

THE PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED REVIEW

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I.

THE TRIAL OF SERVETUS.

DURING the Columbian celebration a few voices were lifted in protest against the general enthusiasm. It was said that Columbus did not actually discover America, but only stumbled on the Bahama Islands, while seeking a western passage to Asia; that he was a bigoted Romanist and ought not to be countenanced by Protestants; and that, having been a pirate and a slave dealer, he was no fit example to be held up to the admiration of American youth. On the other side, it was urged that the discovery of America was an epoch-making event ever to be commemorated; that for four centuries the world has accepted Columbus as the discoverer and applauded him as a hero and a saint; and that now it would be better to preserve this ideal Columbus in the popular fancy than to render historic justice to the actual Columbus who has long since passed beyond the reach of praise or blame.

To a large number of persons the task of vindicating John Calvin at the present day would seem as hopeless, if not as thankless, as that of changing the popular estimate of Christopher Columbus. They will tell us that it is too late to reverse the judgment of history, and that if reversed it would destroy great moral lessons which are too valuable to be lost. For some generations past the world has had an ideal Calvin, who not only taught that hell is full of infants a span long, but proceeded to roast the chief opponent of that doctrine in a fire of green wood, with his heretical book tied to his girdle. The hideous story, with its dramatic incidents, has become the standing illustration of religious bigotry. It kindles the rage of poets and essayists, especially among the descendants

III.

HOMILETIC ASPECTS OF THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD.

THE great "recurring fervour" of present-day preaching is the Fatherhood of God. It is highly important, therefore, to have just Biblical conceptions on this great subject: and there are four aspects of the divine Fatherhood which, in order to its elucidation, it is the object of this paper to discriminate from one another.

It will be found, on examination of the Scriptures, that we may properly distinguish: (1) God's Fatherhood of *Christ as God*; (2) His Fatherhood of *man as man*; (3) His Fatherhood of *Christ as man*; and (4) His Fatherhood of *man as Christ's*.

Looking at these in their order, we find (1) that there is a Fatherhood of God apart from the existence of men altogether, or of any of the creatures God has made. We refer to the intimate and endearing relation in which the First Person of the Godhead has stood to the Second throughout all eternity—God's Fatherhood of *Christ as God*. When we come to speak of the "properties" of the several Persons, the internal distinctions within the Godhead, we approach holy and mysterious ground. But the *Westminster Confession* has Scripture warrant for stating the doctrine thus—"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." And the Nicene Creed had, many centuries earlier, set forth the Sonship of the Second Person in exalted, though now familiar, language, thus: "Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds; God of God, light of light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father."

It is not, of course, to be wondered at, that the eternal generation of the Son is a conception which it is difficult to grasp, and still more difficult to define. By way of guarding the doctrine, theologians have been careful to point out, that while the idea of derivation is implied in generation, it is the person, not the essence, that is so derived; that generation is an eternal and "necessary" process, not to be thought of as having date or beginning, or as being accomplished by act of will—since

the Father never existed without the Son, who "derives and has always derived His being and attributes from the Father, as the fountain of deity;" and that in it there is communicated to the Son not a mere part of the divine substance, but "the whole indivisible substance of the Godhead, without division, alienation or change"—so that the Son, while second in the order of revelation or operation, is not inferior to the Father, but the express image of His person, eternally continuing, "not from the Father, but in the Father, and the Father in Him."

This knowledge is too great for us. It is high; we cannot attain unto it. No man need profess to comprehend it. But we may, in the light of Scripture, apprehend this much, that within the Godhead there is a relation eternally subsisting between the two first Persons in it, for which the nearest expression—though human analogies must not be pressed too far—is the mutual relationship suggested by the name *Father* on the one hand and *Son* on the other. And if this be conceded, our present point is gained—that there is a sense in which God is the Father of Christ, which can apply to none other than to Him who is spoken of in Scripture as "the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father"—who shared the Father's glory with Him "before the world was"—the Word, with God and Himself God—God's "own Son," between whom and the Father (for God *is* love) there was the eternal inter-communion of divine infinite love before the foundation of the world. This is a great fundamental truth of our religion, and homiletic references to it must of necessity be frequent. Any attempt at a detailed exposition of it from the pulpit, however, would be manifestly out of place; and, indeed, any references we make to the monogenetic Sonship of Christ are best couched in the language of Scripture itself. As an old Scottish theologian, Dr. Hill, pointedly says: "It is a vain attempt to apply the terms of human science to the manner of the divine existence, and the multitude of words upon such a subject does not in any degree increase the stock of our ideas"—a remark, the truth of which has been emphasized by many theologians since his time, through their unhappy success in "darkening counsel by words without knowledge." Take, for example, a writer usually so clear and suggestive as Dr. Martensen, when he launches into the metaphysics of the subject thus:

"When, therefore, we say God knows Himself as a Father, we say that He knows Himself as the ground of the heavenly universe, which proceeds eternally forth from Him, solely because He knows Himself as the ground of His own outgoing into this universe, in which He hypostatizes Himself as Logos. When we say that God knows Himself as Son, we say: God knows Himself as the One who from eternity proceedeth forth from His own Fatherly ground, He knows Himself as the *δεύτερος θεός*, who objectively reveals the fullness

wrapped up in the Father. Without the Son, the Father could not say to Himself 'I;' for the form of the Ego, without an objective something different from the Ego, is inconceivable. What the outward world, what nature, what other persons are for us—to wit, the condition of our own self-consciousness—the Son and the objective world which rises before the Father in and *through* the Son (*δι' αὐτοῦ*) are for the Father—to wit, the condition of His own identity" (Martensen's *Christian Dogmatics*, Sect. 56, p. 109).

All which may be very learned, but it is certainly not very lucid, and does not very appreciably "add to the stock of our ideas!"

But now, without presuming to go beyond what is written with respect to a mystery so great as the monogenetic relationship within the Godhead, we proceed to consider another aspect of the divine Fatherhood, whose bearings it is more needful, as well as possible, for us to understand. This is, (2) God's Fatherhood of *man as man*—in virtue of which all men may, in a true sense, be spoken of as sons of God. We here touch on a doctrine which, we are well aware, is liable to gross perversion, and which was never more commonly and plausibly perverted than at this day.

One popular perversion of it has assumed a quasi-philosophic guise, as in the case of the Maurice School, which presses into the service of its theory the Incarnation of the Son of God, to this effect, that "Christ being one with every man, all mankind are in Him redeemed, regenerated, justified and adopted"—"the constitution of humanity is restored"—"the function of faith being to discern Christ as already one with us, and to recognize His benefits as already fully pertaining to us." We cannot too strongly, with Dr. Crawford (*The Fatherhood of God*, p. 183), deprecate such language, as the utterance of mere groundless speculation in manifest contrariety to the teaching of God's own Word. Then it has become fashionable among a certain class of religionists who do not affect philosophy much, but whose theology is shaped less by fact than by sentiment, to sink the judicial altogether in the paternal aspect of God's character. He is represented as a loving Father merely, very tender and forgiving, and prepared, however vexed with the follies of His human children, to gather them all about Him, restoring the poor prodigals for love's sake to His favor, forgetting their past offenses, and helping them to forget speedily their past miseries.

Now, to lull men's consciences and connive at their godlessness thus, is to heal the soul's hurt slightly, crying, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace. To pretend to reduce the Almighty God of justice and love to a being of mere facile good-nature, ready to overlook the interests of righteousness, and simply to "let bygones be bygones;" and to represent men as just His erring, unfortunate children—and not at all as His rebellious and guilty subjects; is a most fatal perversion of the truth.

“For a lie which is all a lie
 May be met and fought with outright ;
 But a lie which is half a truth
 Is a harder matter to fight.”

Yet, while putting away what is false, we are to hold fast that which is good, and there is unquestionably Scripture ground for affirming, that men *as men* may in a true sense be spoken of and addressed as children of God. This affirmation has been vehemently impugned, as is well known, by so distinguished a theologian as the late Dr. Robert Candlish, in his Cunningham Lectures “On the Fatherhood of God.”* But these called forth a ready and thoroughgoing reply from another eminent Scottish divine, whose book, if admittedly inferior in speculative daring and in brilliancy of style, has at least the merit of bringing allegations on both sides of the argument, in a very persistent and common-sense way, to the test of Scripture itself. We refer, of course, to the volume of Dr. Crawford already quoted from, in which “the common Fatherhood,” now under discussion, is submitted to a full and Biblical treatment.†

As we are dealing with the subject from the homilist’s point of view, let us here look, for example, at such a passage as Christ’s parable of the Prodigal Son. Too much ought not to be made of any parable. An illustration is not to be pressed beyond the point it was intended to bear upon. And it would be absurd, for example, to argue from this parable against the need of an atonement for sin before God could receive the repentant sinner back. But the grand truth enforced by Jesus in this parable manifestly is the great love that is in God’s heart for sinful men, and the yearning with which He still follows them even in their course of guilty abandonment and misery. For—and this is our present point—the prodigal is still a son—unworthy, indeed, and yet a son. He is so regarded by himself even amid the swine troughs. He is so hailed by the Father on his return—as the lost son found again. He is so denounced by the surly elder brother, as “this thy son . . . who hath devoured thy living with harlots.”

Does not this parable, then, without straining it in the least, warrant us in addressing sinners as something more than guilty rebels called to do homage before a righteously offended governor? Have we not here the authority of Christ for entreating men, as poor, wandering, misguided, sinful children of God, to leave earth’s husks of pleasure, to arise from the mire of wickedness, and to come back to the Father who loves them and longs for their return? Yes.

* Candlish, *On the Fatherhood of God*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh.

† Crawford, *On the Fatherhood of God*, Blackwood & Son.,

God's government is founded on eternal equity, and as a just Judge He requires atonement. He could not deny Himself by dispensing with that in a spirit of indulgence which would have been widely different from His holy love. But it is also true that He is a loving Father—loving men with a love which Christ's atonement did not procure but rather expressed, on a scale of infinitude whose height, length, depth and breadth we can never hope to comprehend.

Dr. Candlish insists that "there is no trace whatever in all our Lord's teaching of anything like a universal Fatherhood;" that "the Son reveals the Father, not as the Father of sinners of mankind generally, but as the Father exclusively of those who receive the Son and believe in His name;" and yet that "God would be the Father of them all, if they would consent to have it so" (Candlish, p. 196). But we cannot help agreeing with Dr. Crawford, when he urges that "to say that the parable (of the prodigal son) is expressive, not of God's love to His unworthy and sinful offspring, but of His desire that sinners who had never sustained any filial relation to Him should be numbered among His children, appears to be as forced and unnatural a perversion of the plain import of a passage of Scripture as could be readily met with" (Crawford, p. 57). And indeed, Dr. Candlish himself seems to give away his main position here when, immediately after using the words just quoted, he says of God: "His relentings, His longings, His appeals, are prompted by a love that does really partake of the paternal character. It is of a Father's love, a Father's open house, a Father's open heart, that the Son has to speak, when He pleads with those whom, however guilty and degraded, He regards with an affection that is truly that of a brother" (Candlish, p. 197).

But let it not be imagined that it is on the slender basis of a parable that the doctrine of the general Fatherhood of God is founded. The Bible abounds with supports for it, even in its opening pages. It has, indeed, been ingeniously maintained, in the interests of orthodoxy too, in Dr. Candlish's brilliant but inconclusive book, that man as created was simply a *subject*—related to God solely as to his creator, law-giver and judge. But, unless the whole question is to be reduced to a profitless logomachy, it seems obvious that man was more than this at his creation. As deriving his existence from God, as made in His image, as capable of fellowship with Him, as the peculiar object of His delight, it is apparent that man stood to the Creator in a relationship so different from that of the other creatures of His hand that we may most fittingly express it as the relation of a child to a Father, on whose bounty he depended as well as to whose authority he was bound in all things to defer. And in point of fact, in the genealogy in the third chapter of Luke,

Adam is set in the same relation to God as Seth bore to Adam, and Enoch to Seth.

The New Testament no doubt, as we shall see in a little, gave a more full and blessed revelation of the divine Fatherhood than the Old. But, in view of passages like Deut. xxxii. 5; Ps. ciii. 13; Isa. lxiii. 16; Jer. xxxi. 9; Malachi i. 6, ii. 10, and others which might be cited, we surely must admit that under the old economy too it was no unfamiliar thought. As Van Oosterzee and other impartial theological witnesses testify, "The idea was not *new* in the Gospel, though presented there with fuller force." Dr. Crawford undoubtedly makes a strong point in this connection when he insists that it is difficult to see any sufficient ground for the universal obligation of the first and great commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul, and strength and mind," if the common Fatherhood of God be ignored or controverted, since a mere ruler, as such, cannot be viewed as the appropriate object of our *love*. Also when he adds, that the common Fatherhood of God may be just as reasonably inferred from the first and great commandment as the common brotherhood of men may be inferred from the second, which is like unto it: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Crawford, pp. 58, 59). And, even apart from Holy Scripture, from the utterances of heathen writers—including the poet Aratus, whom St. Paul quoted with approbation on Mars Hill—it might be abundantly shown that the conception of men's relation as the offspring of God has a place even in the systems of natural religion.

What we have, therefore, to do is to accept thankfully the truth of this doctrine, as supported alike by Bible statement and by man's own moral sense, and unhesitatingly to proclaim it, without founding, or leading others to found, false expectations on it. God is the Father; but we may not forget that He is the "righteous Father" (John xvii. 25), as Jesus Himself calls Him, or, in the words of St. Peter, "the Father who, without respect of persons, *judgeth* according to every man's work." We have here a leverage of influence, in a homiletic sense, of the use of which, in tender appeal to sinners as those who have outraged an affectionate Father's love, we should be ill-advised indeed to denude ourselves. On the other hand, we are entitled to insist that so far from the Fatherhood lowering God's authority in any wise or lessening His claim on our obedience, it brings with it an additional and powerful sanction, to which the filial heart should readily respond. Whatever be *our* sense of this, God's sense of the heinousness of human disobedience is expressed in the amazed and sorrowful exclamation, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth. I have nourished and

brought up children; and they have rebelled against me!" (Isa. i. 2).

So much for this doctrine of God's Fatherhood of man as man, in its direct bearing on ourselves. It has a further importance, which will immediately appear as we proceed to consider our third head—(3) God's Fatherhood of *Christ as man*.

We have already spoken of the eternal Sonship of Christ. But He had a human sonship as well, resting on the ground of His true and proper manhood. This is an obvious deduction from the doctrine of the sonship of men already stated. Men are sons; Christ is a man; therefore Christ as man is Son, and, being a perfect man, is a perfect human Son of God. We are on the one hand here to avoid any approach to Nestorianism in the separation of Christ's two natures into two distinct persons. But on the other hand we are not entitled to overlook the fact that "the Only-Begotten in respect of His assumed humanity entered into the relation of man to God." If it be said that this conception of a twofold Sonship is strange and incomprehensible, it is freely granted that it is so. It is indeed a great mystery, but no greater than the mystery of the two natures united in one person, out of which union the twofold filial relationship springs. The divine agent of this human Sonship, as we learn from Scripture, was the Holy Spirit, in the fulfillment of the angel's message to the Virgin, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."

What the nature and characteristics of the human Sonship of Christ were, is illustrated in every page of the Gospel record. How soon "the young Child" awakened to a sense of God's Fatherhood towards Him, and of the blessings and objections it implied! How lofty was His conception from the first, and all through His life on earth, of the unbending righteousness, the absolute holiness of His Father; and how deep and comforting the sense of His Father's boundless love! How all pervading was the motive of His own responsive love to Him; how it prompted Him without a murmur to do and bear the will of Him that sent Him, so that for Him true, satisfying, His meat and His drink, were found in finishing the work which had been given Him to do, obedient unto and including death, even the death of the cross!

In that perfect human Sonship of the Lord Jesus—we may tell our hearers—you have a pattern of what man might have been; aye, and thank God, of what man may still through grace become, as son, to God. It reveals to us, by contrast, the depth to which we have fallen, but at the same time, by example, the height to which, by the help of

God, we may aspire. It is in this Sonship that Christ has come so near to us, humbling Himself to be the human Son of God, without ceasing to be divine; lifting our nature into an association with His ever-blessed Person which through all eternity it will never lose; stooping to be born of a woman, to be made under the law, that in life and by death He might magnify the law, and redeem us from the prodigalism of fallen nature to the adoption of grace.

This Sonship it is which makes Christ our brother. When He says, "I go unto my Father and your Father," there may, indeed, as some have thought, be an underlying allusion to the distinction between His Sonship as the Only-Begotten and the Sonship of His people. But there is, at least as plainly, expression given to the community of Sonship He shares with them: "Go to my *brethren*, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God." Consoling message! They are My brethren; therefore we have one God, one Father, one home; and though I am going away, I am only going to the Father's home, to prepare a place for them among the many mansions there.

This brings us to note, in the last place, (4) God's Fatherhood of *man as Christ's*. There is, as we have seen, a sonship which belongs to men as men. But there is a far nobler sonship which belongs to men as Christians, when, justified by faith, they are admitted into the family of God and have a right, not by nature but of grace, to all the privileges of "the household of faith." Men even as begotten are sons of God, but alas, in the case of too many of them, their sonship is manifestly little beyond a name; and in no case now, so far as mere nature is concerned, is their sonship more than a broken shadow of what it might have been. Men, as begotten *again*, are sons of God in a far loftier sense—sons not in name and origin only, but in lineaments of character and conduct. The family likeness is so plainly imprinted often on their personality, that one who knows the heavenly Father and the Elder Brother can be in no doubt as to their paternity, but beholding them will say: "These are evidently sons of God." And of every child of God by faith in Christ this will be completely true, when they are presented faultless before the throne, and have His name written upon their forehead—His image stamped upon their souls.

Every man who enjoys the blessings of this relationship of grace is directly indebted to the Lord Jesus Christ. It was the grand object of His mission to earth, to bring many sons with Him to glory (Heb. ii. 10)—the condition on His side, submission and suffering; the condition on their side, faith in Him and obedience to His voice. "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus"

(Gal. iii. 26). "Whosoever believeth . . . is born of God" (1 John v. 1). "As many as received him, to them gave he the right to *become* the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John i. 12).

It is an important part of the preacher's work to give a clear account of the origin, the marks and the dignity of this heavenly sonship.

As to its origin, it takes its rise, as St. Peter suggests (1 Peter v. 3), in regeneration—that new birth of which Christ spoke to Nicodemus as so absolutely essential to an entrance within the kingdom. The sons of God in the opening chapter of John's Gospel already quoted from, after being described in the twelfth verse as "*those that believe* in His name," are further designated thus in the thirteenth verse: "which were *born*, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of man, but *of God*." The agent of the marvelous change is more specifically declared to be the divine Spirit, and its instrument is the Word; so that those who are the subjects of it may be said either to be "born of the Spirit," or "born of the Word," according as we think of the agent or of the instrument of the saving change. "Am I in the Gospel sense a child of God?" is a question which, put in a more searching way, will read, "Am I one of those who have been born again, and who, in virtue of their new and gracious relationship, are dowered with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ?"

And if towards a solution of this question we ask another, "What are the marks of this heavenly sonship?" the Word of God is ready with its answer. Christlikeness will embrace them all. But among the traits on which Scripture lays great emphasis are: Love to Christ, implying congeniality with Him, true inward kinsmanship—"If God were your Father, ye would love me" (John viii. 42); love to all men—"Love your enemies . . . that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. v. 44, 45); and a consistent desire and endeavor in all things to do God's will—"Every one that doeth righteousness is born of him" (1 John ii. 29).

The Bible makes it plain that unless these marks and others which might be named are present in a man in some measure, he can have no true claim to the higher sonship in God's family of which we speak. If the features of Jesus Christ be not, in some faint degree at least, imaged in him, there can be no true kinship between them. To him the Word of God says in effect what Alexander the Great once said to a delinquent soldier, named Alexander, in his ranks: "Change, sir, your name or else your character!"

If, again, we inquire as to the dignity of the filial relationship

into which divine grace introduces sinners who believe, this is summed up for us in a few words whose meaning we shall not soon by thought exhaust: "Heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. viii. 17). They who are "children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" have loftier privileges than the sonship of nature ever could have brought. They are introduced into a nearer place to God than even angels have. Such is the love of Christ for them, that He abnegates, so to speak, in their favor His rights of primogeniture, and is not only willing but rejoiced to see them instated in a joint heirdom with Himself. By Him and with Him they are heirs of all things. Heaven's fullness is made over to them because they are Christ's. The earth also they inherit; for it is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. All things are theirs, things present and things to come (1 Cor. iii. 21-23).

And this *is* sonship. This is the relation which gives its true meaning for us to these blessed, familiar words: "Our Father which art in heaven." We did not deny the name of sons to men as men, to men as fallen, sinful men, sunken, wandered far from God, the ruin of a once fair humanity. But this sonship which belongs to men *as Christ's* is something so much higher as to be almost a thing different in kind.

You go along the shore after such a storm as sometimes sweeps the coast, and you see a broken, dismantled, battered hulk lying stranded on the beach. That you still will call a ship, though now, alas, its affinities are few with yonder noble vessel, which with full sail speeds by, breasting the waves like a seabird born for tempest, a thing of beauty and of life. A man knocks at your door one day, worn and battered, filthy and in rags, with vice written on his face, and the misery which is its certain Nemesis. He is the son of a nobleman in the manor near by. You know him to be so. You call him still a son. But, alas, the name almost sticks in your throat, as you contrast what he is with what he was and might have been. He is but a wreck of his former self, the ruin of a noble sonship. Even so with the man who is a son of God by nature only. We dare not withhold from him still the name of son, for that name the Bible gives him, and there are reminiscences still about him, sunk and fallen though he is, of his high original. But in view of what he has become—in his beclouded intellect, his perverted feelings, his biased will, his disinherited estate, his prodigal, estranged condition—the name of son seems almost like a satire, and we do not wonder that from his heart arises a sigh for even a well-conditioned servant's place. But children of God in Jesus Christ are sons indeed; created anew in Him, they are conformed to the image of *the* Son, to the praise of the glory of His grace. And when the sanctifying

work of God is accomplished in them—in intellect, feelings, will—they are restored to the likeness which sin had so grievously defaced within them, and made meet for the inheritance of the saints, and for their place among the children, and for the full enjoying of God their Father to all eternity.

We cannot do more than allude here to the counsels of perfection which may be based by the preacher on the Fatherhood of God in its distinctively evangelical aspects. Christ sums them up in the one comprehensive injunction: "Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." He charges His followers in their attitude towards their fellow-men—even to such as hate them—to be (*i. e.*, to manifest themselves as) "the children of their Father who is in heaven;" and of the Master's voice here we have distinct echoes in the writings not only of the beloved disciple, but of St. Peter and of St. Paul. The Lord likewise inculcates on His disciples the spirit, along with implicit obedience, of implicit confidence in their heavenly Father's willingness to bless: "How much more shall your heavenly Father give good things (give the Holy Spirit) to them that ask him." And here again, the apostles, and especially St. John, reiterate the teaching of the Master: "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear. . . . And whatsoever we ask we receive of him. . . . And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us." Whether we view the sonship of believers on the side of its duties, or on the side of its privileges and prospects, there is for the homilist an endless variety of themes, for exhortation, rebuke, incitement, comfort, suggested by the Fatherhood of God.

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