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I N T R O D U C T I O N :

C O N T A I N I N G

A VIEW OF THE PRINCIPAL ARGUMENTS
AGAINST THE DOCTRINES OF THE
DIVINITY AND PRE-EXISTENCE OF
CHRIST.

THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY.

S E C T I O N I.

*Of the Argument against the Doctrines of the
Divinity and Pre-existence of Christ, from
the general Tenor of the Scriptures.*

WHEN we inquire into the doctrine
of any book, or set of books, con-
cerning any subject, and particular passages
are alledged in favour of different opinions,
we should chiefly consider what is the *ge-
neral tenor* of the whole work, with respect
to it, or what impression the first careful
perusal of it would probably make upon an
impartial reader. This is not difficult to

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distinguish. For, in works of any considerable extent, the leading doctrines, and particularly those which it was the particular design of the writers to inculcate, will occur frequently, and they will often be illustrated, and enforced by a variety of arguments; so that those things only will be dubious, the mention of which occurs but seldom, or which are not expressly *asserted*, but only *inferred* from particular expressions. But by attending only to some particular expressions, and neglecting, or wholly overlooking others, the strangest and most unaccountable opinions may be ascribed to writers. Nay, without considering the relation that particular expressions bear to others, and to the tenor of the whole work, sentiments the very reverse of those which the writers meant to inculcate may be ascribed to them.

If, from previous instruction, and early habits, we find it difficult to ascertain the real meaning and design of a writer in this way, we shall find much assistance by considering in what sense he was actually understood by those persons for whose use he wrote,

wrote, and who must have been the best acquainted with his language. For if a writer expresses himself with tolerable clearness, and really means to be understood (being well acquainted with the persons into whose hands his work will come) he cannot fail to be so, with respect to every thing of consequence.

If we wish to know whether Homer, for instance, entertained the opinion of there being *more Gods than one*, we need only read his poems, and no doubt will remain concerning it; the mention of Jupiter, Juno, Mars, &c. and the part they took in the siege of Troy, occurring perpetually. If any difficulty should still remain, we must then consider what were the opinions, and what was the practice of the Greeks, who read and approved his poems. In this way we shall soon satisfy ourselves, that Homer held the doctrine of *a multiplicity of Gods*, and that he, and the Greeks in general, were what we call *idolaters*.

In like manner, an impartial person may easily satisfy himself, that the writers of the books of scripture held the doctrine of

one God, and that they were understood to do so by those persons for whose use the books were written.

If we consult Moses's account of the creation, we shall find that he makes no mention of more than one God, who made the heavens and the earth, who supplied the earth with plants and animals, and who also formed man. The plural number, indeed, is made use of when God is represented as saying, Gen. i. 26. *Let us make man*; but that this is mere *phraseology*, is evident from its being said immediately after, in the singular number, v. 27. *God created man in his own image*, so that the creator was still *one being*. Also, in the account of the building of the tower of Babel, we read, Gen xi. 7, that *God said let us go down, and there confound their language*; but we find, in the very next verse, that it was one being only who actually effected this.

In all the intercourse of God with Adam, Noah, and the other patriarchs, no mention is made of more than one being who addressed them under that character. The

name

name by which he is distinguished is sometimes *Jehovah*, and at other times *the God of Abraham*, &c. but no doubt can be entertained, that this was the same being who is first mentioned under the general title of *God*, and to whom the making of the heavens and the earth is ascribed.

Frequent mention is made in the scriptures of *angels*, who sometimes speak in the name of God, but then they are always represented as the creatures and the servants of God. It is even doubtful whether, in some cases, what are called angels, and had the form of men, who even walked, and spake, &c. like men, were any thing more than temporary appearances, and no permanent beings; the mere organs of the deity, used for the purpose of making himself known and understood by his creatures. On no account, however, can these angels be considered as *Gods*, rivals of the supreme being, or of the same rank with him.

The most express declarations concerning the unity of God, and of the importance of the belief of it, are frequent in the Old Testament. The first commandment is,

Ex. xx. 3. *Thou shalt have no other Gods before me.* This is repeated in the most emphatical manner, Deut. vi. 4. *Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord.* I have no occasion to repeat what occurs on this subject in the later prophets. It appears, indeed, to have been the great object of the religion of the Jews, and of their being distinguished from other nations by the superior presence and superintendence of God, to preserve among them the knowledge of the divine unity, while the rest of the world were falling into idolatry. And by means of this nation, and the discipline which it underwent, that great doctrine was effectually preserved among men, and continues to be so to this day.

Had there been any distinction of *persons* in the divine nature, such as the doctrine of the trinity supposes, it is at least so *like* an infringement of the fundamental doctrine of the Jewish religion, that it certainly required to be explained, and the obvious inference from it to be guarded against. Had the eternal *Father* had a *Son*, and also a *Spirit*, each of them equal in power and
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glory

glory to himself, though there should have been a sense in which each of them was truly God, and yet there was, properly speaking, only *one God*; at least the more obvious inference would have been, that if each of the three persons was properly God, they would all together make *three Gods*. Since, therefore, nothing of this kind is said in the Old Testament, as the objection is never made, nor answered, it is evident that the idea had not then occurred. No expression, or appearance, had at that time even suggested the difficulty.

If we guide ourselves by the sense in which the Jews understood their own sacred books, we cannot but conclude that they contained no such doctrine as that of the christian trinity. For it does not appear that any Jew, of ancient or modern times, ever deduced such a doctrine from them. The Jews always interpreted their scriptures as teaching that God is simply *one*, without distinction of persons, and that the same being who made the world, did also speak to the patriarchs and the prophets,

without the intervention of any other beings besides angels.

Christians have imagined that the Messiah was to be the second person in the divine trinity; but the Jews themselves, great as were their expectations from the Messiah, never supposed any such thing. And if we consider the prophecies concerning this great personage, we shall be satisfied that they could not possibly have led them to expect any other than *a man* in that character. The Messiah is supposed to be announced to our first parents under the title of *the seed of the woman*, Gen. iii. 15. But the phrase *born of woman*, which is of the same import, is always in scripture synonymous to *man*. Job says, ch. xiv. 1. *Man, that is born of a woman, is of few days and full of trouble*; and again, ch. 25. 4. *How can he be clean that is born of a woman?*

God promised to Abraham, Gen. xii. 3. *that in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed*. This, if it relate to the Messiah at all, can give us no other idea than that *one of his seed or posterity*, should
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be the means of conferring great blessings on mankind. What else, also, could be suggested by the description which Moses is supposed to give of the Messiah, when he said, Deut. xviii. 18. *I will raise them up a prophet, from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him?* Here is nothing like a second person in the trinity, a person equal to the Father, but a mere prophet, delivering in the name of God, whatever he is ordered so to do. By Isaiah, who writes more distinctly concerning the Messiah than any of the preceding prophets, his sufferings and death are mentioned, ch. liii. Daniel also speaks of him as to *be cut off*, ch. ix. 26. But surely these are characters of a *man*, and not those of a *God*. Accordingly, it appears, in the history of our Saviour, that the Jews of his time expected that their Messiah would be a *prince* and a *conqueror*, like David, from whom he was to be descended.

In the New Testament we find the same doctrine concerning God that we do in the
Old.

Old. To the scribe who inquired which was the first and the greatest commandment, our Saviour answered, Mark xii. 29. *The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord, &c.* and the scribe answered to him, *Well, Master, thou hast said the truth; for there is one God, and there is none other but he, &c.*

Christ himself always prayed to this one God, as his God and Father. He always spake of himself as receiving his doctrine and his power from him, and again and again disclaimed having any power of his own, John v. 19. *Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of himself. Ch. xiv. 10. The words which I speak unto you, I speak not of myself, but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doth the works. Ch. xx. 17. Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father, and unto my God and your God.* It cannot, surely, be God that uses such language as this.

The apostles, to the latest period of their writings, speak the same language; representing the Father as the only true God,
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and Christ as a man, the servant of God, who raised him from the dead, and gave him all the power of which he is possessed, as a reward of his obedience, Act ii. 22. Peter says, *Ye men of Israel, hear these words, Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you, by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him, &c. whom God has raised up.* Paul also says, 1 Tim. ii. v. *There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.* Heb. ii. 9. *We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, i. e. who was a man, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour, &c. For it became him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.*

Such, I will venture to say, is the general tenor of the scriptures, both of the Old and the New Testament; and the passages that even *seem* to speak, or that can by any forced construction be *made* to speak, a different language, are comparatively few. It will also be seen, in the course of this
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history, that the common people, for whose use the books of the New Testament were written, saw nothing in them of the doctrines of the pre-existence or divinity of Christ, which many persons of this day are so confident that they see in them. For the right understanding of these particular texts, I must refer my readers to the writings of Mr. Lindsey, and to a small tract which I published, entitled, *Illustrations of particular passages of Scripture.*

Why was not the doctrine of the *trinity* taught as explicitly, and in as definite a manner in the New Testament at least, as the doctrine of the *divine unity* is taught in both the Old and New Testaments, if it be a truth? And why is the doctrine of the unity always delivered in so unguarded a manner, and without any *exception* made in favour of a trinity, to prevent any mistake with respect to it, as is always now done in our orthodox catechisms, creeds, and discourses on the subject? For it cannot be denied but that the doctrine of the *trinity* looks so *like* an infringement of that of the *unity* (on which the greatest possible
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stress is always laid in the scriptures) that it required to be at least hinted at, if not well defined and explained, when the divine unity was spoken of. Divines are content, however, to build so strange and inexplicable a doctrine as that of the trinity upon mere inferences from casual expressions, and cannot pretend to one clear, express, and unequivocal lesson on the subject.

There are many, very many, passages of scripture, which inculcate the doctrine of the divine unity in the clearest and strongest manner. Let one such passage be produced in favour of the trinity. And why should we believe things so mysterious without the clearest and most express evidence.

There is also another consideration which I would recommend to those who maintain that Christ is either God, or the maker of the world under God. It is this : The manner in which our Lord speaks of himself, and of the power by which he worked miracles, is inconsistent, according to the common construction of language,
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with the idea of his being possessed of any proper power of his own, more than other men have.

If Christ was the maker of the world, and if, in the creation of it, he exerted no power but what properly *belonged to himself*, and what was as much *his own*, as the power of *speaking*, or *walking* belongs to man (though depending ultimately upon that supreme power, in which we all live, and move, and have our being) he could not, with any propriety, and without knowing that he must be misunderstood, have said that *of himself he could do nothing*, that *the words which he spake were not his own*, and that *the Father within him did the works*. For if any ordinary man, doing what other men usually do, should apply this language to himself, and say that it was not *he* that spake or acted, but *God* who spake and acted by him, and that otherwise he was not capable of so speaking or acting at all, we should not scruple to say that his language was either sophistical, or else downright false or blasphemous.

If this conclusion would be just upon the supposition that Christ had created all things, and worked miracles by a power properly his own, though derived ultimately from God, much more force has it on the supposition of his working miracles by a power not derived from any being whatever, but as much originally *in himself*, as the power of the Father.

It would also be a shocking abuse of language, and would warrant any kind of deception and imposition, if Christ could be supposed to say, that *his Father was greater than he*, and yet secretly mean his *human nature* only, while his divine nature was at the same time, fully equal to that of the Father. On the same principle a man might say, that Christ never suffered, that he never died, or rose again from the dead, meaning his divine nature only, and not his human. Indeed, there is no use in language, nor any guard against deception, if such liberties as these are to be allowed.

There is something inexplicable, and not to be accounted for in the conduct of several

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ral of the evangelists, indeed that of all of them, on the supposition of their having held any such doctrines as those of the divinity or pre-existence of Christ. Each of the gospels was certainly intended to be a sufficient instruction in the fundamental principles of christianity. But there is nothing that can be called an account of the divine, or even the super-angelic nature of Christ in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, or Luke; and allowing that there may be some colour for it in the introduction to the gospel of John, it is remarkable that there are many passages in his gospel which are decisively in favour of his simple humanity.

Now these evangelists could not imagine that either the Jews or the Gentiles, for whose use their gospels were written, would not stand in need of information on a subject of so much importance, which was so very remote from the apprehensions of them both, and which would at the same time have so effectually covered the reproach of the cross, which was continually objected to the christians of that age. If
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the doctrines of the divinity, or pre-existence of Christ be true, they are no doubt in the highest degree important and interesting. Since, therefore, these evangelists give no certain and distinct account of them, and say nothing at all of their *importance*, it may be safely inferred that they were unknown to them.

I would farther recommend it to the consideration of my readers, how the apostles could continue to call Christ *a man*, as they always do, both in the book of Acts, and in their epistles, after they had discovered him to be either God, or a super-angelic being, the maker of the world under God. After this, it must have been highly degrading, unnatural, and improper, notwithstanding his appearance in *human form*. Custom will reconcile us to strange conceptions of things, and very uncouth modes of speech; but let us take up the matter *ab initio*, and put ourselves in the place of the apostles and first disciples of Christ.

They certainly saw and conversed with him at first on the supposition of his being a man as much as themselves. Of this there

can be no doubt. Their surprize, therefore, upon being informed that he was not a man, but really God, or even the maker of the world under God, would be just as great as ours would now be on discovering that any of our acquaintance, or at least a very good man and a prophet, was in reality God, or the maker of the world. Let us consider then, how we should feel, how we should behave towards such a person, and how we should speak of him afterwards. No one, I am confident, would ever call any person *a man*, after he was convinced he was either *God*, or an angel. He would always speak of him in a manner suitable to his proper rank.

Suppose that any two men of our acquaintance, should appear, on examination, to be the angels Michael and Gabriel; should we ever after this call them *men*? Certainly not. We should naturally say to our friends “those two persons whom we “took to be men, are not men, but angels “in disguise.” This language would be natural. Had Christ, therefore, been any thing more than man before he came into
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the world, and especially had he been either God, or the maker of the world, he never could have been, or have been considered as being, a man, while he was in it; for he could not divest himself of his superior and proper nature. However *disguised*, he would always in fact have been whatever he had been before, and would have been so *stiled* by all who truly knew him.

Least of all would Christ have been considered as a man in *reasoning*, and *argumentation*, though his external appearance should have so far put men off their guard, as to have led them to give him that appellation. Had the apostle Paul considered Christ as being any thing more than a man, with respect to his *nature*, he could never have urged with the least propriety or effect, that, *as by man came death, so by man came also the resurrection of the dead*. For it might have been unanswerably replied, This is not the case; for indeed, by *man* comes death, but not by man, but by *God*, or the *creator of man*, under God, comes the resurrection of the dead.

It must strike every person who gives the least attention to the phraseology of the New Testament, that the terms *Christ* and *God*, are perpetually used in contradistinction to each other, as much as *God* and *man*; and if we attend ever so little to the theory of language, and the natural use of words, we shall be satisfied that this would not have been the case, if the former could have been predicated of the latter, that is, if Christ had been God.

We say *the prince and the king*, because the prince is not a king. If he had, we should have had recourse to some other distinction, as that of *greater and less, senior and junior, father and son, &c.* When therefore the apostle Paul said, that the church at Corinth was *Christ's*, and that *Christ was God's* (and that manner of distinguishing them is perpetual in the New Testament) it is evident, that he could have no idea of Christ being *God*, in any proper sense of the word.

In like manner, Clemens Romanus, calling *Christ the sceptre of the Majesty of God*,
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sufficiently proves that, in his idea, the *sceptre* was one thing, and the God whose sceptre it was, another. This, I say, must have been the case when this language was first adopted, though when principles are once formed, we see, by a variety of experience, that any language may be accommodated to them. But an attention to this circumstance will, I doubt not, contribute, with persons of real discernment, to bring us back to the original use of the words, and to the ideas originally annexed to them. I am persuaded that even now, the constant use of these terms *Christ* and *God*, as opposed to each other, has a great effect in preventing those of the common people who read the New Testament more than books of controversy, from being habitually and practically trinitarians. There will, by this means, be a much greater difference between *God* and *Christ* in their *minds*, than they find in their *creeds*.

All these things duly considered, viz. the frequent and earnest inculcating of the doctrine of the divine *unity*, without any limitation, exception, or explanation, by way

of saving to the doctrine of the *trinity*; the manner in which Christ always spake of himself, and that in which the apostles and evangelists spake of him; the conduct of the three former evangelists, in saying nothing that can be construed into a declaration of his divinity or pre-existence; and the term *God* being always used in contradistinction to *Christ*, no reasonable doubt can remain of the *general tenor of Scripture* being in favour of the doctrine of the *divine unity*, in opposition to that of the *trinity*, and even to that of the *pre-existence*, as well as the *divinity of Christ*,

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