

‘REASON AND REVELATION’¹

DR. ILLINGWORTH'S *Reason and Revelation* is a book which no thoughtful person can read without feelings of admiration for its author: admiration both for the wide learning which here, as in his other works, has enabled him to illustrate his subject by quotations from the Fathers, the Schoolmen, the philosophers of the eighteenth century, the psychologists of our own day; and also for the extreme felicity of some of his phrases. Dr. Illingworth describes prayer as ‘a unique school of sincerity’². Such a phrase is in itself an argument. It is an answer to that common theory of prayer which led M. Zola to speak of those who pray as lingering in a realm of ‘sweet illusion.’

It is obvious, however, that a theological book must be judged mainly by the general drift of its conclusions. There is (for reasons which will become clear presently) a certain difficulty in stating Dr. Illingworth's position concisely; but the general purpose of his book may be gathered from the following statement, which is framed almost entirely in his own words.

‘Christianity,’ Dr. Illingworth maintains, ‘has always claimed to be rational’³. But we have been taught by Kant that the human mind is not, as Locke and Hume had supposed, a blank tablet passively receptive of impressions from without⁴; and it came to be recognized with increasing clearness during the nineteenth century that the whole of our nature co-operates in the acquisition of knowledge⁵. Therefore Christianity is not to be judged by mere reason⁶. It is not from every man that Christianity can accept criticism; for the most important elements in its evidence are moral and spiritual facts, and these can only be read aright by men of moral and spiritual insight—insight born of discipline and effort⁷. Reason is limited by our personal prepossessions⁸. We cannot approach Christian evidences—for

¹ *Reason and Revelation: An Essay in Christian Apology*, by J. R. Illingworth (8vo, London, 1902).

² *Ibid.* p. 171.

³ p. vii.

⁴ p. 26.

⁵ p. viii.

⁶ p. 245.

⁷ p. 246.

⁸ p. ix.

example, the Gospel history—without presuppositions of one kind or another; we must approach the Gospel history either as Christians or as non-Christians¹. And these presuppositions result from old philosophical theories, rather than from new facts². Hence it is in the region of philosophy that all attacks on Christianity move and must be met³. Yet we must not reduce Christianity to a philosophy, as the Gnostics did⁴. The Fathers never regard Christianity as a mere philosophy, but always as an historic revelation. The heresies were attempts to rationalize this revelation, and the patristic answer to them consisted in the reassertion of the historic fact. And this was the meaning of dogma, epitomized history⁵. Thus we must maintain the well-known distinction between Reason and Revelation; for the Christian Revelation states truths which Reason could never have reached⁶, and even when revealed cannot comprehend⁷. If we are asked on what evidence the Fathers believed this revelation, we must answer that besides the evidence of Miracles and Prophecy they recognized the self-evidence of the Incarnation from its sublimity and power. And this argument from the intrinsic excellence of Christianity is an appeal to the natural reason of man⁸. A modern Christian, besides the presuppositions of natural religion which lie at the root of Christian belief, has also as evidence the Christian character and the Christian Church as facts of present experience⁹. Thus Christianity is an appeal, not to our reason only, but to our entire personality¹⁰; and faith is reasonable since it is only a particular application of the universal law of human life, namely Trust, based on the particular conviction that God is Love. And this conviction, though taught dogmatically, rests as much on evidence and argument as any other theory of the universe. Moreover, a deeper analysis will show that this trust in God is really the presupposition of all other trust; e. g. of trust in the uniformity of nature, and of trust in our fellow man¹¹. The great difficulty to the belief that God is love arises from the existence of sin in the world; but we cannot conceive finite free-will without the possibility of sin, or any worth in human nature without free-will¹². Nor must the Christian view of future punishment be said to complicate the

¹ p. xi. ² p. xi. ³ p. 245. ⁴ p. xi. ⁵ p. xii. ⁶ p. 130. ⁷ p. 122.
⁸ p. xiii. ⁹ pp. xiii-xv. ¹⁰ p. xv. ¹¹ pp. xvi and xvii. ¹² p. xvii.

original difficulty, since there is no one exclusively Christian doctrine on this subject¹; and we must bear in mind that the very darkest possibilities which the New Testament can suggest are part and parcel of the same revelation which assures us that God is Love².

It is hardly likely to be denied that the most important of the positions which Dr. Illingworth here defends is that which concerns the familiar distinction between the sphere of Reason and the sphere of Revelation—the distinction to which he refers in the title of his book. We must examine, then, with special attention his views on this subject.

The Christian revelation consists, he teaches, of a certain small group of doctrines, those of the Incarnation and the Trinity³, the divine origin of the Church⁴, the personality of God, the freedom of the will, the destiny of matter to become the manifestation of spirit⁵. These are to be distinguished, on the one hand, from the beliefs we may hold about subjects such as future punishment, with regard to which no clear revelation⁶ has been made; and, on the other hand, from those beliefs which are presupposed by revelation⁷ but are not a part of it; for example, that belief in God which belongs to natural religion, or again, the moral doctrines of the Sermon on the Mount, 'much of which was not original nor beyond the discovery of man's natural reason⁸.' The dogmas of the Christian Revelation, on the contrary, state truths which 'reason could not have reached⁹,' with which, moreover, it is 'incompetent to deal¹⁰'; truths which, 'if they were to be known at all, could be known by revelation only¹¹.' Revelation does not attempt to show the rational necessity of its doctrines¹², and these doctrines must not be criticized with the same freedom as philosophy allows itself in other fields¹³. They are 'fixed points' on which the Christian can no longer philosophize as if he were dealing with open questions¹⁴; they must be accepted with implicit obedience¹⁵, and must be allowed to prescribe the outlines within which philosophy is to move¹⁶.

It is clear that Dr. Illingworth's aim is to withdraw certain doctrines of the Christian faith from the arena of free philosophical

¹ p. xviii.

² p. 233.

³ p. 143.

⁴ pp. 183, 184.

⁵ p. 117.

⁶ p. 232.

⁷ p. 209.

⁸ p. 183.

⁹ p. 130.

¹⁰ p. 129.

¹¹ p. 129.

¹² p. 185.

¹³ See p. 185.

¹⁴ p. 117.

¹⁵ p. 129.

¹⁶ p. 241.

discussion, to put them into a class apart from the rest of our rational knowledge. We must ask, then, how far he succeeds in this attempt; how far the opposition between Reason and Revelation can, in the form in which he states it, be maintained. We may see cause perhaps for asking, as a subsidiary question, whether Dr. Illingworth himself maintains his theory consistently, whether indeed his own words may not again and again be quoted against it.

Now it would be foolish to enter upon this discussion without recognizing that, so far as its general outlines are concerned, Dr. Illingworth's theory not only has in its favour a great weight of authority, but also commends itself strongly to the sentiment of religious people. There are many to whom the suggestion that the Doctrine of the Trinity, for example, is a product of philosophic thinking appears to be an attempt to take away honour from God in order to confer it upon the mind of man. Would not such a view, it will be asked, reduce this doctrine to the level of a mere human speculation? Above all, will it not deprive it of the right to be spoken of as a mystery? As these questions represent a very common way of thinking, it will be worth while, before coming to close quarters with Dr. Illingworth's argument, to make a preliminary observation.

An unwillingness to treat Christian doctrines as falling within the scope of philosophy is very commonly bound up with the belief that philosophical conclusions are necessarily vague and insecure. Yet this is a belief which Dr. Illingworth (though he has sometimes, perhaps, fallen in some small measure under its influence¹) must, if it were presented to him in so many words, strongly repudiate, since he recognizes that belief in God is itself a philosophical doctrine, and arrived at by philosophical reasoning. 'Theism,' he says, 'and all that it involves lies in the region of philosophy².' 'Our reason demands a self-existent Being, to make relative and contingent existence possible³.' The same general opinion is held, as a matter of course, by all who make the usual division between natural and revealed religion. If then we should find ourselves led to maintain that, just as reason reflecting upon facts of experience, especially of spiritual experience, has brought men to belief in God, so further reflection

¹ See *Divine Immanence*, pp. 151, 154.

² *Reason and Revelation*, p. 166.

³ p. 198.

and further spiritual experience leads us to be dissatisfied with that conception of a 'unipersonal God' at which reflection first arrives, and has thus led to a belief in a plurality of Persons within the Godhead, we need at any rate have no fear that this view can be regarded as treating the Doctrine of the Trinity with disrespect. If without irreverence we may regard Theism as a product of philosophy, so without irreverence we may regard Trinitarianism as a product of philosophy likewise. We must recognize of course that reason would never have arrived at this doctrine without the help of religious experience. If the Fathers of Christian theology had been unspiritual men, and, equally, if they had been unacquainted with the story of the life of Christ, they would not have arrived at the theological views which they express. But this admission is in no way inconsistent with the frank acknowledgement that their doctrines are the work of reason. If Newton had not known by experience the motions of the heavenly bodies, he could not have formulated the Theory of Gravitation, yet no one denies that that theory is the work of the human mind from beginning to end. That, while regarding the Christian Dogmas as products of thought, we may fully take into account all that is involved in the desire of religious men to speak of them as mysteries, will be seen presently. The feeling, moreover, that to bring these doctrines into the region of philosophy is to take away honour from God, must surely disappear after a moment's reflection. We can make no such delimitation of frontier as this feeling implies between the regions of divine and human operation, since human reason is itself the gift of God. It is possible, therefore, to call in question Dr. Illingworth's antithesis between Reason and Revelation without in any way depreciating the doctrines of the Christian faith.

How then does Dr. Illingworth develop his position? No one who has attempted to follow his argument can have failed to be struck with the somewhat singular use which he makes of the word 'fact.' The doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation, he tells us, are statements of fact¹; and this not in the popular sense in which a fact merely means anything that is true, but in the special sense in which we distinguish the 'simple facts of the

¹ p. 143.

case' from the 'views' we may take of them, the 'theories' which we may form to explain them¹. A part of what Dr. Illingworth means is that the Fathers of the Church refused to give rationalistic explanations of the Christian mysteries—a subject to which we must return presently. Yet, even so, it is difficult to see how the expression 'the fact of the Trinity'² is consistent with what we find in other passages of the book. Dr. Illingworth admits that Theism belongs to philosophy³, and that Trinitarianism is an integral part of Theism—the 'natural climax to which Theism logically leads'⁴. Surely, then, on his own principles, the Doctrine of the Trinity must be part of our 'explanation of that ultimate meaning of the world which it is the constant object of philosophy to seek'.⁵ Thus it seems strange that he should sometimes speak⁶ as if this doctrine were no part of our explanation of the world at all, but simply a statement of one of the facts to be explained.

But the Trinity, he teaches, is not merely a 'fact' but an 'historic fact.' Dogma is 'epitomized or condensed history'⁷, and it states facts 'whose character as facts rests on the authoritative statements of Jesus Christ'⁸. Thus Dr. Illingworth adopts the familiar comparison which likens religious faith to our acceptance of a plain historical fact—such as the fact of some one's birth or death—on the testimony of a credible witness. Commonly, however, as this comparison is made, is it not to a great extent misleading? There is at least one difference, not always noticed, between the two cases. I may, of course, accept on the evidence of a friend a fact whose occurrence I cannot prove, whose surroundings and manner of happening I am quite ignorant of. There may also be some element of 'mystery' in the case, some difficulty in reconciling this fact with other facts. But I am, at any rate, perfectly clear as to the *meaning* of my friend's assertion. With the dogmas of religion it is just the opposite. The difficulty lies not in our inability to prove them, not in anything which surrounds them or follows from them, but within the four walls of the doctrines themselves. If I say that I believe in a Triune God, the difficulty is to know what it is that I mean by my own statement. Dr. Moberly, in his extremely valuable book

¹ See pp. 72, 142.² p. 143.³ p. 166.⁴ p. 238.⁵ p. 241.⁶ See p. 128.⁷ p. 132.⁸ p. 129.

*Atonement and Personality*¹, has pointed out that much popular Christian thought ‘meaning to be orthodox is in fact Tri-theistic.’ Now Tritheism in its simplest form makes a perfectly simple and intelligible statement. If a man tells me that he believes in Three Holy and Powerful Divine Beings, working with perfect harmony for their own collective glory and for the good of man, I have not the slightest difficulty in knowing what he means. But this doctrine bears hardly any resemblance at all to the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity, as we shall see at once if we ask whether these supposed Divine Beings are Divine in a strict sense—that is, not merely powerful but almighty. This question leads straight to the doctrine of ‘three Almighty,’ condemned in the Athanasian Creed; a doctrine which will not bear a moment’s examination, since each of these separate Divine Beings must, in order to be Almighty, have absolute control over the wills of the Others, leaving them not only not Almighty, but not even free. When however we try to correct, in ourselves or in others, this Tri-theistic way of thinking, it is then that we find where the real difficulty of the matter lies. What, we ask, is the true view which we wish to put in the place of this false view? In trying to reach it we not uncommonly find that we are merely alternating between Tritheism on the one hand and Unitarianism on the other.

There are some people, as we know, who tell us simply to ‘accept’ the doctrine without further inquiry. But we cannot even ‘accept’ a statement without knowing what it means. If we do, we are merely accepting words. And to accept words, without giving them any meaning in particular, is obviously a very different thing from orthodox belief. Yet no sooner do we try to arrive at any definite meaning than we find ourselves stumbling helplessly from one heresy to another, till we are almost tempted to give up the effort in despair and to sink back upon the unbeliever’s conclusion that Christian Dogma has no meaning at all.

Against this purely unbelieving view it can, of course, always be pointed out that the Christian Fathers, who were quite as sincere thinkers as other people, defended their dogma with zeal, and that they would not have defended it if it had not meant

¹ p. 84.

something to their minds. This is an argument which, so far as it goes, any honest man acquainted with history will admit. But it is plainly insufficient. We need to convince the inquirer not merely that theology meant something to Athanasius long ago, but that it means something to us to-day.

Now, at this point at least, Dr. Illingworth affords us most valuable help. He tells us what 'the essence of the Christian Revelation' is; what 'we mean by it'¹. 'Briefly, its essence is'—to quote that part of his statement which concerns more immediately the Doctrine of the Trinity—'that God is Love; and that this is possible, because there is a Trinity of Persons within the Godhead, between whom the reciprocity of love can exist, a divine society'².

The more this statement is reflected upon, the more valuable will it be seen to be. Perhaps no better illustration of its meaning can be given than by a reference to Shelley's satirical paraphrase of the opening chapter of the Bible³:

'From an eternity of idleness
I, God, awoke; in seven days' toil made earth
From nothing.'

These words certainly call up a very unpleasant picture; and every one must feel that the Trinitarian has a position of advantage in being able to say: 'According to my view, the existence of God can never be described as an eternity of idleness, but must rather be thought of as that which Shelley would most have praised, an eternity of love.' Shelley's words therefore enable us in some measure to understand why the Doctrine of the Trinity was so zealously defended by the early Church. The religious instinct had led men to desire to believe in a God Whom they could thank for all things, to Whom they could ascribe all perfections. The arguments of natural religion seemed to justify the religious instinct in this desire. But Monotheism had, after all, made no very complete conquest of the human mind. Is not this partially explained if we reflect that behind the ordinary Monotheism there lies for the thinking man—even if he be only dimly conscious of it—the nightmare conception which Shelley's lines put into words? When Christianity, which was everywhere the champion of Monotheism against heathenism, spoke never-

¹ *Reason and Revelation*, p. 183.

² p. 183.

³ *Queen Mab*, vii.

theless of the Father as loving the Son, and the Son the Father—so that loyalty and submission to the Divine Will, a state of mind than which nothing is more divine, can be ascribed to God Himself—is it surprising if men felt that this was the proper outcome of that ascription of all perfections to God which had been made by natural religion, and therefore vehemently rejected those heresies which, though intellectually clearer than orthodoxy, yet led men back to that loveless¹ view of God which Christianity had replaced by a brighter one?

But at this transition from Greek or Jewish Monotheism to the Doctrine of the Trinity, what exactly is it that has happened? Have we simply made a relapse into Tritheism, as Dr. Illingworth’s phrase ‘a divine society’ might seem to suggest? The sentiment of Christendom denies that we have made any such relapse. But can we justify this sentiment, and show clearly wherein the difference between Trinitarianism and Tritheism consists?

The difference between the two may be shown readily enough by any one who—venturing upon a philosophical illustration—will compare the way in which Christian thought ‘outgrows’ Jewish Monotheism with the way in which, even in dealing with everyday human experience, the mind ‘outgrows’ the familiar conception of Space.

Space, we say, extends infinitely in all directions, so that nothing can possibly be outside it. But we cannot say that our thoughts and wishes are within it. They do not take up room, or move about inside our body. When Locke says that his soul travels in the coach from Oxford to London, we feel at once that there is something wrong. Athanasius remarks that we ought not to ask ‘where’ God is. It is the same with the soul. God and the soul are present in the world in somewhat the same sense in which the ‘influence of Titian’ may be present on the canvas of a modern artist. This influence would not take up the room which otherwise might have been occupied by pieces of paint. That is, it is not present spatially. If, then, my thoughts are neither within space nor outside it, then from a purely spatial point of view they must be regarded as non-existent. In other

¹ In this connexion the curious piece of polemic in Athanasius’ *Historia Arianorum ad Monachos* (ed. Bened. tom. i p. 366, may not be without significance.

words, the spatial way of thinking, which is absolutely necessary for certain purposes of Science and daily life, breaks down when we come to admit the reality of human thoughts and wishes. It cannot, without contradicting itself, admit that certain things are real, of whose reality there is nevertheless no doubt.

Similarly—to take a less prosaic example—the conception of Cause breaks down when we apply it to God. One of our primary religious instincts urges us to give God thanks, and this implies that He is the Cause of what happens—that God's Will is the Cause, and the World the Effect. But if we are thus to separate God's Will and the World, so that God's Will is one thing and the World another, then we require some link—some third term—to join the two, just as our will is connected with its fulfilment by certain Laws of Nature. Causation implies the connexion of two things in accordance with a law. Religion, however, refuses to divide its gratitude between God on the one hand, and some Law which is distinct from God on the other: and therefore Religion comes in the end to treat God's Will and its fulfilment as inseparable, as no longer two, but one. Thus the conception of God as Cause has at length broken down under the stress of the very same feeling which originally evoked it: for when we no longer have two distinct terms, Cause and Effect, we no longer have what we mean by Causation.

And just as these conceptions, Space and Causation, break down as thought advances, so the common conception of a Person breaks down when we apply it to God. A person in the ordinary sense of the word, if he is to love, needs an object of love outside himself. 'Dependence is as fundamental a characteristic of personality as self-identity¹.' God, however, is no longer what we mean by God—is no longer the perfect Being which we define Him to be—if He is dependent on something outside Himself: and therefore it is not ultimately satisfactory to think of God as a Person in the sense in which that word is commonly understood².

¹ *Reason and Revelation*, p. 195.

² It is a fashion with some theologians to say, not that the conceptions of Cause or Personality 'break down' when applied to God, but rather that it is only when applied to Him that these conceptions 'find their full meaning.' But is this way of speaking anything more than an attempt to introduce a new use of words? If we choose to use the word Causation where there are no two terms to be distinguished as Cause and Effect, we are no doubt at liberty to do so; but we certainly

The difference, then, between Tritheism and Trinitarianism is that Tritheism—in common with Unitarianism and ordinary popular Atheism—employs the common conception of a Person, while Trinitarianism is, in one aspect, simply a declaration of the inadequacy of this common conception to our theological needs. Just as, according to Athanasius, we must not speak of God as in Space at all—and therefore must not think of Him as either in motion or at rest—so we must not speak of God as, in the common sense of those words, either personal or impersonal. To the man who cannot emancipate himself from spatial conceptions—who asks therefore whether God is somewhere, or everywhere, or nowhere—we must undoubtedly answer that He is everywhere. For the purposes of the religious imagination the thought of the omnipresence of God is of permanent value¹. Similarly to the man who asks—as for certain purposes we must all continue to ask—whether God is personal or impersonal, the answer must be that He is personal. But nevertheless, according to the Trinitarian, personality—in its common as distinct from its theological sense—is an inadequate conception, just as extension through Space is an inadequate conception, for the full truth about God. In other words, Tritheism deals in conceptions which are shallow and clear, Trinitarianism in conceptions which are mysterious and profound. And thus Dr. Illingworth's account of the 'meaning' and 'essence' of the Christian Dogma leads us to a view entirely congenial with the general religious sentiment—a view which represents it as teaching, on the positive side, that God is Love in the fullest and most human sense of that word; that is, that the Ultimate Reality is good, according to that final standard of goodness with which we believe ourselves to have in Christian morality at least a partial acquaintance; and, on the negative side, that the Trinity is a mystery; that is, that certain common conceptions which we use for the purposes of Science and daily life are inadequate when applied to God. Is it not run the risk of being misunderstood. Dr. Moberly (*Atonement and Personality*, p. 162) sees 'no reason for assuming that what is implicit in human personality must exhaust the meaning of personality in God.' But if, as he suggests, we are to use the word 'personality' to cover something which even a 'perfect analysis' of its usual meaning would not show to be involved in it, what are we doing but arbitrarily using the word in a new sense? How in this case can the old meaning throw any light upon the new? What connexion is there between them?

¹ See 2 Chron. vi 18. See also *Library of the Fathers*, vol. viii p. 18 and note.

just because it is the expression of the two truths that God is Love, and that God is mysterious, that the ordinary religious man most loves and values the doctrine of the Trinity?

It may of course be objected that, even as an abstract statement, Dr. Illingworth's account of this doctrine is insufficient, that many religious experiences and conceptions have converged to produce the Christian Dogma as we have it, and that in particular the inward experience of God's working in the human soul, and the resulting conception of God as Spirit, needed even in a bare outline a somewhat fuller mention than it receives in Dr. Illingworth's summary¹, in which the Doctrine of the Spirit—as distinct from that of the plurality of the Divine Persons—appears as subordinate to the Doctrine of the Visible Church. This criticism, however, need not be discussed here. It is a criticism which implies that Dr. Illingworth's treatment of the subject, even if incomplete, proceeds on the right lines; and it would be ungracious to appear to grudge to Dr. Illingworth the full measure of praise which is due to a writer who has had the courage to tell us what the Christian Revelation means, in contrast with the many theologians who have seemed to think that the less significance and intelligibility it is supposed to possess the more venerable it will become.

Taking Dr. Illingworth's statement, however, just as it stands, can we regard it as consistent with his own theory of Revelation? His theory of Revelation may be expressed in the following propositions: (1) that Christian Dogma is history, not philosophy²; (2) that it rests on authority, not on reason³; (3) that we must not philosophize about it with the same freedom which philosophy claims in dealing with other subjects⁴. Surely these propositions are not really consistent with the view that the Doctrine of the Trinity *means* that God is Love and that perfect Love implies reciprocity⁵.

For, in the first place, the Doctrine of the Trinity, as thus explained, is at once a criticism and an expansion of the common conception of God. How can such a criticism of a fundamental conception of the mind belong to the domain of history? If Theism 'lies in the region of philosophy' as Dr. Illingworth

¹ p. 183.

² p. 132.

³ p. 129.

⁴ p. 117.

⁵ See p. 183.

asserts¹, must we not on this view say the same thing about the Doctrine of the Trinity? Will Dr. Illingworth then fall back upon some such statement as the following—'That God is Love, and that this is not possible unless the reciprocity of Love can exist within the Godhead, is not, strictly speaking, what the Christian Revelation *means*: it is rather what *follows* from it. Behind this obviously philosophical reflection concerning reciprocal relations—and beyond all such "subtleties of conception"²—there lies the simple historical fact of the existence of the Three Persons?' Have we not, however, already seen that the Doctrine of the Trinity states no simple historical fact at all? It is not couched in terms which history uses. If we say that Jesus Christ was miraculously born we are making a historical statement. If we say that this birth is to be regarded as an Incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity, we have passed beyond historical fact to theological interpretation. A 'Tri-personal consciousness'; 'Three Subsistences of One Substance'; 'Three Existences of One Essence'; 'Three Subsistences of One Subsistence'—these surely are not the categories of history³. Dr. Illingworth will hardly say that the Incarnation is an occurrence in the life of Three historical Persons. If the Doctrine of the Trinity uses the word Person in the sense in which that word is used by history, it is not distinguishable from Tritheism. Unless it draws our minds above the region of historical conceptions altogether—unless we see it in its philosophical context—we can give it no meaning except a heretical one⁴.

¹ p. 166. ² See p. 142. ³ Moberly, *Atonement and Personality*, pp. 159, 175.

⁴ Theologians are often disposed to make in this connexion two contradictory demands. They insist on the one hand that, not only provisionally, but finally and without qualification, God shall be regarded as a Person in the usual sense of that word; and, on the other hand, that God's nature shall be regarded as utterly inscrutable. How can God's Nature be utterly inscrutable if we have a conception under which it is not merely provisionally useful, but finally satisfactory, to bring it?

To say that certain common conceptions are inadequate to express the Nature of God is not Agnosticism—since we must have some positive knowledge of God before we can recognize this inadequacy—and is far more in accordance with the usual religious sentiment about mystery than is Dr. Illingworth's remark that 'to comprehend God would be synonymous with possessing universal knowledge' (p. 185). Mystery means something different from mere ignorance of facts. No one would think of saying that a man's life was a mystery merely because we did not know all that he had done.

Secondly, when Dr. Illingworth interprets the Doctrine of the Trinity as meaning that the Godhead is such as to admit within it the reciprocity of love, is he not, in thus telling us what the doctrine means, at the same time giving us a reason for holding it? If the 'conviction that God is Love rests as much on evidence and argument as any other theory of the universe¹,' and if, moreover, Christian doctrine is 'the natural climax to which Theism logically leads²,' then our faith rests not upon authority but upon Reason. Let us freely admit that if the Doctrine of the Trinity had not been suggested to us by our teachers we should not have been able to construct it. Yet if, when once it is presented to us, we can see that it logically follows from belief in God, then it no more rests upon authority than the axioms of Euclid rest upon the authority of those who first taught them. Thus even if our Saviour—besides placing together in the Baptismal Formula three words of deep religious significance in a singularly impressive conjunction, a conjunction whose suggestiveness theology may still be very far from having exhausted—had explicitly declared the Doctrine of the Trinity as it is stated in the Creeds of the Church, it would still not have been true that this doctrine rested on His authority. His theological teaching would have been 'an appeal to the natural reason of man³' just as His moral teaching is.

'But,' Dr. Illingworth will say, 'the comparison with Euclid is altogether misleading. Euclid deals with an abstract subject-matter, whereas in deciding upon the truth of Christian doctrine we are dealing with a subject-matter which is complex and concrete⁴.' Dr. Illingworth's treatment of the distinction between abstract and concrete thinking is worthy of careful attention, but it does not support his theory of revelation. A judgement which concerns literature—a decision, for example, as to how much of *Henry VIII* is the work of Shakespeare—is a conspicuous example of 'concrete thinking.' In such a case it is necessary to take into account, so far as possible, the whole context of the problem, and impossible to exclude the influence of those presuppositions which depend on the greater or less acuteness of our literary taste. But no one says that literary judgements rest on revelation. Similarly, when we observe that good men and bad men judge differently of Christian evidences, ought we not to be

¹ pp. xvi, xvii.² p. 238.³ See p. xiii.⁴ See p. 70.

concerned to show that the presuppositions of the former are rational? We weaken our case if we suggest that the good men have some non-rational sources of conviction which 'limit' reason from without¹.

The question, then, which we must ask is whether the Trinitarian Dogma is really the logical climax of Theism or not. If it is, then, like Theism itself, it rests upon reason. If it is not—if we can consistently hold in the fullest sense that God is Love without believing in a plurality of Persons within the Godhead—then the whole of Dr. Illingworth's justification of Trinitarian belief breaks down. So far as Dr. Illingworth teaches that the argument which leads from belief in God to belief in the Trinity is not conclusive, and therefore needs to be eked out by a reference to revelation, he is, in fact, playing into the hands of the Unitarians, who maintain that no one would ever accept the doctrine of the Trinity on its own merits, if he were not biassed in its favour by attachment to traditional teaching. Dr. Illingworth is surely a better defender of Christian belief when he says² that 'the essence of the Christian position was that the life and teaching of Jesus Christ had revealed to the intellect as well as to the heart what neither the heart nor the intellect could have discovered by themselves, but which, when once revealed, they *could recognize as self-evidently true*,' than when he says—in exactly opposite sense—that 'the Christian religion claims to be a revelation of truths about God and man which we can see to be eminently reasonable, but *cannot adequately test*'³. Must there not be something wrong with the position which can betray a writer of Dr. Illingworth's great powers into such a contradiction as this?

But, thirdly, is not the very conception of Dogma as a statement 'with which reason is incompetent to deal'—which reason must not freely criticize—intrinsically unsound? 'Of course,' says Dr. Illingworth, 'a revelation must be understood to begin with⁴'; and towards a better understanding of the Christian Dogma he gives us much help, as we have seen. But to understand it we must think about it; and if we are to think, we must think honestly. We must allow thought to follow its own laws: we must surrender ourselves to the logical consequences which are involved in the meaning of the terms we use. Dr. Illingworth

¹ See p. ix. ² p. 125. ³ p. 239 (the italics are added here). ⁴ p. 184.

does not sufficiently distinguish between thinking about given facts and thinking with a prescribed conclusion. We can hardly expect the world to have much respect for our thought if we give out that before beginning to think we have already decided upon the conclusion 'at which we are to arrive'. If a statement is presented for our belief, we must surely ask how far it is consistent with itself, and how far it agrees or disagrees with what we otherwise know: but to do this is to subject the statement to free criticism.

Moreover, as Dr. Illingworth himself recognizes, the Christian dogmas are not absolutely final and satisfactory. They are 'the most accurate or least inaccurate modes' of stating the truth². Indeed it is obvious that statements which are not perfectly clear cannot be regarded as absolutely final. 'The Three Persons,' says Feuerbach, 'are not only *Unum*—the gods of Olympus are that—but *Unus* . . . God is a Personal Being consisting of Three Persons³.' We cannot be contented to leave the subject thus. If we are really convinced that belief in God is a rational necessity, if we are in earnest in saying that Trinitarianism is a real advance upon the doctrine of a God regarded as 'uni-personal,' then we cannot be willing to let the matter remain in confusion. If it has been worth while to advance so far, it is worth while to press on still further. It cannot but be right to hope that the Spirit of God will lead us into all the truth, not merely to a part of it⁴.

Such a hope is not really contrary to the views of the Christian Fathers. It is true, as Dr. Illingworth says, that they rejected the endeavours of the heretics to 'rationalize Christian doctrine⁵.' But the heresies were not so much 'attempts at explanation' as attempts to eliminate everything difficult, everything for which an explanation was required. The fault of the heretics was not that they tried to know too much, but that they tried to think of God under the conceptions of vulgar rationalism, to explain the doctrine of the Trinity by means of the very conceptions against which that doctrine is essentially a protest. When Athanasius teaches that there are certain questions which are not to be asked, and says of those who ask them that 'it is all

¹ See p. 241.

² p. 182.

³ *Essence of Christianity*, ch. xxiv—Miss Evans's translation.

⁴ St. John xvi 13.

⁵ *Reason and Revelation*, p. 121.

one as if they sought *where* God is¹, the moral of this comparison is, not that it is wrong to wish for knowledge, but rather that we must not think of God under inadequate categories. It is 'irreligious' to ask where God is, not because God wishes His position in Space to be kept a secret, but because it shows 'ignorance of God' to think of Him as occupying Space at all. The example set by the Fathers, if rightly understood, is not in favour of those who would withdraw theological statements from philosophical criticism. And may we not say, in general, that Dr. Illingworth is far more in consonance with the best theological traditions, as well as with the most vigorous parts of his own work, when he tells us that Christianity is essentially on the side of free thought² than when he teaches that there are certain doctrines with which reason is incompetent to deal? For is it seriously possible to treat the growth of Christian Dogma, even if we give the very simplest account of it, as anything else than a philosophical movement? 'The Christian Dogma arose,' it may be said, 'simply because Jesus Christ—Whom His followers recognized as their Lord and their God, the highest object of homage and reverence which they could conceive—was known to address prayers to His Father, and spoke of receiving from His Father the promise of the Holy Ghost.' Yet, if the early Christians had been really unspeculative, this faith need never have taken shape as a theology; they need not have asked, as they did ask, what the relation was between this Supreme Object of their homage and the God of Rationalism and Natural Religion. The conception of God as the Highest Object of Reverence, and the conception of God as the Creator and Governor of the World, are, after all, two conceptions, not one; and the refusal to identify the Creator of the World with the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ was not, as we know, unheard of in early times. If the Fathers, taking up a position similar to that of the Ritschlian school of modern days, had argued that no theory of His relation to the Creator of the World could make Jesus seem any more Divine than they already recognized Him to be, they might have condemned all the attempts at theological definition—those of Athanasius as well as those of the Arians—as heretical alike. It cannot be said that the temptation to a low estimate of these

¹ *Against the Arians*, ii 36, quoted by Dr. Illingworth, p. 127.

² p. 22.

definitions had never been felt. Dr. Illingworth quotes St. Hilary¹ as complaining that 'whereas it is by faith alone that we should worship the Father, and reverence the Son, and be filled with the Spirit², we are now obliged to strain our weak human language in the utterance of things beyond its scope—forced into this evil procedure of our foes.' Yet the Fathers became philosophers even in spite of themselves: for when once—however reluctantly—they had consented to use these definitions, they cannot have been willing that they should be regarded as phrases conveying no intelligible meaning to the mind. And it is a mere truism to say that in dealing with intelligible conceptions reason is dealing with what falls entirely within its own province.

There are many matters of great interest in Dr. Illingworth's book besides those which have been dealt with here—notably, his very able treatment of the thesis that the various lines of Christian evidence form, 'not a chain of reasoning which would be no stronger than its weakest link,' but a 'cumulative argument'; and his somewhat strange assertion that for Christian theology the Freedom of the Will cannot be an open question.

His handling of these subjects is, however, of far less importance than his general theory of Revelation. The school of writers to which Dr. Illingworth belongs has produced work of very high theological and religious value. Anything which impairs the usefulness of writings such as theirs is a matter of concern to the Church. But is there not good reason for thinking that if they could bring themselves to abandon that partial distrust of philosophy of which Dr. Illingworth's theory of Revelation is a symptom, they would immeasurably strengthen their position as interpreters of the Christian Dogma?

CHARLES J. SHEBBEARE.

¹ See p. 128.

² The basis of fellowship of the New York State Conference of Religion is described in the following terms :—

- (1) The Fatherhood of God.
- (2) The Ethical Teachings of Jesus and the Prophets.
- (3) Emphasis on Social Righteousness.
- (4) The Spirit of God in the Minds of Men.

Thus the members of the Conference would be at one with St. Hilary in the desire to 'worship the Father, to reverence the Son, and to be filled with the Spirit.' If we recognize that the theology of the Church Councils is more definite than that of the New York Conference, we ought to recognize also that, on St. Hilary's own showing, this result is due in some degree to the heretics.