passages it is said, that God "sent," "gave," His Son: e.g., Rom. 8:3. "God sending his own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh," (John 3:16; John 3:8; 4:9; Gal. 4:4; Acts 3:26). Now, who would dream that when God says, "He sends the Son in the flesh," He was not His Son before, but was made such by the sending (1 Tim. 3:16; 1 John 3:8)?

Son, When Pre-Existent.

The three Old Testament passages (Ps. 2:7; Prov. 8:7, 22, 23; Mic. 5:2), are advanced with great subtlety and force by Turretin. He favours, for the first, the interpretation of the "today" ("have I begotten thee"), as the punctum stans, or eternal now, of the divine decree. The great objection is, that the idiom and usage of the Psalms do not sustain it. It is better, with Calvin and Hengstenberg, to understand the verb, "have begotten," according to a frequent Hebrew usage, as equivalent to the manifestation, or declaration, of His generation. This took place when Christ was revealed to His Church. The passage then does not prove, but neither does it disprove, the eternity of His generation. In this text, as well as Proverbs 8:22, 23, Turretin argues the identity of the subject with Jesus Christ, with great force. In Micah 5:2, the application to Jesus Christ is indisputable, being fixed by Matthew 2:6. The relevancy of the text to His eternal generation depends on two points—whether the phrase "going forth," *taox;/m*

means generation or production, or only manifestation in action; and whether the phrase "from of old, from days of forever" means eternity, or only antiquity. As to the former question, we are shut up to the first meaning of generation, by the usage. (Gesenius giving only "origin, descent"), and by the consideration that Christ's manifestation in action has not been eternal. B. As to the second question, the sense of proper eternity is certainly the most natural. The only plausible rendering besides the one given by Turretin is the one hinted by Gesenius: ("whose descent is from antiquity"; referring to the antiquity of Christ's human lineage). And manifestly this gives to the noun the perverted sense of channels of descent instead of act of production, its proper meaning.

Father Is Eternally Father.

C. We find another argument for the eternal generation of the Son, in a number of passages, as the Baptismal formula; the Apostolic benediction (Matt. 11:27; Luke 10:22; John 5:22; 10:33–37; Rom. 8:32; and so on). In all these cases the word Son is used in Immediate connection with the word Father, so that it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the one is reciprocal to the other. The Son is evidently Son in a sense answering to that in which the Father is Father. But do these passages permit us to believe that the first Person here receives that term, only because He has produced a human nature in which to clothe the Son, when the two first passages give an enumeration of the three divine Persons as making up the Godhead, presented in its most distinctive divine attitude, receiving the highest acts of worship, and all the others bring to view acts in which the Father and Son mutually share essentially divine acts or honours? It is plain that the paternity here means something characteristic and permanent; so, then, does the filiation.

Romans 1:3–4.

D. In Rom. 1:3, 4; we read that the "Son of God was made of the seed of David according to the flesh, declared with power orisqento" to be the Son of God according to the Spirit of Holiness," and so on. Here we not only find the evidence of head that the Son was made flesh, and so was Son before; but the evident antithesis between the flesh and the Spirit of holiness, His divine nature, compels us to read that His resurrection forcibly manifested Him to be God's Son as to His divine nature, even as He was David's as to His human. But if His filiation to God respects His divine nature, as contrasted with His human, the question is settled.

Christ Is Son When Creating.

E. I may group together two very similar passages, Colossians 1:14–17 and Hebrews 1:3–6. The Sonship, is surely not merely the incarnation, when it is stated to be a begetting before every creature! The Son as Son, and not as incarnate only, is represented in both passages as performing divine functions, as representing the Father's nature and glory; from which we must infer that His Sonship is something belonging to His divinity, not His humanity merely. And in Hebrews 5:5, 6, the Apostle seems to aim explicitly to separate His Sonship from that of all others as divine and peculiar. Consider hence: Hebrews 1:2, 3:5, 6, 7:3, and 7:28. In a word, the generation of the Son, and procession of the Spirit, however mysterious, are unavoidable corollaries from two facts. The essence of the Godhead is one; the persons are three. If these are both true, there must be some way, in which the Godhead multiplies its personal modes of subsistence, without multiplying or dividing its substance. The Scriptures call one of these modes a *genesis*" and the other an *ekporeusi*". We hence learn two truths. The

Second and Third substances are eternally propagated in dissimilar modes. The inscrutable mode of the Second substance bears some mysterious analogy to the generation of human sons.

Objections.

It has been supposed that the following texts were repugnant to our view, by showing that the filiation had a temporal origin in Christ's incarnation and exaltation as a mediatorial Person (Matt. 16:16; Luke 1:35; John 1:49); seem, it is said, to imply that His Sonship is nothing else than His Messiahship, and in John 10:35, 36; it is said, He states Himself to be Son because sanctified and sent into the world by the Father. The answer is, that this argument confounds the traits which define Him as Son with those which constitute Him the Son. To say that the Messiah, the Sent, is the one who is Son, is far short of saying that these offices make Him the Son. It is said that Acts 13:33, and Colossians 1:18, refer the Sonship to his resurrection, the former of these passages especially, citing Psalm 2:7 in support of that view. I reply, that it is only a mistranslation which seems to make Acts 13:33 relate to Christ's resurrection at all. We should read, in that God hath set up (as Messiah) Jesus: as it is written in Psalm 2—"Thou art my Son: this day have I begotten Thee." Here we see a striking confirmation of the sense given above to this Psalm viz: that Christ's Sonship was declaratively manifested by His installment as Messiah. In the Colossians 1:18, Christ is said to be the *prwtotoko* "ek tw n nekrown. But evidently the concluding words should explain the meaning: "That in all things He might have the preeminence," in the resurrection of New Testament saints, as well as in an eternal generation.

Once more, it is claimed that Luke 1:35; plainly defines the incarnation as the ground of the Sonship. The simplest reply is, that the divine nature (compare Rom. 1:4), was never born of the virgin but only the humanity. This nature, hence united in the mediatorial Person, was called God's Son, because of its miraculous generation, so that the whole mediatorial person, in both natures, might be Son of God; that which is eternal, eternally Son, and that which is temporal, temporally Son. If the adverse rendering is to hold, then, first, the Holy Spirit, and not the First Person, is the Father of Christ, and second, His Sonship would be only equal to Adam's.

General Force of Words: Father—Son.

In fine, there is a general argument for the eternal generation of the Son, in the simple fact the Scripture has chosen this most simple and important pair of words to express a relation between the First and Second Persons. There must have been a reason for the choice, there must be something corresponding to the well-known meaning of this pair of words, else eternal truth would not have employed them. That meaning must of course be compatible with God's

immateriality and eternity, and must be stripped of all the elements arising from man's corporeal and finite nature and temporal existence. It is not corporeal generation, nor generation in time; but after stripping it of all this, do we not inevitably get this, as the residuum of meaning, that the personal subsistence of the Son is derivative, though eternal, and constitutes His nature the same with the Father's?

Personal Relation of Holy Spirit.

Fourth. It is a remarkable fact, that while so many terms and traits belonging to generation are given to the Second Person, not one of them is ever given in Scripture to the Third. He is indeed "sent" as the Son is "sent," but this is in both cases, not the modal, but merely the official term. The nature of the Third personality is always represented by the word "breath," and his production is only called a "proceeding out" The inference seems fair, that the mode of personal subsistence, and the personal relation is therefore different from that of the Son. But as both are inscrutable, we cannot tell in what they differ (see Turretin, Locus 3, Qu. 31, § 3).

Is It Eternal?

The evidence for the eternity of this personal relation, between the Spirit and the other two Persons, is much more scanty than that for the eternity of the Son's filiation. In only one place (John 15:26), is the Holy Spirit said to proceed from the Father. If that place stood alone, it could never be determined from it whether it was intended by our Saviour to define the mode of the eternal subsistence of the Third person, or only to denote his official function in time. But besides the analogy of the Son's relation, we may infer with reasonable certainty that it intends an eternal relation. As his generation is not a mere commissioning in time, so the Spirit's procession is not a mere sending or an office in time. Otherwise the symmetry of the doctrine of the Trinity would be fatally broken; while the Scriptures hold out three coordinate Persons, eternally subsisting and related as Persons, inter se, we should be guilty of representing the Third as bearing no permanent relation to the others.

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