God as Triune, Creator Incarnate, Atoner

(A Reply to Muhammadan Objections and an Essay in Philosophic Apology)

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CHAPTER I

God as Triune

IT would of course be possible to prepare this chapter with a presentation of the *scriptural proof* for the doctrine of the Triunity, and of the *historical proof* that this doctrine was always held by the Christian community. But this has already been done frequently enough; and moreover it is as *irrational* that this doctrine is attacked by Islám as unscriptural. No, the very Scriptures themselves are rejected on the ground of the 'irrationality' of this doctrine and of the Incarnation and Atonement which are bound up with it. What we want to do now, therefore, is to try to show that this belief in the irrationality of the Christian position is an error; and that these doctrines, first, are philosophical in themselves; and secondly, that they make belief in God—One, Holy, and Loving—*more* and not *less* easy.

Let us start by applying this twofold axiom then, to the doctrine of the Trinity in Unity. Let us seek to show: first, that it is rational, by replying to the main philosophic objections that are urged against it; and second, that it facilitates, not complicates, a true theistic faith.

Five Philosophic Objections stated and answered.

i. That the words 'Father' and 'Son' are Unworthy of Godhead

This objection may be divided into two heads: (1) That these words involve the physical idea of generation; (2) that they involve the temporal idea of sequence: both of which are obviously repugnant to monotheism.

But we say that more careful thought shows the emptiness of these objections.

(1) You have to distinguish very carefully between the idea of *procreation* and that of *fatherhood.* A parent and a father are by no means the same thing. Every earthly father is a parent; but not every parent is a father! Parenthood, or procreation, is a physical act which man shares with the lower animals, nay, with the lowest, nay, with the vegetable kingdom also, with all that reproduces its kind. You see at once now the absurdity of saying that such and such a jelly-fish was the father of such and such another jelly-fish, or that this plant was the father of that! When you sow a seed in a garden, who even thinks of the precise individual plant which produced that particular seed and, in consequence, the particular plant that springs from it?

This shows, with a sudden clearness, that when we talk even of earthly father and son, the idea of physical procreation is secondary in our minds. What we are really thinking of is a set of purely moral considerations—the spiritual relationship

between two moral and spiritual beings. We may mention a few of these: *love*, first of all and most important of all; *tenderness*; intimate and mutual *communion*; perfect and blissful *reciprocity*; *oneness* of *nature*; oneness of *image* and *character* and *will*; oneness in *work* together with *correlation of function*. I speak, of course, of ideal fatherhood and sonship; and yet have actually seen not seldom such a relationship fulfilled on earth.

Is there anything in *such* qualities, we ask then, that is unworthy of Godhead as such? Certainly not from the moral view-point. As to the metaphysical difficulty of plurality, that is another matter which may be discussed thoroughly later on. But, morally speaking, these things eminently befit a holy God, and this is precisely why He deigned to use these terms, and no other, to bring home to our minds the sort of relationship between Him and His Eternal Word. Apart from some such terms, that relationship would have inevitably been construed in a purely metaphysical way (as it was indeed by the Jewish philosopher Philo), and it would have been completely destitute of spiritual value to the soul of man. But as it is, this doctrine of Father and Son, united by the mutual Spirit of Father and of Son, has given a new impetus to holiness in family life, a new meaning to love and communion wherever it has been received into the heart and not the intellect alone.

(2) We already have gone more than half way in resolving the second objection, that these terms

involve sequence, which, of course, would mean that the Son was not eternal, and that God *became* Father.

But our elimination of the idea of procreation, *as totally inapplicable to a purely Spiritual Being*, eliminates the notion of sequence also. When attention is concentrated on the moral ideas bound up with the words Father and Son, it at once is evident that the two terms are entirely reciprocal and eternally involve each other. Even on earth a man does not become—is not—a father until his son is in being; when a son is born, a father also, so to speak, is born into the world; then and not till then! How much more, then, are Father and Son non-sequent in God, in whose eternal nature there can be no question of becoming! In other words, so far from 'Father' preceding 'Son', the two are necessarily contemporaneous, and in the case of God, *co-eternal*. Once you grant the possibility of eternal relations of any sort in the Godhead, there is in fact no further difficulty whatsoever in calling them by the purely moral terms Father, Son, and Spirit—the mutual Spirit of Fatherhood and Sonhood.

We pause here to remark: Granting that the foregoing sets the matter in a slightly clearer light than it was before, still undoubtedly this doctrine of Fatherhood and Sonship is an enormous stumbling-block to Muslims. Their repugnance is so instinctive, so engrained in their very constitution, that it may be really questioned whether Christians do well to give such prominence to terms which are

so capable of being misunderstood, and which, were perhaps only used at the first to shadow forth the ineffable substance of eternal truth. If they only succeed in doing the exact reverse of this—namely, suggest error—why not drop terms of so dubious utility and seek fresh ones to shadow forth in a more fruitful way the truth (if so be) which lies beyond? If the whole point of terminology is to facilitate explanation, what is the use of terminology which itself needs so much explanation? Why not drop it?

The answer to this is: Because we have no right to play fast and loose with expressions that God has sanctioned with such tremendous emphasis; because their continued existence in Holy Writ and use by His Church are like the preservation and employment of a standard which we cannot afford to lose. Depend upon it, if this terminology were banished from religious usage to-day, a great deal more would go too. Sooner or later the reality, to which these expressions are a continual witness, would be utterly lost sight of. And, if the idea of the Fatherhood of God were lost to us, many of us would lose interest in all religion.

May it then be used in the purely figurative sense that God loves men and supplies their needs as a father does those of his children? In regard to this, it is curious to observe how the average Muslim dislikes even this figurative use—showing how really different his conception of Allah is from our conception of the Father in heaven. This comes

out curiously in a tradition preserved in the *Musnad* of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (vi. 21) where the version of the Lord's Prayer which the prophet sanctioned is given.[1] How significant that the great opening invocation, 'Our Father', which has cheered thousands and changed their whole minds towards God, is sternly suppressed! This supports our contention that if you take away the doctrine of the eternal Fatherhood of God, and play fast and loose with the terms 'Father' and 'Son', you will lose the sense that God is in any case fatherly. Similarly, if you reject the eternal Sonship of Christ, you will sooner or later lose the power and the right of being, in any sense, sonlike. History and sound sense, no less than dogma, teach us this.

The pity is that the Prophet of Islám should have been led to use such unmeasured language as is found in the Qur'án about matters he clearly never understood, for nothing can be more clear from the Qur'án than that he confounded the Christian doctrine of Fatherhood and the timeless relations of

[1] In a tradition quoted by Abdullah and traced to Ibn Ubaid El-Ansari the latter says: 'The Prophet (peace be upon him) taught me a charm and allowed me to use it for whomsoever I pleased. He said, Say "Our Lord which art in heaven! Holy (is) Thy name. As in heaven, so (is) Thy word, Allah! in heaven and on earth. Grant us mercy on earth. Allah! Lord of the good, forgive us our sins and trespasses. And send down, of Thy mercy, mercy, and of Thy healing, healing, upon (so and so) in his complaint that he may be healed." And he (the Prophet) said, "Repeat this thrice, and likewise the two Charms from the Koran".'

Divine Father, Son, and Spirit, with the gross ideas of the heathen Mekkans, about Allah having female deities as his daughters, and so forth! Indeed it is more than probable that the words, 'He begetteth not, neither is He begotten,' are a rebuke addressed against these Mekkans and have no Christian reference in them at all. Muhammad, in his attitude to Christianity, may be said either to have totally misunderstood the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, or to have been striking at ignorant forms of misbelief[1] that we also repudiate.

The state of the Jews of the times of the Apostles and that of the Muslims of that day—and every other day—are not completely parallel in the matter before us; for the Jews, monotheists as they were, and deists as they were becoming, had had their ears prepared for the sound of the words 'God the Father', 'The Son of God', as the study of the Taurát shows; for there these expressions are used to denote any peculiarly intense and loving relationship between God and a nation, it might be, a class, or an anointed king, or (finally) The Anointed King, the expected Christ. It was, therefore, easy for the monotheist disciples of Jesus Christ, men like the Twelve, or the learned Saul, to apply these terms in a spiritual transcendent way to the eternal relation between God and His Incarnate Word, a relation with which, from a *metaphysical* view-point, Philo had already fami-

[1] The Qur'án makes it clear that the Trinity, in his mind, was the Father, the Son and the Virgin Mary!

liarized thinkers. Yet Muslims also have had a sort of *metaphysical* propædeutic in the conception of the eternity and uncreateness of the Qur'án, the 'Word of Allah'. And this is a hint which Christian may well take for their study and preaching.

We may now sum up the answer to the first objection. When you have eliminated the idea of *procreation* as inapplicable to a spiritual being, nothing remains in the ideas 'Father' and 'Son', save purely moral ideas that are perfectly worthy of Godhead; and, that the same consideration solves the difficulty of sequence in time, for 'Father' and 'Son' are now shown to be co-relatives and therefore co-eternals.

There is now the prior difficulty of plurality within the Godhead still remaining. This therefore we treat of next.

ii. That Unity and Plurality are Incompatible Ideas

It may be said: Does not the very idea of distinction contradict identity? And does not the very idea of plurality contradict unity?

We boldly reply: On the contrary! There is no such thing as identity without distinction in the world of realities; no unity without plurality. There is nothing *a priori* inconceivable in a Unity in Trinity. On the contrary, all the best philosophic thought of ancient and modern times distinctly facilitates and points to some such conception if we desire to believe in a real God.

In modern philosophic thought, particularly, it

has become more and more clear that relations, relatedness, are the very soul of being. And what are relations save distinctions, a plurality within a unity? The more highly related a thing is, the more reality it has; I mean, the higher is its type of unity. On the other hand, if we try to conceive of unity without difference we find ourselves reduced to mere abstractions of the mind—like the mathematical points without parts or magnitude, which have no real existence except as an abstraction of the mind, or in other words are really equal to zero. And so Being of this abstract sort (as Hegel, one of the greatest of the moderns, saw) is literally equivalent to Not-being.

Are we then going to apply to God the poorest, barest, and most abstract of the categories, unrelated Being, undifferentiated Unity, as if it were the sole possible and the highest one? Or also the richest, fullest and most significant? Surely the latter! Then, somehow or other there must be relatedness ascribed to God essentially—not with the finite created universe, or anything beyond His own being, for that would raise that created being to the rank of a second god. This essential relatedness must, then, be within, within the circle of the Unity of the living God. The Godhead must Itself be the centre and home of some extraordinarily varied distinctions and relations if It is to be living and real, and not fulfil merely some abstract demand of thought, as for example the demand for an unconditioned First Cause—which seems the

only thing that Islámic scholastic theologizing amounts to.

But we go much further than this and point out how, in all things known to us, the higher the differentiation, the greater and more valuable the unity. If we can prove this, it will increase the force of our presumption that the highest Being of all—God—will display, in virtue of His transcendent unity, transcendent differentiation as well!

When we consider nature, wherein whoso reads may often see the shadow of God, we see that the things which possess a very low degree of differentiation can hardly be said to possess unity at all. Take a stone, for example. It has unity, it is true; it is *one* stone. But how valueless is that unity! Split it into two and you have not destroyed the thing itself, neither (except in the mathematical sense) have you destroyed its unity, for you have now two stones—two *ones*, each of which is now as much *one* as was the former thing. So much for the unity of a thing which is as nearly destitute of differentiation as an object can be.

But come up now to the kingdom of living things, to the organic world, the kingdom of life. We see a very different state of things; though here, too, we shall see a regular advance—an increase of the quality and value of the unity with the increase of differentiation.

Beginning low down in the scale, we find, in the vegetable kingdom, things where the differentiation is very low, and where, in consequence, the unity,

the individuality, is nearly as low as that of a stone. Take moss, for example. You can cut it about without marring its essential character. One piece of moss does not differ in any important respect from another; there is no uniqueness about it.

But the higher you go in the vegetable kingdom you find that the more the internal differences increase the more essentially *one* the thing is: that is (1) you cannot divide it without destroying its life, in fact the 'it' itself; (2) each one differs more decidedly from every other, that is, is more unique. For these are the two marks of a real unity, *indivisibility* and *uniqueness*: these together making up *individuality*.

It is the same when you come to the higher stages of life, where consciousness has now entered in—I mean the animal kingdom.

At first the differentiation is extraordinarily low, and so, therefore, is the unity. Some animals can be severed, and the severed parts live and move for some time independently—their unity is low because their differentiation is low. And, again, the less differentiated the animal is internally, the less significant is the individuality of each individual, the less unique, the less does its destruction signify. But the higher up you come, the more consciousness develops and (afterwards) intelligence, the more you find, on the one hand, the internal differentiation enormously increased, and the essential unity enormously increased with it—a unity expressed (as we have said) by the twofold mark of indivisibility and

uniqueness. Lovers of animals tell us that each individual differs from its fellow nearly as much as a human individual from his fellow—is, in fact, nearly as unique. They will tell you that each is unique. In other words each presents, to a high degree, unity (as defined by us) and internal differentiation. And all this culminates in man, whose being is the most of all inconceivably differentiated, and yet presents the most perfect and significant unity.

We sum up therefore: *In the world of life and consciousness things increase directly in real unity as they increase in internal differences.* A man is more of a unity than a turnip. He is also, by this law, more highly differentiated.

If we here, in any sense, discern a principle, then I reverently claim that it throws light on our subject. For carry on the same line of thought to that Being in whom Life and Consciousness are made perfect, who is absolutely unique, and entirely indivisible, who alone in fact completely satisfies all our postulates for perfect *unity* and who is THE ONE, that is, God. Is it not now credible, nay, do we not *expect* to have it revealed to us that here also internal differentiation has also increased to a degree as inconceivable as His Unity is superior to any earthly one? We say that that differentiation will be inconceivable, it will be only just dimly imaginable, but it will be most tremendously real! And this is just the character of the differentiation shadowed forth to us by the revelation of the

Trinity! It is transcendent, it is real, it is in a line with legitimate earthly analogies. It is uniquely great; for what can be greater than the differentiation between persons' consciousness?

We conclude, then, that *the highest and richest Unity of all, the Divine, exists in the indivisible but real internal differentiation of three Consciousnesses*, One God, Blessed for ever and ever, Amen!

(1) The Muhammadan will at once say to this, that it is irrelevant and irreverent to compare the Creator to the created in any way whatsoever, the very distinguishing feature of Divinity being distinction, not similarity; total distinction from any and every earthly analogy whatsoever. But we have already gone over that ground sufficiently in a criticism of Muslim Deism,[1] where we showed how barren and useless is this purely negative doctrine of *Mukhālafa* (difference) which verily reduces Allah to a negation and disables us from saying anything about Him whatsoever. Moreover, Muslims are better than their philosophy, for they do not content themselves with saying that 'Allah is not this and that', but all say, 'Allah is Living, Knowing, Willing,' etc., thereby asserting similarity, not mere naked difference. And it is idle to say that between Allah's knowing and ours there is no similarity, that it entirely transcends ours and is incomparable with it, for if there is really no similarity, how unphilosophical it is to

[1] *The Muslim Idea of God.* London and Madras: C.L.S.I.

give the two knowings one and the same name![1] May we not as well drop this indefensible position, cease futile juggling with words, and say that while God transcends us in every imaginable way, there *are* aspects in which He has graciously 'made man in His image', so that the same names may properly be applied to both Man and God, and denote a real relation and identity?

The fear of attributing to Allah what is unworthy of Him is certainly an honourable one, but Christianity does not transgress the limits. In the matter before us, for example, we are simply asserting a mental need when we say that we cannot value or even imagine an abstract unity, and that the highest Unity must exhibit the highest differentiation. What is gross or material or unworthy of God in this?

(2) It may be objected, that Islám itself asserts the plurality of the attributes, mercy, justice, and so forth, that are possessed by the Divine Unity. But Islám has always and utterly objected to the hypostatizing of those attributes, which is what Christians do.

We have two remarks to make to this. (*a*) That the assertion of the plurality of the attributes in no respect meets the mental demand that has been spoken of, for, instead of asserting the highest and

[1] *The reductio ad absurdum* of this mode of thought is to be seen in a passage in Averroes, where the limiting of the seven neither more nor less is an extraordinary example of arbitrariness.

most transcendent form of differentiation, we have merely the assertion of the very feeblest possible form conceivable. For attributes are in themselves nothing; apart from the essence they are unreal abstractions. And mercy, justice, etc., are merely so many aspects of the divine action; they might be at will increased or reduced. And this again shows the arbitrary and unreal character of the multiplicity thus asserted. What we want is a multiplicity of differentiations *that shall be as real and immutable as the unity itself.* (*b*) Christianity does not 'simply hypostatize attributes' as Islám has misunderstood. This misunderstanding—that the Father personified Justice, the Son Mercy, and so forth—is a total mistake which dates from very far back. It has no foundation in the Bible or in our theology. Both Father and Son are equally to be characterized as 'just' and 'merciful'.

(3) It may be objected that this category of unity-in-difference is only applicable to material beings, not to spiritual beings. But on the contrary we found that the spirituality of those beings increased directly with the differentiation of each grade as we ascended upwards through the inanimate, animate, sensitive, and, finally, rational. What now hinders us, logically and rationally, from taking one further analogous step and saying that, when we come to the highest mode of being—the Divine—where the material gives entire place to the spiritual, we shall find that unity-in-distinction is as applicable as it was to all the lower categories,

only in a far higher mode as regards both the distinction and the unity? The degree to which the Divine Being surpasses and transcends the lower modes may be—is indeed—unimaginable, but we claim this transcendent superiority for the distinctions that must constitute His Unity just as much as for the Unity itself. And we say that the real, immutable distinctions of the Persons or Consciousnesses meets this postulate, while the purely abstract differences of the Attributes do not.

(4) But it may be objected, lastly, that when we leave the material, all this category of organism on which we are relying ceases, and with its failure the reasoning fails also.

But why, it may be replied, should this category be objected to any more than those of Being or Life, as applied to the Divine? 'Being' characterizes the very lowest types of things, and 'Life' characterizes low as well as high types. Yet we ascribe both to the Divine nature. Why then not 'organism' (unity-in-difference), which as we have seen increases as the types of living being ascend? This question really leads to a third main objection against the Christian doctrine.

iii. That the Idea of a Trinity makes the Godhead Compound and Divisible

Does Organism as such imply divisibility, since it implies composition? Does not the doctrine of Trinity involve the *divisibility of the divine substance?*

We believe that the following considerations will totally remove this objection.

Properly speaking, a divisible thing is that which can be divided without destroying the thing itself as a stone. A block of stone can be split into two parts without damaging the stone as stone. Or as a machine; the machine can be taken to pieces without destroying the machine, for the pieces can be put together again as before. In differing ways, then, stones and other shapeless metals, and machines, are divisible. But when we come on to substances which possess organic unity (see the last chapter) a very different state of things obtains. You cannot divide them, you can merely divide their material.

What do we mean by this? The meaning is plain when you take a flower and shred it to bits. Can you replace that flower? Certainly not. You have not divided it; you have destroyed it. Those dead parts lying on the table are not the flower, nor do they even make up the flower. The flower, the *it* itself has been destroyed. You could not divide it, you could only destroy it, or keep it.

A hand when severed from the body is really not a hand at all. It is only a lump of flesh shaped like a hand; for it is *of the essence of a hand* to be one with the whole body, to communicate through its nerves with the brain, to share the one life of the whole. It is only by an abstraction, which contains as much falsehood as truth, that you say that the hand is a part of the body at all, if by

that you mean that it exists as a hand after being severed from the body. It is only by a very partial abstraction you can do this, namely, by arbitrarily selecting some features which inhere in 'hand' and arbitrarily overlooking other equally or more important ones.

We repeat, therefore, you can divide the *material* of an organism, but you cannot divide the *organism*, the unity-in-difference. You can but prematurely effect its dissolution and destruction. It, in fact, would be indivisible in all senses of the word were it immaterial; as it is, it is ideally indivisible; only, its material substance can be divided.

But God has no material substance. Therefore He is, in every sense, both ideally and really indivisible.

An earthly organism, then, can only exist in the fulness of its nature or be destroyed—there is no third possibility such as division. God cannot be destroyed; therefore He exists only in the undivided and indivisible fulness of His nature—that is, in His Unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

And just as we saw that, ideally speaking, a member is quite different from a part, since it can only be itself when abiding in the unity, so, both ideally, and really, Father, Son, and Spirit are *in no sense whatever parts* (God forbid!); but are eternally and truly interrelated, mutually-involving Members in an indestructible and indivisible Unity. And this does not say one word against the reality of the distinguishability of each. On the contrary that reality is absolutely involved in what I have

said; and at the same time, instead of destroying, it constitutes the perfect Oneness of God; not a barren Monad, but a rich and perfect Unity. To whom glory for ever and ever.

To sum up: the Godhead has no parts, though It has Members; it is, therefore, unable to be parted. It is indivisible.

iv. That the Idea of the Trinity is Tritheism Necessarily

There is a fourth objection to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity one to which defenders of that doctrine sometimes expose themselves if they are not careful, namely, that the doctrine reduces the Godhead to the category of a *genus* (or *species*) [1] made up of three individuals, and is therefore naked Tritheism (God forbid!).

But a clearer thought-analysis will reveal the fallaciousness of the objection. Let us see, what the objection amounts to. A *genus* or a *species* is, of course, a universal that includes a large number of particulars that fall under it. Man is a species, and Amr, Zaid, and Ubaid, etc., are individual men falling under it. If then Godhead is to be considered a genus, then the Unity is recuced to the formal unity of a genus, and the three members included in it are no less three gods, than Amr, Zaid, and Ubaid are three men.

[1] The two expressions have, of course, only a relative difference, and it is difficult to say which should be used in stating the objection hero.

Of course, if the case were so, we should not be Trinitarian Christians. But it is not so. There are two considerations which refute this objection.

(1) A genus, thus understood, has no absolute, objective, and substantial existence at all. It is a generalization, an abstraction made by the mind from many individuals who or which are observed to have important common features. But God is not a generalization, an abstraction! He is the highest reality, a living entity. Therefore, whatever the mysterious Persons of the Holy Trinity may be, they are not individuals, ranged under an abstraction or generalization called God, and the charge of Tritheism quite falls to the ground.

Philosophical controversies have doubtless raged round the question of what these universals really are. Are they the merest abstractions, expressions to denote common features roughly observed in particulars, mere names to labels given for convenience in classification? Such is the doctrine of the Nominalists. Others agreed with that doctrine as far as the objective existence of the universals is concerned, but tried to preserve to it more reality than was conceded by the Nominalists, by saying that a universal was a real conception of the mind, more than a mere name and rough label. These thinkers were called Conceptualists. But Aristotle emphasized the importance of believing in the objective reality of the universal underlying these—the differences of the particulars—that is to say, that each universal though inseparable from the

individuals it embraces, does really indicate an intrinsic similarity in the things embraced. To finite thought that similarity may be abstract; but to absolute thought it is real. To absolute thought, the forms, which inhere in all members of a species, are absolutely the reallest things of all, being the subject of the contemplation of the thought of God. Hence the Aristotelians were called Realists. But still they totally denied that their doctrine involved attributing to these universal *genera* (man, animal, etc.) any substantial, or hypostatic, existence, that is, declaring that they are distinct entities. Only Plato found his way to this extreme position, and appeared sometimes to teach that universals, horse, man, etc., are distinct entities; that they inhabit an ideal, heavenly world, that they are as substantial and real as any individual things here on earth—nay, far more so, for they are the sole reality; and in comparison with them horses, men, etc., are mere shadows, owing whatever reality they possess to their partaking in the likeness of their heavenly, ideal counterparts, which he named ideas. Hence his followers were called Idealists.

These are philosophical matters which are rather remote from our thinking to-day, and we may feel the distinctions alluded to are more subtle than is necessary, and not worth much trouble. Nevertheless blood has been shed in the course of working out the controversy, but it would take too long to show why this was. For our present purpose, however, it is enough to say that God, the supreme,

living reality is in no sense a mere Universal-embracing-individuals, as conceived by any of these schools of thought.

If, then, God is neither a mere Name, nor a mere Conception of the mind, nor a mere metaphysical Essence,[1] but is a transcendent and perfect living reality, then the Godhead is in no sense a mere Universal, and the Persons of the Sacred Trinity are not particular individuals (gods) in the unity of the class (god), and the charge of Tritheism falls to the ground.

(2) The second consideration which reveals the fallacy of the objection is this: a genus (man for example) whatever be the degree of reality which it possesses, is not in the least affected by the destruction of one, or any number, of its constituent members. Annihilate Amr, Zaid and Ubaid, and as many others as you please, and the genus, as genus, still remains. It is not even, as genus, mutilated. This shows that genus is not really a living organic unity, which is bound up with the unimpaired existence of its members. But this is exactly what, with all reverence, we seem to see in God, who is highest and most perfect Life. He is a unity in and through the Persons, not one of whom has or can have any separated existence, but each lives for,

[1]Nor an Ideal Substance, after the Platonic fashion; but it is not necessary to consider this possibility, for all subsequent thought has regarded the conception as inadmissible, and to Plato himself it was in all probability only a cast, one of many made by that versatile angler on the waters of truth.

in, and through each. Therefore the Father is the one Substance of God, the Son is the one Substance of God, the Holy Spirit is the one Substance of God; not three gods, but One God. To whom be glory for ever.

v. That the Idea of the Trinity is, then, Meaningless and Barren

The final objection is as follows: If, as concluded last time, Father, Son, and Spirit, is each the one substance of God, this simply means that there is no reality whatever in the distinctions Father, Son, and Spirit, owing to the utter impossibility of assigning to any one of the so-called Persons anything peculiar to that Person. In other words, you can never say that any One does what the Other does not; and this fact lands you into the most hopeless contradictions.

This objection is strongly urged in a little book by a young Muhammadan doctor, a follower of the late Sheikh Muhammad Abdu, where he says:

Moreover, the idea of the Nazarenes that Allah is one in essence, three in persons, is impossible; for they believe that each Person is distinguished from the other by sundry properties: the first by His Fatherhood; the second by His Sonship, and by His Incarnation and indwelling; the third by Procession. These distinctions are conceived of as perfectly real, insomuch that what is ascribed to one must not be transferred to another. To this I reply: The property that constitutes the distinction inheres essentially in the Person to whom it belongs; that is, to His *essence*. Therefore, it inheres in the essence of *Allah*, for His essence is one and indivisible, as every Christian maintains; and the essence of each Person is the essence of Allah. But, on

the other hand, that same property, since it is constitutive of the distinction does not inhere in another Person, therefore does not inhere in that other Person's essence, therefore does not inhere in the essence of Allah. Therefore the same thing does, and does not, inhere in the essence of Allah; which is absurd. . . . Thus you can prove that, Incarnation being a property of the Son, Allah did, and did not, become incarnate: a contradiction that is self-evidently false.

To this it may be replied: Both in physics and metaphysics, when you get down to ultimate problems, you find yourself involved in logical contradictions. Time and eternity, creation and self-sufficingness, extension and infinity, all involve contradictions and intellectual insolubilities, for which indeed philosophers have a technical name, *Antinomies of Reason,* so inevitable have they found these contradictions. It need not, therefore, disturb us overmuch, even if we *were* to find one slight antinomy still adhering to our ultimate doctrine, that of the Sacred Trinity in Unity.

Now it is eminently to the point to notice that even our super-logical author himself is quite unable to escape such contradictions. In a former page, for example, we find him enlarging on another 'ultimate' question, namely, the ultimate constitution of matter. He has arrived at the atom, and is discussing whether it is divisible or not, and whether it has extension or not. After proving that you cannot conceive the dividing process going on *ad infinitum*[1], he concludes that there must be a point

[1]Arab philosophers never allow this possibility of an infinite series.

at which it ceases, and the atom becomes indivisible; and he proceeds:

This ultimate atom either has extension or it has not. If it has, then the mind can always conceive its divisibility, and so on *ad infinitum*, which, as we have shown, is impossible. The only possible conclusion, therefore, is that it has *not* extension, and we conclude that every body is composed of absolutely extensionless atoms, i.e., without length, breadth, or height, but having definite position; resembling the mathematical points, except that the former exist, while the latter are imaginary.

Such is the author's amazing conclusion; and we must remember it is the basis on which he erects his entire argument, for it comes at the very beginning of a book which is supposed to be a close logical argument for the refutation of materialism and the demonstration of Muhammadanism, with as great certainty as that of the mathematical sciences!

Surely the antinomy (if any) adhering in the doctrine of the Trinity is nothing compared with the hopeless contradictions in terms here involved! Matter, whose one distinguishing property is extension,[1] is said to be composed of extensionless things, which, together, make up an extended thing. But an extensionless thing is equivalent to zero. However often you add zero to zero you only get zero; but according to our author, who is so severe

[1] It is worth while noting that Muslim philosophic thought is against this Muslim neologist on this very point. In El-Fudali's *Matn*, the extension of matter is selected as the best example of the self-evident! To which his commentator expressly notes, '"Matter"—*whether the atom* or a compound.'

on Christian logic, you only have to add a sufficient number of zeros together (query, how many ?) to get an integer. How many breadthless atoms, we wonder, when set in a row would make up a line an inch broad ! It would be easy to elicit many other ridiculous conclusions from the same axiom, but we forbear, for the point is not to substitute a true doctrine of the ultimate atom for our author's absurd one, but rather to point out how the finite mind, when it gets down to ultimates, even in physics, does always come to antinomies.

But the case is not so desperate with the doctrine of the Trinity. If we hold firmly and reverently to the conclusion we have reached with such a hard effort of thought, that a new and unique category, yet one not unintelligible to us, is applicable to the Godhead, namely, that of *spiritual organism*, we shall find that it solves also their serious-looking final difficulty. In any organism, the whole of the one essence acts in every action of every member, *and yet the member has its appropriate work.* If my eye sees, I see, but my ear does not see, yet we do not for this reason rush to the assertion that I do, and do not, see at the same moment. Rather we say that I see through my eye, not my ear. The whole, including the ear, profits from the performance of the eye.

If one member does anything, the one essence does it, and all the members co-operate ; yet this does not forbid that member to have its own inalienable function in the economy of the organism.

If one member suffer, the whole organism suffers, and the members co-operate in that suffering; yet this does not prevent a proper suffering to each member. If you will have it so, in the category of organism you have come into a sphere where the paradox of our critic *is* literally true, that the same thing does, and does not, perform the same action at the same time!

Without saying that the category of *spiritual organism* is adequate to the Godhead, it may be held and maintained that it is the highest we can apply if we want to have a living personal God at all. The reality is no doubt higher than our highest conception, but this might only make our thesis more, not less, true, namely, that the Divine Persons should have each His proper function, the One God being in every case the sole and invariable worker. To take our critic's instance, God certainly can be incarnate in His Word the Son, without that incarnation being predicated of the Father or the Spirit, properly. In the Atonement for mankind that Incarnate One can take His peculiar part.

The oneness, reciprocity, and mutuality of the Godhead must indeed be ineffable if even a physical organism is so true a unity, whose members live only in and through each other and the one undivided essence. How much more so, the immortal, eternal, infinite God!

The Doctrine of the Trinity cannot then be criticized from this view-point. The last objection of the critics falls to the ground.

CHAPTER II

God as Creator

WE pass from our purely defensive ground to show that, so far from the Trinity making a belief in a living God more difficult, it goes to make easier for us some difficulties besetting all monotheistic systems, and not least Islám; and especially the difficulty, Why should a self-sufficient God have created the world? And, after creating it, was not His self-sufficiency thereby imperilled? How real this difficulty is all students of Islám know. The Philosophers with their theories of emanation (*sudur*) and the eternity of the world (*qidam al alam*); the Sufis with their Tradition [1] are enough to prove that this difficulty is a real one; and, as a matter of fact, most agnosticism is owed to the seriousness of this very difficulty to many minds. We say that the doctrine of a Trinity makes the position easier, not more difficult.

Let us recaptulate the difficulties experienced by Islámic Deism in ascribing to God creation.

[1] *Kunta kanzan makhfiyan lam u'raf, fa ahbabtu an u'raf, fa khalagtu khalgan wa to 'arraftu ilaihim, fa bi 'arafuni.* 'I was a hidden treasure, being unknown. Then I desired to be known. So I created creatures and made Myself known to them; and by Me they knew Me.'

1. How could such a God pass over into actual creation and become a Creator? Have we not here an involving of the Absolute God in contingency?

2. Before creation His activities were entirely inactive, only finding activity in creation. They were latent, not potent; potential, not actual. Now potentiality is no substitute for action. It is, relatively to action, deficiency. And if we say that creation was required to release the Creator from His latency and set free the quality of Power, with other qualities denoting action, then we have ascribed to Him deficiency and dependence of the first order.

3. Creation in this case would mean for God the beginning of relations, for in creating He comes into relations with His world. But the beginning of relations would mean the beginning of a new kind of life for the Divine Being. This is against pure transcendence (*tanzih*).

4. Relation involves something in the way of reaction for both parties. What is this reaction but passivity? He who hears, for example, has an action done upon him. This is against *tanzih*. How could an absolute Being like such a God limit his absoluteness, and condescend from it?

Now the idea of a Triune God, as revealed through Christ, greatly lessens, if it does not entirely annul, these great difficulties. Let us note the following important considerations:

(*a*) The doctrine of the Triune God reveals to us a God with eternal activities, not latent, but potent in eternal action. Love is the essence of His be-

ing, and love was always active in Him. And there is no type of activity more active than love. In creating, therefore, God was not becoming actively active after being only potentially active. He was simply acting in accord with His own ever-active nature. Creation itself was an outcome of love; it was love willing the existence and the happiness of other beings. It was an overflow of love more than an outcome of power; for love is concerned with the end, power with the means. Here is a very great difference between the Islámic and the Christian conceptions of God: Islàm makes Will and Power the two sole qualities of God to which all His relations with man and the world can be reduced; Christianity says God is Love; it makes Will simply the articulate expression of Love, and power simply the handmaid of Love. Even the glory of God is simply the triumph of His nature of Love. To all of these ideas Islám is completely strange. It cannot advance beyond the conception of an irresponsible Ruler. Such a conception is for ever lost in the royal Fatherhood of God through Christ.

(*b*) The doctrine of the Triune God shows that creation did not mean for God the beginning of relations; for God Himself is eternally related in the highest possible way—in a way that infinitely transcends the most highly organized and intro-related being on earth. The creation of a world of relations is simply the reflex of the essentially relational nature of God.

(*c*) The conception of the Triune God removes the difficulty of ascribing reaction, limitation, passivity, and emotion to God, which is so fatal to pure transcendence, and which, nevertheless, is inevitable as soon as you have ascribed to Him creation. The difficulty has for us lost its terror, for as we have seen that relatedness is the very soul of God, we see also that limitation is simply another way of expressing relatedness. All relations are limitations; they all involve action and reaction, activity and passivity. God who is Father, Son, and Spirit, is the home of all these things. Why should we be afraid of them then? True love and true freedom are not absence of all limitations. But freedom and love are expressed in self-limitation, and blessedness is seen in the free play of action and reaction. All these things were found eternally in the bosom of the one Godhead, who is love, being Father, Son, and Spirit.

In the same way passivity is now shown not to be a thing that degraded God; in God is both activity and passivity. Blessedness needs both; love needs both.

So also emotion. The conscience, heart, and moral needs of men cry out for a God who stands not coldly aloof, but for one with feeling; yet the intellect of man has feared to yield on this point, and attempts to figure God as totally unaffected by anything that man can do or suffer. But the doctrine of the Triune God who is Love shows that such fears are groundless; for love is the highest

form of life; and so its emotion is part of the eternal ethical life of God.

Thus we see that the dilemma which is fatal to Deism, namely, that in creation God lays Himself open to reaction, limitation, passivity, emotion, and so to weakness and deficiency, is solved for us. These were no new things to God: they did not appear to Him to detract from His glory; they existed quite apart from creation; they were of His being, and in them He expresses Himself. Consequently when He graciously created a world, into which He entered in relation, and so allowed all the consequences of relation—self-limitation, reactions, passivities, emotions—He was doing no new thing; He was simply expressing His nature in time as He expresses it eternally.

In regard to God's creating Nature, it might conceivably be maintained that He did not in any way limit Himself, because He was creating something wholly under His own hand, capable of being acted on, but not of acting nor even of reacting, whose smallest motion was really God's doing. And, being entirely mechanical, it would have no point of resemblance or similarity with its Maker. But what shall we say of man, God's conscious, knowing, willing, feeling creation? How can we escape the conclusion that here at any rate there is a point of similarity between God's will and man's; between God as mind and man as mind; between God as knower and man as knower. If not, how could God communicate with man? There cannot be

intelligent communication unless the receiver is to some extent like the sender. To the oxen the hieroglyphics were, are, and will be, mere marks. But to us they are messages simply because there is a point of mental similarity between us and those who wrote them. So prophecy itself involves this similarity between God's mind and ours. But it is impossible for pure *tanzih* to admit any such correspondence or similarity. Yet it attempts to assert the possibility of communication. This is contradictory.

If Islám replies that the world, including man, is in every respect a tool in the hand of God's power, we say that many of the former metaphysical difficulties still remain (see above); and moreover that this makes impossible the quality of love in God; no one loves a machine, though he have absolute power over it. And of course it is even more impossible for a machine to love its worker, even on the assumption that it is a conscious machine and one that can understand the communications made to it by its Maker.

But even this assumption (that the machine is somehow rational) must be denied on pure *tanzih* principles. Why should *tanzih* deny reality to the *will* of man as a free thing, that is self-exercised, yet allow to man's intelligence that it is real and self-exercised. So here there is a dilemma: either you allow that man's intelligence is real, self-exercised, that is, capable of give and take, in which case you must say that the knowledge of

God not only gives, but also takes, not only communicates with but is communicated with, not only knows but is known, not only speaks but hears—all of which is a species of passivity and contradicts *tanzih*. Or you must say that man's intelligence is as mechanical and as illusory as his will: he seems to hear, but it is only God hearing Himself; he seems to speak but it is only God speaking to Himself; he seems to know, but really he only dreams. His individual consciousness is an illusion—his very individuality and selfhood vanishes, and he becomes like a character in a novel, a thing that seems to act and think and speak, but really only exists in the mind of its writer. So that if *tanzih* is incapable of being harmonized with the creation of nature, it is doubly incapable of being harmonized with the creation of any spiritual being such as man.

And in fact we often see, in the history of Islámic thought, men who have in their very insistence on absolute *tanzih* positively asserted this very thing, namely, that only Allah exists, and that all other existence is illusory, a semblance. This is the thought that underlies their name for God—Al Haqq. They mean that no other being has reality or existence. These men, whether they know it or not, are pure pantheists, their belief resembling the Indian philosophic pantheism, whereby all that we see is Maya (illusion). Thus easily does pure *tanzih* fall to its extreme opposite. In the language of these men, *tawhid* did not merely mean calling God the One, but calling Him the Only—that is,

denying reality or even existence to all phenomena whatsoever.

Such are the terrible difficulties, intellectual and moral, into which the Islámic doctrine of God falls, especially in relation to the creation of man.

But the difficulties seem almost to vanish when we conceive of God by the aid of the mind of Christ, and know Him as Father, Son and Spirit. We have already seen how this trinitarian conception as Love facilitates the conception of Him as Creator of the world generally. How much more then of man, particularly—man, who alone of all creation has, decisively, the power of memory and forethought, of self-consciousness and of other-consciousness, of conscience, rational thought—in one word, who alone of all created things (as far as we know) has spirit, and is capable of prayer, gratitude, and love; who is like unto God, 'in His image' in these respects. We note the following considerations:

1. If God created a being capable of love, while He Himself is incapable of real love, He created a being greater than Himself; for 'love is the greatest thing in the world.' But we have seen God has love—is love; therefore the creation of a loving creature occasions no surprise but the reverse.

2. For creation, if it has any significance, must have for its end the manifestation of the glory of God—by which we do not mean His power, for that were by itself and in itself a barren display—but His love and His power in His love. Therefore

would creation have been utterly incomplete had it stopped with the solar system—or with the minerally constituted earth—or with the vegetable kingdom. Why? Not because these things were insufficiently marvellous, for who can positively assign degrees of marvel to the creation. Why then? Does not one feel the answer to be that these things were incapable of consciously knowing God, or loving Him, or glorifying Him, or being or becoming like Him? That is the answer. And it shows us, further, why creation did not stop at the animal world, from the amoeba up to the ape. The same answer holds good. Man is the crown of it all, and to man all points. In man creation suddenly awakes into full consciousness, as one wakes out of a dead sleep or a confused dream. In man God has one to whom He can talk, and who can talk with Him, in other words, like Himself.

Now this point of likeness is abhorrent to the Muslim, for it conflicts with his abstract doctrine of uniqueness. But he only denies it at the heavy cost of denying also the possibility of communication and love between God and man. For, as we have seen, conscious communication absolutely implies some point of spiritual similarity between the two, and love implies the same, *a fortiori*. And thus we find in the forefront of the Bible, 'God created man in His likeness'—a truly inspired word; just as we find in the New Testament, 'the inner man, which is renewed after the image of Him who created him.'

It is true that this word of Genesis has been adopted by Islám in the form of a tradition. This tradition has always fascinated Muslim theologians, but has perhaps equally embarrassed them. If any one wants to see how they sometimes do all they can to explain it away and evacuate it of meaning, let him read Al-Ghazali's *Mishkat al Anwar*, (pp. 34–5). We conclude, however, from the existence of this tradition that there is a yearning in Islám itself to establish a closer link between man and God. But the answer to that yearning, as we are seeing, is to be found in Christian, not Muslim, theology. For in the Holy Trinity we see that here also we have no absolutely new principle. God saw in His Son and Word the 'express image of His person' (Hebrews i. 2) from all eternity. So the creation of a world, in the highest rank of which He could see the image of His person, finitely, is seen to be no longer strange or new, but in accordance with His own essence.[1]

[1] The definition, or description, of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity given by Fr. L. Cheikho in his reply [*Tafnid at Tazwir li Muhammad Tabir et Tannir* (Refutation of the Falsification of Muhammad Tahir et Tannir)] to a virulent Muslim attack on Christianity [*El 'Aqa'id el-Wathaniya fi'd-Diyanat an-Nasraniya*] is so interesting that we quote it here in full:

'God, the One, the possessor of glory, perfection and an essential unity that admits of no division, is an intelligent Deity, having knowledge of the Reality (*haqiqh*) of His divine essence (*dhat*) from all eternity; and by this perfect knowledge

of that Reality, which does not in any way take away from His substance (*jawhar*), He causes to overflow (*yufi*) on to that Image (*surah*) the totality of His perfections as though He were it and It were He; and *this* is His self-subsisting Word which was never subject to the creative fiat. And because it emanates (*sadara*) from Him and is begotten from Him in thought, not by motion, and not in space nor time, abiding in Him continually, we call It 'Word', and Him 'Father', just as we call the concept of our own thought, the production of our intelligence, 'the *son* of our thought', or its '*word*', which our lips utter without severing it thereby from our intellect. Only, our word is an *accidens*, while in God there is no *accidens*, so that we are bound to assert that *God's* Word is God just as much as is Its Source. Further, since the Son resembles the Father, being His essential Image, there must be a connexion between the Father and His Word whereby the Father loves His Image and that Image is drawn to its Begetter. And this connexion also is not an *accidens*, but is likewise a *substance* (*jawhar*), the Holy Siprit, the mutual love betwixt Father and Son, proceeding from Them both.'

CHAPTER III

God as Incarnate

WE shall not consider the Incarnation from all of its aspects, but shall keep within the scope of these studies, namely, to show that it is not contrary to reason; to show that it facilitates faith in God, not makes it more difficult; while to deny it makes faith in God difficult, if not impossible.

Let us examine, therefore, the following objections to the Incarnation:

i. Was the Incarnation proper to the Son; if so, how can you say that God was incarnate?

ii. In asserting the Incarnation, you assert that God became, or was, transformed.

iii. In asserting the Incarnation you have brought God within the limits of space.

iv. The same with regard to the limits of time.

v. Lastly, you have involved God in weakness and passivity and suffering.

i. Was God, or the Son of God, incarnate?

We have already explained, in speaking of the Trinity, how it is possible to assign proper functions to one person as distinct from another in the Godhead without dividing the Godhead. The reason is that the Persons are one yet distinct.

Every act is done by God, that is to say, all the One Divine essence does all and the Persons unite in willing every particular and inspiring it and ordering its accomplishment. But this does not make it impossible that the actual accomplishment be worked out by one Person specially. 'The Son doeth nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do.' That is to say, the Father designs each act and wills it and shares in the spiritual emotion consequent on it—in a word, does it, while the actual execution is the Word's. There is no contradiction in terms here; the brain does an act, which a member executes for example.

Apply this principle to the Incarnation. We find that the Son in the fulness of His Godhead was incarnated: the Word became flesh. This Incarnation was willed and planned by the Father, and carried out by the inspiration of the Spirit. We can, therefore, say that God was incarnate, without saying that the Father was, or that the Spirit was, in the same sense as the Son.

My whole self is in the hand with which I write, yet my whole self is not bounded by my hand. So God Himself was in Jesus Christ—the fulness of the Godhead; yet the Godhead was not limited by the Man Jesus. The one is a mystery, and the other is a mystery.

If one denies that my whole self is in my hand, then I ask him, What part of myself is in my hand? Is my spirit divided? No; and, therefore, you can get no further than this, that the fulness of

the Godhead was in Christ, yet was not bounded by the Man Jesus.

Spirit is such a mysterious thing and its relation with matter yet more mysterious. How much more then is the nature of the presence of the Infinite Spirit—God—in relation to material things a mystery also?

We, therefore, confess that in this matter we have a mystery which does indeed utterly transcend reason, though it does not conflict with it. It is only a special case of the general mystery—that is, God's relation to this universe.

ii. The Incarnation and Becoming.

The Word became flesh. It is objected to this cardinal text that it represents the conversion of the Godhead into flesh, and brings God into the category of becoming, that is, contingency.

We need not reply to the first objection, for the text does not say 'the Word was converted into flesh'. From this point of view, the Church has rejected the theory of conversion: 'not by the conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking the manhood into God.' Nevertheless, the text does undoubtedly say became. Let us look at the matter closely.

We assert that this matter entirely goes back to the previous initial difficulty of creation and relation. We assert that no new difficulty is added, but that this *becoming* is simply an aspect of the original difficulty.

Now we have shown clearly that the original difficulty affects the Muslim even more than the Christian; it affects every believer in a one, conscious God—Creator—every monotheist, in fact. Therefore the Muslim cannot criticize this text in any special way. For whoever believes that God created has involved himself in attributing a sort of *becoming* to God. For He who had not as yet created, created. He *became* a creator, in other words. We are bound to use metaphors of time in order to make some difference between *creator* and *created*, and avoid attributing eternity to the world.

If the objector falls back upon the idea that creation was always in the mind of God, and that the act of creation merely realized the thought, we reply that this does not in the least lessen the force of our contention; for we simply alter the wording of it and say: He who was a creator potentially *became* a creator actually. He who was a creator in thought *became* a creator in deed.

It comes to this: if creation became, that is, passed from non-existence to existence, then the Creator, in virtue of His mere relation to that creation, also became—passed from non-creativeness to creativeness. Thus the Incarnation and the text 'the Word became flesh' only bring you back to the original mystery of God and creation; they add nothing to it, being strictly a development of it.

iii. In asserting Incarnation you have brought God within the limits of space.

The relation of God to space, nay, the very nature of space in itself, is a matter absolutely impossible to determine or imagine. Philosophers have vexed themselves to define space or to conceive of it in itself. Some have said it is merely an abstraction; some that it is merely a necessary condition of our perception, and has its existence in human perception rather than independently, so that apart from that it has no real existence, being, in fact, a 'form' or constituent element of perception. However that may be, we see from this the folly of dogmatizing what God's relation to space is. Does He fill it or is He apart from it? Or would it not be truer to say that in some way He is superior to it? For all that, we are in space, and *He* is related to us; therefore He must be related to space in some way or other. And who shall define what that way is?

And further, who shall define how God shall demonstrate His relation with space? How shall He use it? By what modes?

(1) We see in the first place that the condescension of God in creation and relation and revelation has inévitably involved His attributing to Himself spatial metaphors. Our very language and thoughts, nay, the language and thoughts of revelation itself, bear witness to this. Is not this a self-limitation on the part of God—to make it appear as though He were spatially connected

and limited, even if in reality He is not? From this point of view, to be limited spatially and to appear to be limited amount to just the same thing. God has, as a matter of fact, limited Himself spatially in merely revealing words and ideas like 'throne', 'heaven', 'send', 'messenger', 'see', 'hear', etc., and attributing all to Himself. Every one of these notions is a purely spatial one and calls up spatial images. This is true just as much for the Muslim as the Christian, for he also uses all these words; and he talks of the throne *on* which God sits, *borne* by angels, *surrounded* by angels above, below, and around. What is this except the utmost of spatial limitations? And when he talks of the soul's entering the garden, being with God, seeing His face, standing by His throne, does he not necessarily imagine and picture in his mind a *place*, and forms and figures and spaces? Of course he does. Therefore we repeat from this point of view that God, quite apart from the Incarnation, has struck Himself into space, having *in the minds and imaginations of all men limited* Himself, and, if you please, incarnated Himself, using incarnation in the wider sense of entering within material bounds.

(2) But, in the second place, if we admit the principle that God allows Himself to appear bounded by space, in thought, while really transcending it in a manner not to be imagined by us, and further admit that this appearance is at least a hint of some truth, we can carry the argument a step

further and say that it is equally possible for God to give some *sensible* manifestation of His presence in space—that is, one affecting not only the imagination but the senses. That is to say, He can connect His presence more with one part of space than another, without thereby denying His omnipresence. Who shall say this is impossible? On the contrary, it is admitted. We say even in common parlance, at certain solemn times, we *feel* that God is with us. If in old times He made a wondrous light, or fiery cloud or smoke, and gave His people to understand that His presence was in some particular way connected with or manifested in that fire or light, who can deny it? And on the other hand, who is so foolish as to think that which manifestation exhausted or monopolized the presence of God! When Moses saw the fire in the bush and heard the voice; when Israel saw the fiery cloud in the Holy of Holies, and they bowed down and worshipped as if in the immediate presence of God (and they were so from this point of view) were they so foolish as to think that the Heaven of Heavens was then empty of God's presence? No, they saw a mystery with two sides to it—like all mysteries in heaven and earth (and what thing created or uncreated is *not* a mystery?) and were thankful.

And similarly the 'Angel of the Presence', the Angel who said to Manoah that His name was WONDERFUL (pelai), which is the peculiar epithet of God; in these cases also we have a mysterious

self-relation of God to *space and sense*, real, yet not exhausting reality.

Islám is conscious of these mysteries as much as Christianity. The prophet in one tradition talked of feeling the Fingers of God. Would he have said more if he had said he had seen them?

And thus we arrive at the incarnation in Christ. It is only the same mystery carried to a higher and nobler plane. The Godhead in space, and yet not in it; His presence related particularly to a certain place, and yet not limited by it; appealing to sense, yet transcending sense; revealed, yet veiled by the very medium of revelation. It is the old story of the two-faced mystery. We must accept both and worship. The disciples in looking on the body of Christ did not see God, for in this sense none sees God; but none the less they looked on One 'in whom was the fulness of the Godhead bodily.' As to the mode in which this was effected, or how the matter looks from God's point of view, we know not. Who knows how anything looks from God's point of view?

Finally; if the human spirit is not material, we get a precisely similar set of problems and paradoxes. My spirit seems to be limited by my body and housed in it, and yet who can say it is really under the category of space? Can you measure it? How many dimensions has it? Has it a shape? If it escaped from my body, would it go up or down? through window or door? East or West? Where

does it go to?[1] These questions in themselves show the absurdity of trying to fit spirit into the category of space. It seems wholly above it. And yet none the less my spirit is in some way undoubtedly limited by my spatial body. Who can solve this paradox? And if it is true, even though unintelligible, why should we say that a similar connexion between God (who is pure, transcendent Spirit) and matter in general, or man in particular, is impossible? It is only admitting one more mystery before which our boasted reason retires baffled and transcended.

iv. In asserting Incarnation you have brought God within the limits of the category of time; and, as time and contingency imply each other absolutely, we have thus involved the Divine Nature in contingency

The reply to this is very much what we replied in the case of space, namely, that the difficulty, if it is a difficulty, is already involved in the ideas of God's creation and governance of this world. Whether to the Muslim or to the Christian or to the Jew, the mere thought of God's creating the world as a

[1] Al-Ghazali, in the *Madnun Saghir*, notes this mysterious property of the human spirit, and observes how difficult it is to avoid attributing to it, in consequence, properties which are strictly divine ones. The generality of men, he says, find it impossible to conceive of Allah as not being related to space (*fi jiha*). It is impossible to make them understand that the human *ruh* Spirit also transcends this relation! They would think that this would be to make man like God.

definite act, and then governing it by definite acts, inevitably involves Him in the idea of time. His acts, words, and even thoughts are represented to us as intervening at definite successive moments in the stream of times; as constituting successive links in the chain of events. They have a past, a present, a future. The Qur'án from end to end holds God in the category of time, in His relation to this world. We hear Him telling Muhammad what He did in the past, what He is doing in the present, what He will do in the future. Now words are the index of thought, and so these words of God denoting tense carry us to the corresponding thought in the Divine mind. The Divine mind is represented as thinking in tenses. Now when thought is involved in a certain category, the thinker himself is thoroughly involved. If, therefore, time and contingency really imply each other, then God in relating Himself to a temporal system has already involved Himself, in some way, in contingency!

We are perfectly willing to admit that this train of thought only conducts us to half the truth, and that the other half, could we only grasp it, would show us God transcending the category of time. But neither Muslim mind nor Christian mind can rise to this; and, therefore, what we object to is that the Muslim should urge a difficulty as a special one against the Incarnation of the Word of God, when it is really a common difficulty. We may say that, from this point of view, the special incarnation in Christ in no way differs from the

general immanence involved in the guardianship of the world. A Muslim may try to save himself by saying that events do indeed happen in time, including the manifestations of God's words and acts, but that this does not touch God Himself or His thoughts because these things were all written down beforehand in the Preserved Tablet, and, therefore, existed all together in the thought of God, without present, past or future; we reply that this is of no avail, for the Muslim is none the less bound to admit a distinction between the ideal existence of the world in the mind of God and its real existence in time. There must be an essential difference, or else the world were as eternal as God. Well then, if there is a difference, it remains true that God, after bringing the world from the sphere of thought into the sphere of being, involved Himself in some new way with the category of time, with the consequences before mentioned. Or if, going still deeper in philosophy, the Muslim contends that the self is one thing and the attributes another, that God's self is utterly transcendent of time, while His attributes may be 'attached to'[1] created things in time, without infringing upon His transcendence, we reply that this philosophy may possibly be sound, but it applies to all mind as such. Philosophers have pointed out that even in man there must be an extra-temporal element; for otherwise, if not only the acts and thoughts of men were in the flux and stream of

[1] *Muta'alliqa bi* is the parlance of Muslim theologians.

time but also the Self itself, there would be no consciousness of events. The very power to distinguish between past, present and future would vanish; the man himself would be rolled along the flood of time as consciousless of it as is the plant torn up by the river and washed down in its current. There must be a stable point to enable us to approach unstability, a resting-place outside time to enable us to know time. So then, if this is true for God, it is also true for the spirit of man.

But this thought, though it is no help to the Muslim Deist (but the contrary), does greatly assist the idea of Incarnation. For it shows that man has an extra-temporal element at the core and base of his selfhood, which perhaps gave the point whereat the divine and human natures come together in the indissoluble union of the Incarnation. We, therefore, conclude by saying that the Incarnation is only a particular case of the general difficulty; a particular phase of the general mystery; a continuation of the initial act of condescension involved in the creation of the world of God and its governance by His hand.

v. The Incarnation involves attributing passivity and weakness to the Almighty Godhead

We shall not spend very much time over this objection, partly because it has been several times noticed already, and partly because it must be more deeply examined in the next section, on the Atonement.

It will be enough to remind ourselves that:

(1) Passivity, as such, has already been shown to be a necessary correlative of activity, and a Living God must in Himself possess both the one and the other. And the Triune God of the Christian has been shown actually to possess both. Therefore the objections that the Incarnation involves passivity, as such, falls to the ground.

(2) We have already seen also that relation implies passivity; that a Creator's relations to the created in general, and created intelligence in particular, was not, could not be wholly one-sided. Action implies reaction, activity passivity. Therefore the bare idea of Creation involves what is here objected to Incarnation as such.

(3) As regards weakness, we have already shown that the moral sphere is not identical with the physical, and that what is weakness in the one may be strength in the other and *vice versa*. The Incarnation is an act primarily within the moral sphere, and, therefore, it is to be expected that many aspects of its enormous moral power will, in the physical sphere and to the natural eye and to the natural or carnal heart, appear to spell weakness. But 'the weakness of God is stronger than men!'

Passivity—weakness—suffering (which means *bearing*); it is plain that we have now passed to another subject, an extension of that of the Incarnation, namely, the Atonement. And this we proceed in conclusion to examine, holding on fast to all our dearly-won gains in preceding discussions.

CHAPTER IV

God as Atoner

i. General Considerations

We have frequently pointed out, and the remark cannot be too often made, for the point is absolutely cardinal, that the minute you leave the purely physical category and enter the moral one, that moment everything becomes changed. The centre of gravity being altered, the whole system shifts, and our thought must undergo a corresponding modification or be guilty of the most serious inconsistencies and errors. Now the physical category is concerned with the mutual relations of inanimate things, or the relation of thinking beings with inanimate things, such as the action of a player on the ball, or the action of a falling stone upon a person. It will be seen that such relations do not go beyond the sphere of the mechanical. They have, in themselves, nothing to do with the moral.

But the minute you enter the moral sphere, that is, that which concerns the reciprocal relations of moral beings, animate, conscious, rational, you find that the simple judgement concerning, for example, strength and weakness, has to be tremendously modified. In the physical sphere, for example,

the question of relative strength can be settled by a tug, by a display of muscular force, by a decisive impact. But how ridiculous it would be to assert that moral questions can be so settled; or that when you wish to assert your moral superiority over somebody else, or to win him morally, you can do so by a display of superior physical force! The idea is absurd. On the contrary, the means you employ may seem, in the physical sphere, to be sheer weakness. At all events, moral means are very numerous and very different and delicate and complicated, while physical means are always simple and the same in character, because they have no other criterion than physical force, which is always calculated according to purely mathematical laws.

The cardinal mistake of Islám, as we have seen, and the cardinal point of difference between it and Christianity is that the former conceives the relations between God and man to fall wholly within the physical category (with the result, of course, that it makes men *things*, not persons); while Christianity insists that men are persons, and that the relation between them and their Creator must be fundamentally moral. The forces, therefore, that God exerts on man will not be purely physical in character, a contest of strength with strength; nor yet merely psychical, as though it were a contest between a strong intellect and a weak one; but moral. And from this the profoundest differences spring between what Islám regards as befitting

to the Deity and what Christianity regards as such. Once master this fundamental difference and everything explains itself. In that which Muslim eyes regard as weakness, Christian eyes see power! What the Muslim admires as power seems to the Christian under certain circumstances as sheer weakness—the weakness of the blundering giant who displays his force in a delicate moral case where it is utterly out of place. All these differences of view culminate in the Cross, which (rather than the Incarnation) is the real battle-ground between the two faiths. To the Muslim, as to the carnal Jew, the Cross is a blasphemy, the very embodiment of weakness and defeat; to the Christian it is the very symbol of moral strength and victory, and through it he has learned to say 'the weakness of God is stronger than men.'

The dealings of a despot with his people might conceivably be purely physical and non-moral. He might impose his will on them by force majeure, by the mechanical means of soldiers, guns and bayonets. But think how absurd would be such a method in the case of even a decent government, and how much more in the case of a father who wishes to impose his will on his children! To carry a pistol into the nursery when he gives his orders! No; he must often wait long, and abide and be patient and try every means. Now the Christian holds that the relation between God and man is nearer that between father and children than between a government and its subjects, much

more a despot and his slaves. God is Sovereign, but He is a Father-Sovereign.

We have noticed the word 'long-suffering'; in that word the word suffering is already introduced, and it carries with it the idea of 'bearing' and so of 'passivity'. Once given a moral relationship, you cannot escape from all these words and thoughts. And, in truth, the Bible is one long record of the long-suffering of God, and, therefore, of His patience, His bearing, yes, His suffering!

Once grant, then, a sinful and rebellious mankind, and such a God, and everything becomes plain—or as plain as is possible to our limited intellects. We see then that 'love' and 'holiness' (as we prefer to call 'mercy' and 'justice'[1]) are not two contradictory epithets, but two sides of one and the same thing. Love is that which will not leave the sinner till all has been done for him. Holiness is that which, for the sinner's own sake, and for righteousness sake, and for the sake of all that makes life worth living, will not receive the sinner

[1] *Love* and *Holiness* are the widest and most general terms to denote the antithetic aspects of God's attitude to man. They are, therefore, the safest, most full of meaning, and best.

Mercy and *Justice* are metaphors drawn from the law courts, and, therefore, introduce us to a narrower sphere. God is Judge, but He is not only a Judge. The mistake comes from pressing the metaphor into becoming an expression of the entire truth. *Grace* and *Wrath* exhibit the two regarded separately, from the view point of their results in man. But even so, how different is the wrath of a father from that of a judge or a king! It really includes burning love.

without taking full account, and making him take full account, of his sin. Holiness, therefore, says what *must* be done, and love says what *shall* be done. Holiness is necessarily loving, to be truly holy; and love is holy, to be truly loving; else neither would be worth the having. The relations of God in Heaven to man are determined by this, and the relations of God in Christ to man were determined by this too, and led to Calvary's cross.

With these general observations we may go to discuss the Atonement of God in Christ.

ii. The Christian View of God and His Relation to the Atonement

We have seen in our last section that the fundamental difference between the Christian and Muslim idea of God is that the latter shrinks from attributing to God distinctively moral qualities, and tends, therefore, to place His qualities in the physical category; and likewise makes His relation with the spirits of men external, mechanical, physical, non-moral. Whereas the former does not shrink from conceiving God as a completely moral Being, experiencing all the experiences proper to a moral Being, and manifesting all the manifestations proper to such. No such experience, no such manifestation will, according to the Christian view, degrade God or lessen His divine glory, but rather His divine glory will consist largely in such manifestations.

We saw further, and with deepest awe, for we

were there approaching terrible and holy ground, that, when sin affects the relation that exists between such a being and the spiritual beings He has created, then the former, just because He is what He is, cannot remain unaffected. But in what way is He affected? In regard to the prior question of His being affected in any way at all, we have long seen that that need not frighten us, for our studies have made it abundantly clear that Islám itself cannot help attributing a being-affected to the Creator. We have not, therefore, to defend ourselves on this score when we say that the Creator is affected by our sin (for the Qur'án itself makes Him affected by extreme displeasure); but the whole question turns upon the sort of way in which He is affected. We answer unhesitatingly, in every and any way proper to a Being who is moral in Himself and whose relations with those human creations are thoroughly moral, and mutually moral. In just such ways will He be affected. And when we look into the Bible for confirmation of our theory, we find it completely borne out. For we see it written there that God is affected by the sight of His rebellious children with wrath, love, pity, sorrow.

All this is repugnant to the Muslim, though we might fairly ask him why he does not shrink from attributing the emotions of wrath to God, and to a lesser extent love and pity also, but will not allow sorrow to be attributed to Him. Perhaps, driven into a corner, he tries to escape from this assertion by giving his assent to the shocking words put by

Al-Ghazali into the mouth of God, 'These to bliss and I care not; and these to the Fire, and I care not.' But, in all seriousness we ask, is this more likely to improve our theology, or turn us into atheists forthwith? In these fatal words Muslim theology finally showed its hand, and we may truly say that it is impossible for us to love such a God as this, or indeed to owe Him any allegiance, for we feel that a righteous man on earth is more richly and nobly endowed than such a God in heaven.

To return then. Philosophy and revelation are at one in saying that God experiences and manifests what can only be described as wrath, pity, love, sorrow, in relation to sinful, rebellious man. And all these things are all aspects of the same thing. Wrath, for example, is not the wrath of an offended law-giver or exasperated law-administrator, but the wrath of a righteously indignant Father and the terrible offended purity of a perfectly holy Being. Illustrations on earth would be the righteous wrath of a father whose son brought disgrace on his name by an act of treachery towards himself; or the terrible indignation of a perfectly truthful man at some instance of ignoble deceit in his friend; or the withering anger of a perfectly pure woman at some evil suggestion made her by an impure mind. Is there not in such cases wrath, wrath that burns like a furnace, wrath that makes the offender feel blasted, and desire to sink beneath

[1] *Ha'ulā 'i ila n na'im wa lā 'ubalī, wa hā'ulā', ila n nar wa lā 'ubalī.*

the ground and fly away into darkness? How much more then the wrath of God! But notice that in all such cases it is a purely moral emotion —the experience and manifestation of a perfectly moral Being, not the merely external wrath of an incensed monarch, nor the irritation of a thwarted administrator, still less the merely physical, mechanical vengeance of an almighty machine of whose working man has run somehow foul; but the still more terrible and burning wrath of a Holy One. Love only adds an element to its intensity. And is not this the true interpretation of the wrath of God all the way through the Bible as interpreted through Christ, that the force exerted on the impure and untruthful in the awful Day of Judgement itself will be not essentially different from the purely moral force exercised here on earth in the examples we have already suggested? The same fire of love-holiness, which will make some glow on that day, will be to others the fires of hell.

So much for wrath. It is only because our own psychological capability is so limited that we are forced to give separate names for what are really only aspects of the same thing in God, and talk of love, pity, sorrow, as though they were different and even conflicting emotions. We can perhaps only experience them successively, yet even in us they may be all essentially related. One can imagine a mother feeling wrath, pity, love and sorrow, if not all at once, still in essential relation

to each other, if the object of them was a son who was false, treacherous and impure, and yet with the possibility of becoming a good man. In God they are all simultaneous, and the full conception can only be got by looking at them all. *Love* is the passionate desire to reclaim the work of His own hands. *Pity* the recognition of its weakness and misery. *Sorrow* is what is caused by treachery against love, the manifestation of wounded love. *Wrath* we have already described. If God does not experience these things, somehow, in His eternal heights, He is no god for us. But the study of Isaiah, Hosea, Jeremiah and Jonah (especially) shows us conclusively that this is in fact His attitude to me and to sinful man. And in Jesus Christ the fact is finally revealed.

Apply then these thoughts, lastly, to the Atonement. We have already seen that the Incarnation is only the particular case of God's general condescension to relation and communion with, and indwelling in His world and especially man. Then the Atonement is only the particular manifestation, in that Incarnate Word, of the general attitude of God to sinful man. The Atonement is the Divine Sorrow, Pity, Wrath, and Love embodied in the Incarnate One. The Atonement is the expression of the eternal Patience of God—which is sin-bearing—in relation to space and time, just as the Incarnation is the expression of the Eternal Essence in relation to space and time. The Passion of Christ is the temporal and spatial manifestation

of the Passion of God. The wrath, love, pity, sorrow, patience of Christ are the manifestation in terms of space and time of the same things in the Heavenly God. The Incarnation says, 'God was in Christ'; the Atonement adds, 'reconciling man unto Himself.'

The doings of Christ, therefore, in the flesh are, as it were, the doings of God when manifested on the stage of space and time, being brought there into immediate contact with men. This conception show us how far from the truth is anyone who construes the Christian idea as that of a severe, angry Father and a mild, loving Son. The Bible lends no such support to a division in the Godhead, however much it may appropriate functions to the persons of the Trinity. In the one work of Love and Redemption through Suffering—that is Patience—the Godhead is One Father, Son and Spirit. '*God* so loved the world.' '*God* was in Christ.' '*God* commendeth His love towards us.'

The Atonement is thus seen to be a work springing from the very nature of God, not an external action which had to take place before God could forgive. We rather say: None but a God who is so loving as to bear man's sin in eternity, and bear it, incarnate, in time, could forgive and save the sinner. This is absolutely true. The Atonement, in Christ, of the Incarnate Son, is indeed the means whereby we attain salvation. But it is not an external means, an external plan, to enable God to

do what His own nature could not do. It is rather, so to speak, an internal means, a transcript of the internal work in the heart of the Godhead, without which we could not have been saved. A sentence like 'But for the Atonement we could not have been saved', really means, 'But for a God who is also an Atoner we could not have been saved.' God, being as He is, could not but bear, could not but yearn, could not but be incarnate in His Word, could not but come into conflict with sin on the earthly stage in this Incarnate One, who as man suffered to the last possibility the action of sin in Himself—a death of agony in body and darkness in soul.

This last sentence brings us to consider whether we can get a little nearer to the heart of this great mystery.

Christ came into this world armed only with moral weapons; determined to fight sin with the sword of righteousness and the spirit, not with the forces of physical or super-physical might. On the mount of temptation He definitely renounced these latter, and thus definitely soared away from all Muslim ideas of the kingdom of this world or the way it should be brought about. He saw that moral results could only be brought about by moral means, and He, therefore, definitely renounced the right of physical resistance. For another, even a prophet, for all except the Saviour of the world, this might have been conceivably permissible, in certain circumstances. For the Saviour of the world it was never in any circumstance to be.

To the Muslim this seems the very embodiment of weakness. To the man who knows what moral power is, it seems the very embodiment of strength.

The battle between Him and sin was, therefore, a fair fight in the moral arena. No extraneous weapons were used. Had He summoned the angelic legions in the garden of Gethsemane had He invoked His divine power on the Cross and descended, much more, had He invoked the civil arm successfully, the contest with sin would have been non-moral; for a non-moral element would have been introduced, and the moral salvation of man would have fallen through. Sin would have received no mortal wound, and no decisive defeat. And so He resisted not.

He allowed the sin of man to do against Him its worst. He allowed it to manifest itself on His perfectly holy, righteous Person; to manifest on Him its true and essential nature for all time—as a thing hating God, hating righteousness, loving the death of all that is holy.

But this involved going the whole length—to death. Had He stopped short of this, sin's nature would not have been fully exposed and its issue would not have been fully seen. To reveal its nature he had to bear its nature, namely, the desire to kill all that is good. And to reveal its inevitable doom he had to bear its doom, namely, to perish terribly.

Then, and not till then, could He turn round and triumph. When sin had done its worst, not till

then, could He show it that it had done nothing. Had He triumphed before, it might have been said that sin had not put forth all its strength. It is only when a man has put forth his last ounce of effort that it can be said he is beaten. The last strength of sin is death; it could not be beaten before it had accomplished that. Its final defeat could not be until it had exercised as great an activity as possible. Christ, in order to overcome utterly, had for one moment to yield to that supreme victory of sin and death.[1]

Thus was accomplished the salvation of the world. The sinner, when he realizes the Atonement, sees sin in its true light—an utter enemy; he, therefore, hates it as God does; and God in forgiving him does not do an immoral thing, but with forgiveness gives a new life unto holiness, and death unto sin. To forgive a sinner with his sins still on him and his sinful heart still unconverted within him is simply immorality. It would end in the tottering of the pillars of eternal Holiness on which the world, yea, eternity itself, is built.

And indeed you might almost say that the Cross has created the sense (or the full realization) of

[1] Did God die then? The question thus stated contains a fallacy and a lie. God as spirit cannot die—i.e., be extinguished. Many have asserted that even *our* spirit, as spirit, cannot die either. But any being that has spirit and body can have the two separated and so die. It is not correct, therefore, to say that God died, or even that the Word of God died; but the Incarnate Word called Christ died—i.e., the Spirit of the Incarnate One was separated from His flesh.

what sin is. It has, therefore, created the true attitude of abhorrence to it. And it has, therefore, created the true salvation from it. At the Cross the mind of man in regard to sin becomes attuned to the mind of God. And this is the meaning of the word 'the Blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin.' It cleanseth, because it cleanses the conscience of man, telling him that because he now feels towards his own sin as God does, he is forgiven; nay, more, his sin is removed, he is justified, that is, he returns to the relation with God that preceded sin. He is at peace with God, because he can now be truly at peace with himself. He is at peace with himself because he has now the right to be at peace with God.

Nothing but perfect Holiness could have involved such cost as the Passion of God in eternity and in Christ. Nothing but perfect Love could have borne it. Therefore in the Cross holiness and love, wrath and pity, justice and mercy, meet together and kiss one another.

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