

# THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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## Traducianism

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The various theological doctrines are so interwoven that it is sometimes difficult to know in what order to discuss them. As a professor once said of a work on philosophy (and no doubt of all works on philosophy, so also with theology) one cannot understand the first chapter until after he has understood the last chapter. The nineteenth-century theologian, W. G. T. Shedd, had prepared for the subjects just discussed in our previous section by a long passage on the origin of individual souls. He put it in his chapter on "Creation." A. A. Hodge might well have done so, for he holds to the immediate creation of every soul at the moment of conception. But Shedd holds that the souls of the children are as much derived from their parents as their bodies are. The plan of the present treatise is to connect the origin of souls with federal headship and the imputation of guilt from Adam. The origin of souls was mentioned in that section, but its discussion was deferred.

### *A. A. Hodge*

A. A. Hodge is a creationist. He teaches that each successive human soul is immediately created by God in billions of cases, billions of separate acts of creation. But his defense of this position and his arguments against traducianism are both beset with difficulties. In the first place, he acknowledges that "without going the length of Realism, it appears probable that the divinely ordained representative...is conditioned on the generic unity

of men as constituting a race propagated by generation." Note the term *propagated*. This means that traducianism is at least plausible. But Hodge does not want to go "the length of Realism." But if not, then what? Everyone who has had an introductory course in philosophy knows, or should know, that Aristotle and John Locke proposed an empirical method by which sensory observation could be transmuted into abstract concepts, which in turn form the basis for universal propositions. But Aristotle never spelled out the method; he depended on an illustration of an army in rout. Locke was more specific, but Berkeley demolished his argument. Hence the more philosophical readers may here wish to consider whether the generic unity Hodge suggests can be produced without adopting the Realism he detests. As for Christ himself—though traducianism, operating through Mary alone, can account for his human soul—his federal headship cannot be accounted for, either by creationism or by traducianism. Not by creationism, because even if his human soul had been a special creation, it is the Person and not just the human nature that is the federal head. Not by traducianism, because Christ had no descendants. But this is not the case with Adam.

One reason why A. A. Hodge makes such a poor case for creationism is his imperious urge to refute Realism. Thus he says, "The doctrine that each soul is severally and immediately created by God at the

instant of conception<sup>1</sup> is obviously and absolutely inconsistent with the Realistic view of human nature. *No Creationist can be a Realist.*" I am not sure that this emphatic statement is altogether correct. For one thing, it may be possible for a Creationist and a Realist to agree on the constitution of human nature without agreeing on the immediate origin of each soul. Nor is it true that every Realist agrees with Plato. Shedd certainly believed that God created the world, and he did not believe in the pre-existence of souls; whereas Plato had no place for any strictly creative Deity. After all, Augustine was a Realist, and he argued strongly against Plotinus in favor of creation.

Since Hodge is so strongly opposed to Realism, one may oppose Hodge on that basis. For example, the theory of imagination by which Aristotle aimed to produce concepts which in turn would make universal judgments possible is open to devastating attack.<sup>2</sup> Then if Aristotelian Conceptualism be rejected, only Realism and Nominalism remain; and the latter must reduce the Trinity to tritheism or atheism. But the more immediate rebuttal, and the one more appropriate to the present treatise, is the Scriptural material.

Hodge seems to think that traducianism is inconsistent with the federal headship of Adam: "Calvin ...[et al.] unite in affirming that we were in Adam representatively; that we really and truly sinned in him because his sin is our sin, really and truly our sin as to its federal responsibility." But far from denying federal headship, traducianism offers a possible, even a probable explanation of why God chose Adam to be our federal head. Creationism allows only a physical or corporeal, not a spiritual, connection between Adam and us.

Yet Hodge wants "hereditary corruption." But how can corruption be hereditary if every new soul is an immediate creation? Hodge surely does not help himself by his incomplete disjunctions. On two successive pages he argues, "these men [Calvin,

Beza, Turretin] were not Realists ...they specifically explain ... that we were in Adam *representatively*." Hodge's disguised premises are (1) that federal representation is impossible in Realism, and (2) that Adam's being our representative cannot be harmonized with traducianism. These two premises are clearly untrue, for traducianism not only aims at but also succeeds in making representationism more easily understandable. The two do not form an exclusive disjunction as Hodge maintains.

Another poor argument shortly appears. "If the entire genus was in Adam, the entire antediluvian race was, in the same sense, in Noah. If we were guilty co-agents in the first sin of the one...we must be... guilty of every one of the sins of Noah." This paragraph teems with confusion. First, we are indeed descendants of Noah. Second, the entire genus was in Noah, and is in us too. Otherwise we would not be human beings. As Plato so clearly said in his *Parmenides*, the Idea, or genus, is not like a canopy or tent in which each man is directly under only a part of the covering. The Idea or definition must be complete in every individual case, or—in better Platonic language—every man must participate in the whole Idea.

But this in no way implies that we are guilty of any—let alone every one—of the sins of Noah. In fact we are not guilty even of Adam's sins, that is, his second, third, and fourth sin. We are guilty only of his first sin. Just because the federal head of the whole human race must be, or most appropriately is, its ancestor, it by no means follows that every ancestor must be a federal head. Hodge's logic is bad, very bad. Actually he is applying simple conversion to a universal affirmative. The point is that God chose Adam as federal head of the race; he did not so choose Noah. Had he chosen Noah and not Adam, then the antediluvians would not have been guilty of Adam's sin. Traducianism is a plausible explanation of federal headship, but it does not require two or more federal heads to make the race guilty.

Hodge's failure to refute traducianism, and realism, does not *prove* that these two theories are true. There may be better objections than those Hodge has made. I do not happen to know any. However,

<sup>1</sup> Note well that these words absolve from the charge of misrepresentation everyone who reports that creationism teaches the *immediate* creation of each and every soul.

<sup>2</sup> Compare my *Three Types of Religious Philosophy*, chapter 3. See also several other of my books.

one's decision must be based on Scripture. And there are indeed Scriptural passages which, to put it modestly, seem to favor Shedd rather than Hodge.

## *The Scriptural Evidence*

Shedd divides his argument for traducianism into three parts: (1) Scripture, (2) Systematic Theology, (3) Physiology. The third part may be interesting, but it is useless. The first and second parts are the same thing. The second simply organizes the first. Therefore Shedd and the present treatise base the case on Scripture.

Shedd begins, "the Bible teaches that man is a species, and the idea [or definition] of a species implies the propagation of the entire individual out of it." This was what was meant a page ago in the reference to a covering tent in Plato's *Parmenides*. That the human race is a species, Shedd defends by the use of the term *man* in *Genesis* 1:26-27. Note that God said, "Let us make man in our image, and let *them* have dominion...male and female created he them." *Man* or *Adam* did not become a proper masculine noun until *Genesis* 2:19. Note too that *Genesis* 46:26 speaks of "the souls that came with Jacob into Egypt, which came out of his loins." Shedd also quotes a half a dozen verses from the New Testament. When Eve was taken from Adam's side, there is no mention of the creation of a second soul. Eve totally came out of Adam (*I Corinthians* 11:8). This supports the view that any child of Adam and Eve was born totally a member of the species. The entire person, not just his body, is propagated.

One may object that the new soul was immediately created, but that its creation is just not mentioned. Reply: Doctrines should not be based on silence.

It is not my desire to summarize Shedd's fifty or sixty pages of Scriptural argument. His work is easily obtainable and the student is urged to study it. However, whether found in Shedd or elsewhere, more Scriptural references than two or three in *Genesis* are needed.

That the propagation of the race is only corporeal, and not spiritual or mental also, that only the child's body and not his soul comes from the parents seems

to be denied in *John* 3:6: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit." The Greek verb—occurring twice in this verse, and five times in the context—is *gennaō*, beget. It is the same verb that one finds in *Matthew* 1:1-16. In *John* 3:6 Christ is speaking to Nicodemus, and "that which is born of flesh" is Nicodemus' unregenerated soul rather than his physical body. The verb indicates that Nicodemus received his unregenerated soul from his parents. This prevents the interpretation that *sarx* (flesh) means simply man's corporeal nature. Nor does the Nicodemus usage stand alone. *Matthew* 24:22 may look as if only the body were meant, but the shortening of the evil days preserved life and soul too. *Luke* 3:6, "And all flesh shall see God," cannot possibly refer to a physical body. Nor must *sarx* always refer to a sinful soul: To return to *John* again, 1:14 says that the Word was made flesh (*sarx*). Consider: The Word did not merely take to himself a physical body; he also took a reasonable or rational soul. He got them both through Mary. Similarly, *sarx* in *John* 17:2 does not mean the body, certainly not the body alone, but rather Jesus gives eternal life to souls. *Sarx* sometimes means man's depraved nature, but this only enforces the point that it means the soul. A body cannot sin. Therefore the soul of Nicodemus came from his parents.

*John* 1:14 has already been mentioned, but one should also notice that the preceding verse denies that spiritual birth depends on heredity ("not of bloods"); but though natural birth is not explicitly mentioned, the verse implies that natural birth does so depend. Hence both soul and body come from parents. The soul, as well as the body, is born (compare again 3:6).

*Acts* 17:26 does not say that God hath made of one blood all nations with respect to their bodies alone. The following verse, with its phrase "seek the Lord," clearly includes man's mind or soul. Shedd and others cite other verses that interested students can search out. The accumulation of verses is important because some Creationists give the

impression that traducianism has only a few verses in its favor,<sup>3</sup> whereas the number is considerable.

The most important argument for traducianism is based on *Genesis* 2:2-3. "God ended all his work." "In six days the Lord made Heaven and Earth...and rested on the seventh day" (*Exodus* 20:11). "God rested...from all his works [*apo pan to ton ergon*]" (*Hebrews* 4:4).

Perhaps the reader will permit a paragraph on Charles Hodge also. In Volume II of his *Systematic Theology*, 68ff., he discusses traducianism and creationism. Most of the section on the former depends on the alleged silence of Scripture on the subject: The various passages that traducianists use, he claims, are inconclusive. He even asserts, "The more enlightened and candid advocates of traducianism admit that the Scriptures are silent on the subject" (68). This means, of course, that Shedd, who used Scripture passages, was either not enlightened or not candid. Hodge understands the word *flesh*, in those passages already cited, to mean precisely the body in contrast with the soul. Then when he comes to the transmission of inborn depravity, and the difficulty of thinking that God immediately creates sinful souls, he appeals to secondary and mediate causes, thus abandoning the idea of immediate creation: "We do not know how the agency of God is connected with the operation of second causes, how far that agency is mediate, and how far it is immediate" (69). Certainly this is a surrender of creationism. Traducianists are willing to say that the souls of men are "created" mediately, *i.e.*, by the mediation of parents, just as we may also speak of trees and animals as created objects. But these created objects on my front lawn were mediately created through the seeds or slips from earlier plants.

Charles Hodge at this point refers to his later chapter on original sin as a more explicit defense of creationism and the difficulty with God's immediate creation of sinful souls. This reference I take to be pages 222ff., and perhaps also page 253. But none

of this relieves him of his duplicity. On the latter page he allows, "It is moreover a historical fact universally admitted, that character, within certain limits, is transmissible from parents to children. Every nation, separate tribe, and even every extended family of men, has its physical, mental, social, and moral peculiarities which are propagated from generation to generation." But if God *immediately* creates the soul of the child, no mental or moral characteristics can be *propagated*.

The earlier section is equally unsatisfactory. His subhead was "Realism No Solution of the Problem of Original Sin." The main deficiency in his argument is that traducianism, as a theory of the origin of the soul, never claims to explain original sin. It is a view of the origin of the souls of Adam and Eve's descendants. Beyond that, it may add that the derivation of the children's souls from their parents ties in nicely with God's choice of Adam as their federal head. This would have been so even if Adam had not sinned. But while traducianism and original sin are related, for all doctrines are in some way related in one system, the latter must receive its own explanation. Or, as another example, the atonement as such is not an explanation of our sanctification. Nor do the sacraments explain our resurrection at Christ's return. Hence Hodge's attempt to refute traducianism, or realism, on the ground that it does not solve the problem of original sin is worthless.

All the less do these pages (222ff.) refute traducianism. The main reason is that Hodge is ardently opposed to Realism. In fact, his argument against Realism begins two pages back. A few paragraphs ago I urged several objections against Hodge's arguments. Maybe one more is allowable and sufficient. "Realism ... subverts the doctrine of the Trinity in so far that it makes the Father, Son, and Spirit one God only in the sense in which all men are one man. The persons of the Trinity are one God, because they are one in essence or substance; and all men are one man because they are one in essence. The answers which Trinitarian realists give to this objection are unsatisfactory, because they assume the divisibility, and consequently the materiality of Spirit" (222).

<sup>3</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 200, "The few scriptural passages...", "no clear teaching of scripture..." At least Berkhof is honest enough to apply these remarks to both views.

This quotation consists of three sentences. The first sentence is doubtful. Hodge does not cite any author. Naturally, the Persons of the Trinity are one in the sense that all men are one and all horses are one; but it does not follow that the three Persons are one *only* in that sense. For example, three human beings have three wills; but the three Persons have but one will. Hence the diversification of human beings is not identical to the diversification of the Persons, for which reason we cannot assert that the two unities are completely identical. The second sentence seems to me to be quite true and therefore no objection. Sentence three takes it as an objection and offers an alleged reply. Realists, says Hodge, assume the divisibility of essence and the materiality of Spirit. Hodge capitalizes the S. Now if pagan Plato was worse than Christian Realists, he must have all the more asserted the divisibility of the essence. Actually he ridiculed it. Did Hodge never read Plato's *Parmenides*? And to suppose that Christian Traducianists or Christian Realists teach the materiality of Spirit, either the Holy Spirit or the human spirit, is ridiculous. Traducianists are traducianists because they believe that not only are the children's bodies derived from their parents' bodies, but also that their immaterial souls are equally derived from their parents' immaterial souls.

Kind reader, permit me to add a personal remark. I consider Charles Hodge by far the best of all American theologians. But his Scottish common sense *philosophy* was fortified with too much usquebaugh before he imbibed it.

### *Buswell and Berkhof*

J. Oliver Buswell, Jr. defends creationism in a most unfortunate way. In his *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (Zondervan, 1962, Vol. I, 250-252) he speaks three times of Christ having been born with a sinless body: "The body of Christ was perfectly sinless." Nothing is said about a sinless soul. This is peculiarly strange, for, contrary to orthodox doctrine, Buswell teaches, "He, that is, his personal eternal being, his soul, became a human person, a human soul, without in any way ceasing to be a divine person, a divine Soul" (251). But this seems to be Nestorianism unless Buswell

means to annihilate the divine Person, and other creationists would not be pleased with this defense of their doctrine.

This section will now conclude with a review of the objections raised against traducianism by Louis Berkhof (*Systematic Theology*, 197-201). Berkhof begins with a short but very fair statement of traducianism, including some of its Scriptural support. He refers to only one verse in favor of creationism, namely, *Psalm* 104:30. But if this verse teaches creationism, it follows that the souls of all animals and all plants are also immediately created. Now, it is true that the Old Testament assigns both souls and spirits to animals, and if a creationist wishes to accept the point, he is consistent. Those who oppose the theory of traducianism in the case of human beings, but deny it of animals, are inconsistent. An interesting, if inconclusive, point. But it certainly keeps God busy creating.

Berkhof's first objection is only half an objection. He begins by appealing to the simplicity and indivisibility of the soul, and concludes that the souls of the parents cannot divide to make a new soul. He offers no Scriptural support for this; and, as previously noted, the soul of Eve seems to be a contrary example. The second part of the first objection is a question: Does the new soul originate from the father or from the mother, or from both? Medieval theologians, as I have heard, held that the body comes from the mother and the soul from the father. That it comes from both is more plausible. Eve's soul was surely a special case; Christ's human soul could have come only from Mary. This was also a special, miraculous case. But inability to answer this question is no refutation of traducianism, especially if Scripture favors the fact.

Berkhof presses this question in his second objection by asserting that if the new soul is potentially in the souls of the parents, traducianism must be a form of materialism. This is utter nonsense. He also adds that it would make the parents *creators*. But since he cannot deny that the bodies of babies come from their parents, he must, if consistent, acknowledge that parents are indeed *creators* of bodies. It is strange how a truly intelligent theologian can be so irrational. The third

objection is not an objection at all: It is something that traducianists admit, indeed assert, and use as an objection against creationism. Berkhof says, "(3) It proceeds on the assumption that, after the original creation, God works only mediately"(198). This, however, is not precisely an assumption: It is an exegesis of Scripture.

Berkhof also argues that God in regeneration does not act mediately but immediately creates a new soul. Now, it is true that the apostle speaks about a new man and even a "new creature" (2 *Corinthians* 5:17; *Galatians* 6:15). But if the Greek word in these two verses be understood as *bara* as used in Genesis, there would have come into being, *ex nihilo*, another person; and in such a case the sinner himself would not be that person. One must remember that *regeneration*, in the epistles, is usually called a *resurrection*. Resurrection allows the individual sinner to remain himself. Well, *re-generation* does so too. Creation *ex nihilo* produces someone else.

The fourth objection is one that has become all too familiar with us through the Hodges. Traducianism is Realism, and Realism is bad. Without repeating the philosophic arguments about species, universal propositions, and nonexistent images, we deny—on the basis of arguments already given—that traducianism "fails to give a satisfactory answer to the question why men are held responsible only for the first sin of Adam, and not for his later sins, nor for the sins of the rest of their forebearers [*sic*]." This matter will appear again in the discussion on sovereignty.

Berkhof's fifth and last objection is equally faulty. Briefly, it is that traducianism would result in Christ's having a depraved human soul. But this assumes that Adam was Christ's representative and federal head. This, however, is not the case; and the *Westminster Confession* explicitly rules it out: "...the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity descending from them *by ordinary generation*" (VI, 3). Incidentally, the verb *conveyed* suggests traducianism. The birth of Christ was miraculous and is not to be subsumed under the otherwise universal rule.

Berkhof then argues for Creationism, first on an exegetical basis. *Ecclesiastes* 12:7, "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return to God who gave it," indicates "different origins" for soul and body. This is not surprising: *Genesis* 2:7 says so. But neither verse specifies the mode of propagation. God immediately formed earth into a body for Adam; does that mean that God immediately does the same for every individual? How *Isaiah* 42:5 fits into Berkhof's theory is difficult to say. *Zechariah* 12:1 says that God "formeth the spirit of man within him." But *Amos* 4:13, with the same Hebrew verb, says that "God formed the mountains also; and createth the wind." Does God immediately create every wind that blows down from Canada to chill us each winter? Did not God form a mountain in a Mexican cornfield a few years ago? It took him about a year to do it. *Hebrews* 12:9, which Berkhof next cites, speaks of God as "the Father of spirits." How can one get creationism out of this? He quotes "Delitzsch, though a traducianist [as saying], 'There can hardly be a more classical proof text for creationism.'" One cannot but wonder whether Delitzsch was speaking sarcastically, for if this is the best text creationists can find, traducianists need have no fear. In ancient Jewish society, and sometimes in American English, the term *father* does not mean a boy's immediate parent. Abraham Lincoln said, "Four score and seven years ago, our fathers...." The Jews regularly referred to Abraham as their father (*John* 8:39). If the verse has any reference at all to the origin of souls, it suggests traducianism, not creationism. Berkhof really gives his case away by adding to the verse in *Hebrews* 12:9, *Numbers* 16:22, which says merely that God is the God of the spirits of all flesh. Well, of course; God is the God of all the universe.

The second argument is the philosophical point that while creationism recognizes "the immaterial and spiritual and therefore indivisible nature of the soul of man.... The traducian theory on the other hand posits a derivation of essence, which, as is generally admitted, necessarily implies separation or division of essence." This is a misunderstanding of Realism, one that the *Parmenides* ridiculed. Perhaps Berkhof is thinking of Tertullian. But Tertullian—though a Christian, and an important person in the

development of the doctrine of the Trinity—was, strangely enough, a materialist. Very few Christians have been materialists. The next one I can think of was Thomas Hobbes in the seventeenth century. More recently, behaviorism has been making headway in Christian colleges; but clearly this is not Christianity. At any rate, Shedd and others were not materialists.

The third and last argument concerns Christology and argues that traducianism must make Jesus guilty of Adam's first sin. This was refuted earlier, and some elucidation will follow in the next section, *Sovereignty*.