

A Letter to an Inquiring Hindu

W. Kelly.

My dear Sir,

I too have to apologise for leaving your letter, though of the greatest interest to me, so long unanswered. Suffice it to say, that I had much to wind up before quitting home, and that much fresh occupation has hindered since I came to this busy city. You are right in not allowing your mind to get dragged into discussions, and I trust that I shall in no way tempt you to a path so unpromising especially in the things of God.

But you speak of the doctrine of the Trinity early in your letter. Now that entirely depends on the revelation of God, and indeed almost entirely on the Christian revelation or Greek Scriptures; for, though the Hebrew Scriptures fall in with it when revealed, they can of themselves be scarcely said to reveal it. So, too, the points of salvation and faith turn on the same larger and prior question of their Divine revelation, as distinct from the external testimony of creation or the internal testimony of the human conscience.

But, surely, my dear sir, if you have seriously read the books commonly called the Old and New Testaments, you can hardly have failed to see their essential difference, not in measure only but in kind, from the sacred books of India, China, Arabia, and any other people or age. They differ quite as much from the Talmud of the Jews and from the commentaries of the early Christian writers, which bear the unmistakable signs of being merely human and consequently fallible and in fact erroneous.

The Old and New Testaments, besides their superior moral character, differ in two respects. They have an historical substratum, peculiar each to each, supported if their testimony be true by miraculous vouchers; and they are prophetic. Now none but God could clothe men with miraculous power for some worthy moral end, and this too where the ways of the men so invested preclude suspicion of trickery and collusion. Still less, if possible, could any but God give distinct prophecies of the most unlikely events hundreds of years before the fact. These qualities are found only in the Bible, the wonder of which is increased by the circumstance that its writers extend over a space of about 1500 years from Moses till the Apostle John.

These things are only explicable by the truth of the claim of Scripture to be God's word. If the Bible then be His word, faith comes by hearing that word. Reasoning is good in its own sphere and for its own proper ends; but faith is subjection to and reception of God's word because it is His. If God has made such a revelation, it binds the conscience of all who hear it. But in such a world as this one need not wonder that men disbelieve it. For on the face of it men generally are far from God and opposed to His will. That God should leave man, so dark and wretched as he is, without a revelation, would be strange indeed: not so, spite of such a revelation, that many should reject it, and many should be unfaithful to it. Least of all is this a difficulty to one who believes the Bible; for the Old Testament predicted the sin and unbelief of the Jews, as the New Testament predicts the sin and unbelief of the Christian professing body. As the revelation comes from God to man and acts as a moral test, so does Christ. If I love what is good and holy and true, I shall love the Bible, and the Lord Jesus; if I like my own will and way, and the world, I shall despise both the Bible and the Lord Jesus Christ. If I begin to learn my unfitness for God's presence, I shall begin to abhor myself and to look to God, who will surely lead me on to welcome the good news of redemption through Jesus Christ.

Either Jesus was a Divine person or He was the worst of deceivers. This last you do not think: how then can you fairly escape from owning the glory of His person? Seven hundred and fifty years before His birth, Isaiah (Isa. 7) declared to King Ahaz that the Virgin should conceive and bear a son to be called Immanuel, GOD WITH US, further calling Him the mighty God (Isa. 9), the Father of eternity (or the age to come), etc. In due time the Virgin Mary does bear such a son, even Jesus, who raises the dead, rises Himself from the dead, and goes up to heaven in the face of His disciples.

Again, even the greatest difficulties which unbelief finds are all necessarily elements of the history and of the doctrine. Thus, if Jesus had not been a man, man had derived no such benefit as the gospel proclaims. If He had not been God, the benefit could only have been human, earthly, and temporal. To give such a boon as Christianity offers, He must be both God and man in the same person. Again, if He had not died as man, there could have been no Christian redemption by blood. If He who died had not been Divine, the value of blood-shedding had been only that of a creature, and limited. To be infinite, not in person only, but in His sacrifice for us, He must be, as Scripture declares He was, both God and man.

Take a proof of this from the *Hebrew* Scriptures. It was written by Zechariah 500 years before the crucifixion. "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced." This is still as a whole to be fulfilled for the Jews is a *nation*. It has only been verified by individuals as yet. The prophet speaks of a future time of trouble, when the Gentiles will gather round Jerusalem and God will appear on their behalf when at the last extremity and they will then recognise in their deliverer God the One whom they pierced. The "I" of the passage (Zech. 12: 10) is certainly God, Jehovah of Israel; yet He must have taken a body and come in humiliation, if He had been once "pierced" by them. In whom can all this meet but in Jesus of Nazareth, the Lord God of Israel?

The very notion of Christianity is above human thought till God revealed it. Others have concerned God's appearing in human form to steal, to kill, to indulge lust or other evil. Such were the ideas of Greeks and Romans. Scripture alone reveals God assuming human nature without sin to be a sacrifice for sinners, to make them saints, to glorify Himself in and by them. With this, too, the Trinity harmonises perfectly: for, instead of its being mere ideas or various functions and displays, the Father in His love gives the Son, who in equal love comes to die, in order righteously to put away sin and to rise in witness of the victory for the believer, and the Holy Spirit deigns to work in the conscience and heart of him who believes, both to convince him of his need and then to fill him with Divine streams of enjoyment and power to magnify Him who died and rose for him.

You will see from what is already said that I in no wise despise the value of reason. Thus it is irrational and immoral to suppose that a Being good and holy, omniscient and omnipotent, made this world and man as they are now. But reason, unaided, cannot account for it. Revelation declares that God made all good, but suspended its continuance on the obedience of its head — that the head failed, and that the race and the world fell thereby. My reason bows to this as the only true and righteous and sufficient explanation.

But how can I rise out of this state of ruin? My reason fails to find a remedy. Divine revelation shows me God undertaking, God giving, God fulfilling the mighty task; and this in the nature which failed, yet to the glory of Himself. This my soul accepts as the only solution of all my difficulties. It is worthy of God to save the lost, but it is only worthy of Him to save holily and righteously at all cost to Himself, at infinite cost, yet to save freely of grace, and therefore by faith of His testimony that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. In every other scheme love is lost, or righteousness is compromised, or guilty man is flattered. The cross

of Christ alone satisfies and harmonises all truth, meeting every want of man and every attribute of God.

Before the Scriptures were written at all, as in the days of Moses, and before they were finished, as in the days of Jesus and the apostles, miracles were vouchsafed by God to arrest attention to the Divine power put forth in a less or a greater degree, as seemed fit to Him.

But, when all was written, miracles were not continued; for then the truth revealed was complete, and the testimony such as only inattention or self-will can dispute, the fulfilment of prophecy being the most powerful continuous testimony after miracles were no longer wrought.

Accepting then these revelations as proved truly Divine, I hear Jesus saying (John 8), "Before Abraham was, I am." Did He speak the truth? If not, the morality of the gospel in its Chief is detestable, not Divine. Lofty precepts condemn, if there be not holy practice. If Jesus was holy and true, He was God, according to the import of His own words. None but a Divine person could say, "Before Abraham was, I am," πρὶν Ἀβραάμ γενέσθαι, ἐγὼ εἰμι. If you know Greek tolerably, you will see, when it is pointed out, the amazing force of this statement. In speaking of Abraham, a mere creature, the Lord uses the verb γίνομαι, which means to become, or come into being. In speaking of Himself, He employs the substantive verb, which alone is proper to express, where required, absolute uncaused being. He, does not merely say, "Before Abraham was, I was," no matter how: high you carry the point and term of His existence, even if it were the first of created beings, as the Arians say. If so, Jesus would have said, ἐγενόμην. But no! He, the lowliest of men, could not deny His deity. He is God, the "I am," and so He declared Himself, which provoked the unbelieving Jews to take up stones. But the time to suffer was not yet come; and so He passed through and went on His way. Again in John 10 Jesus declares that He has ἐξουσίαν, right and title as well as power, to lay down His life as well as to take it again: who could have such authority but a Divine person?

This then was no mere Athanasian dogma. It is the distinct teaching of John 1, Philippians 2, Hebrews 1, and very many other passages in the, apostolic writings. It is the keystone of Christianity. Without it not only is its salvation a myth but its morality is a cheat. For all is built on the capital truth that God in Divine love humbled Himself to become man and die for sinners, that He might save and bless the believer to the uttermost, not by Christ only, but with Him.

But be assured, my dear sir, as great as is the free and boundless blessing of the gospel, so equally the sin and danger of neglecting it — mark, not of opposing only but of neglecting it. For, if it be true that God really give His Son thus to live and die, the guilt of neglecting so great salvation, once it is brought before us, is proportionate to the dignity of His person and the efficacy of the work wrought at an incalculable cost. May the gracious God and Father of the Lord Jesus bless you, giving you to read honestly the Scriptures, with prayer for Divine light and guidance! — Believe me ever faithfully yours,

W. K.