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A STUDY OF THE CHRISTOLOGY

OF

HORACE BUSHNELL

by

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B. A., Yankton College

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the

Degree of Bachelor of Sacred Theology

in

The Biblical Seminary in New York

April 1, 1933

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This Thesis Is  
Respectfully Dedicated  
to

DR. GEORGE W. RICHARDS

and

DR. DEAN G. MCKEE

who unselfishly gave their time  
and counsel in its preparation.

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

A. The Subject Stated.

Dimly pencilled on a stray sheet of paper are found, among others, these words, "My figure in this world has not been great, but I have had a great experience...I have filled no place at all. But still it has been a great thing even for me to live. In my separate and merely personal kind of life, I have had a greater epic transacted than was ever written, or could be."<sup>1</sup> These words were written by Horace Bushnell. This is the simple and unassuming estimate of the man, who came to the end of a search on a February morning, when he experienced "a personal discovery of Christ, and of God as represented in Him".<sup>2</sup> The ultimate result of this experience was the publishing of a book, "God in Christ", which created as great a stir in the theological circles of New England as there had been for some time. Later another followed, "Christ in Theology", which restated and added to the doctrines of the first. The purpose of this thesis is to make a study of the Christology of Bushnell with the purpose of evaluating his contribution to the thinking of his day.

B. Justification of the Thesis.

In the history of the church there is one question which has outweighed all others. One day Jesus was on the way with His

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1. Cheney, Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell, p. 2.
2. Ibid, p. 193.

disciples, near Caesarea Philippi. Jesus asked the disciples, "Who do men say that I am?" Then He put the decisive question, "But who say ye that I am?" -- a question which men of every generation must answer in one way or another. Findlay, in his exposition of the First Epistle of John, says:

"He is central in His religion; the view that men take of Him, and the attitude they assume toward Him, determine the trend of their faith and life. The question that our Lord put to the Jewish rabbis, 'What think ye of the Christ?'" He has been propounding to every school of religious thought from that day forward: by his response each answerer gives judgment on himself. So the Person of Christ becomes the "stone of stumbling and rock of offense" or the "sure foundation-stone", to one generation after another."<sup>1</sup>

Horace Bushnell lived at a time when French liberalism had swept the land. Again, men had to face the age-old question, "But who say ye that I am?" Various answers were given; there were the Trinitarians, followers of Jonathan Edwards, on the one hand, and the Unitarians on the other. Dissatisfied with either answer, Bushnell wrought out of his own experience his answer. It will be our purpose to present and evaluate this answer.

Nor is this a question of the past. There was never a time when the question of the person of Christ was more vital than today. The question is answered in the same two ways. Perhaps we can find a contribution for the present day in the Christology of Horace Bushnell.

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1. Findlay, George G., Fellowship in the Life Eternal, p. 314

#### C. The Sources of the Study.

Among the published works of Bushnell there are three books which are the outstanding sources on this subject. Two have already been mentioned, "God in Christ", and "Christ in Theology". The other is "The Character of Jesus". These three contain the Christology of the author. In the first book, Bushnell states his position. The other two were written to clarify the first. These three books will therefore be the basis of this study.

#### D. The Method of Procedure.

Since the theology of Bushnell is related so closely with his own spiritual experiences, the opening chapter has been devoted to a biographical study, tracing his spiritual development. This will add considerably to the appreciation of his theological point of view. The following chapter presents his Christology, which is organized around three questions, (1) What was the relation of the Divine to the Human in the Person of Christ? (2) What is the Mission of Christ? (3) What is Christ's relationship to the Trinity? The content of this chapter will be evaluated in the fourth chapter. It will be compared with other contemporary interpretations of Christ in New England; the standard of evaluation will be the historic creedal statements of the church. The final chapter will summarize briefly the results



of this study, closing with its outstanding contribution to the present day.

## CHAPTER II

HORACE BUSHNELL, THE MAN

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### HORACE BUSHNELL, THE MAN

- A. His Background and Early Life.
  - 1. The Social and Religious Background of his Family.
  - 2. His Religious Life as a Child.
  - 3. The First Turning Point in his Religious Experience.
- B. Critical Days as a Student.
  - 1. The Influence of College Life in his Religious Thinking.
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  - 1. The Climax in his Struggle with Ill-health.
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- E. Summary and Conclusion.

## CHAPTER II

### HORACE BUSHNELL, THE MAN

#### A. His Background and Early Life.

##### 1. The Social and Religious Background of His Family.

Connecticut has been called "the Mother of theologians".<sup>1</sup> On the fourteenth of April, 1802, she helped to win the right of that name for herself, for that day marks the birth of Horace Bushnell, the greatest theologian in America since the day of Jonathan Edwards. His father, Ensign Bushnell, was a Methodist and seems to have been of Huguenot descent -- at least the best qualities of that blood, mental alertness and religious sincerity, are marked in his family. His mother, Dotha Bishop, was an Episcopalian, giving her family the quiet, worshipful spirit of that church. The two were "plain farming people, known to their neighbors as well for their excellent abilities, as for their uprightness, industry, and kindliness."<sup>2</sup>

##### 2. His Religious Life as a Child.

At the age of three, the family moved to New Preston, fourteen miles away. Since neither the church of the father, nor of the mother, was to be found here, the family joined the Congregational church. This "composite"<sup>3</sup> religion had a great effect upon the young boy. The religious life that resulted from such a background is aptly described by a younger

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1. Munger, Horace Bushnell, Teacher and Theologian, p. 3.
2. Cheney, The Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell, p. 4.
3. Munger, op. cit., p. 7.

brother, who writes:

"He was born in a household where religion was no occasional and nominal thing, no irksome restraint nor unwelcome visitor, but a constant atmosphere, a commanding but genial presence. In our father it was characterized by eminent evenness, fairness, and conscientiousness; in our mother it was felt as an intense life of love, utterly unselfish and untiring in its devotion, yet thoughtful, sagacious, and wise, always stimulating and ennobling, and in special crises leaping out in tender and almost awful fire. If ever there was a child of Christian nurture, he was one; nurtured, I will not say, in the formulas of theology as sternly as some; for though he had to learn the Westminster Catechism, its formulas were not held as of equal or superior authority to that of the Scriptures; not nurtured in what might be called the emotional elements of religion as fervently as some, but nurtured in the facts and principles of the Christian faith in their bearing upon the life and character; and if ever a man was true to the fundamental principles and the customs which prevailed in his early home, even to his latest years, he was."<sup>1</sup>

Bushnell himself later spoke of his mother as one who earnestly prayed for and with her children, but "never fell into the mistake of trying to talk her children into religion...And yet she was preaching all the time by her maternal sacrifices for us."<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, her chief concern was to make her children Christian.

### 3. The First Turning Point in His Religious Experience.

The Christian life would be natural to a young boy in such an environment. At the age of nineteen, after a boyhood of religious interests, he joined his home church. A very interesting memorandum of this event from his own hand, comes to us. It was written on March 3, 1822:

"A year since, the Lord, in his tender mercy, led me to Jesus. Four months since, in the presence of God and angels and men, I vowed to be the Lord's, in an everlasting covenant never to be

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1. Quoted by Munger, op. cit., p. 7-8.
2. Quoted from an article written by Dr. Bushnell at the request of his friends. See Cheney, op. cit., pp. 28-29.

broken. But alas, alas, O my God! how often in the past year, or even in the last four months, have I dishonored thy cause and lost sight of my Redeemer!...If I should never sin again, it would not atone for what is past. What can I do?...Lord, here I am, a sinner. Take me. Take all that I have and shall have; all that I am and shall be; and do with me as seemeth good. If thou hast anything for me to do; if thou hast anything for me to suffer in the cause of that Saviour on whom I rest my all, I am ready to labor, to suffer, or to die. I am ready to do anything or be anything for thee."<sup>1</sup>

Although, earlier he did refuse the opportunity of an education, this experience put into him a great desire for a liberal education.

#### B. Critical Days as a Student.

##### 1. The Influence of College Life on his Religious Thinking.

A year later, in 1823, upon passing the entrance examinations, Horace Bushnell became a student at Yale College. His college life was marked by intellectual earnestness, and "a wonderful consciousness of power."<sup>2</sup>

"He lived the life of a scholar, original, retired, peculiar, and independent, who had an interior life with which neither stranger nor friend could intermeddle -- never less alone than when alone with himself and his books."<sup>3</sup>

So writes his college tutor. Yet, he was recognized as a leader in athletics, and his love of music caused him to help found the Beethoven Society -- a society whose purpose was to lift the standard of the music in chapel.<sup>2</sup>

Here his religious life suffered. He was just in time to

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1. Quoted from an article written by Dr. Bushnell at the request of his friends. See Cheney, op. cit., pp. 28-29.
2. Munger, op. cit., p. 17.
3. Cheney, op. cit., p. 36.

feel something of the wave of French liberalism which pervaded the country in those days. Intellectual by nature, it was attractive to him; it made him a skeptic. He later writes of himself: "I loved a good deal the prudential, cold view of things; my religious character went down."<sup>1</sup>

## 2. His Experiences as Teacher, Editor, and Law Student.

Graduation came in 1827; for a few months he taught school at Norwich, Connecticut. But this work did not prove congenial with him. He welcomed an invitation to come to New York to join the editorial staff of the "Journal of Commerce". But he stayed here only ten months. Neither was this his life work. Next he turned to law; a year of study was spent at the Law school at New Haven. His mother's wish had been that he might choose the ministry, but in his skepticism he turned away from that profession. His own description of this period shows his spiritual condition:

"I was graduated, and then, a year afterwards, when my bills were paid, and when the question was to be decided whether I should begin the preparation of theology, I was thrown upon a most painful struggle by the very evident, quite incontestable fact that my religious life was utterly gone down. ...I had run no dissipations; I had been a church-going, thoughtful man. My very difficulty was that I was too thoughtful, substituting thought for everything else, and expecting so intently to dig out a religion by my head that I was pushing it all the while practically away. Unbelief, in fact, had come to be my element."<sup>2</sup>

After the year in the law school, Bushnell decided to go into a law office in Ohio. Having made this plan, he went home for the

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1. Munger, op. cit., p. 18.

2. Cheney, op. cit., p. 32. Taken from the original, written by Dr. Bushnell at the request of his friends.

summer, before going west.

### 3. The Significance of his Appointment as Tutor at Yale.

He had scarcely arrived home, when there came to him an appointment from President Day of Yale, to a tutorship. But Bushnell's mind was set on law; two weeks after coming home, he wrote a letter declining the appointment. As he went out of the door with the letter, he met his mother. When he told her what he was going to do, she scolded him, gently but seriously, because she felt that he was not doing his duty. She told him,

"You have settled this question without any consideration at all that I have seen. Now, let me ask it of you to suspend your decision till you have at least put your mind to it. This you certainly ought to do, and my opinion still further is that you had best accept the place."<sup>1</sup>

Unable to refuse such a request, he obeyed. It was the turning point in Bushnell's life, for as a result he accepted the appointment. Later he pays tribute to his mother for having the insight to cause him to change his plans.

### 4. His Conversion at Yale.

When he arrived at Yale, he was put in charge of a group of students, who very soon fairly worshipped him. The first two years were uneventful. He was a success as a tutor, and was also studying at the Law school, with an eye on a political career.

The outstanding event of this period came in 1831, when a revival began taking effect at the College. Students and tutors

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1. Cheney, op. cit., p. 33.



alike were stirred, but Bushnell, with his group of students, was unmoved. The story is told by a fellow tutor:

"...What, then, in this great revival was this man to do, and what was to become of him? Here he was in the glow of his ambition for the future, tasting keenly of a new success -- his fine passage at arms in the editorial chair of a New York daily, ready to be admitted to the bar, successful and popular as a college instructor; but all at sea in doubt and default religiously. That baptism of the Holy Ghost and of fire compassed him all about. When the work was at its height, he and his division of students, who fairly worshipped him, stood unmoved apparently when all beside were in a glow...What days of travail and wondering those were over him! None dare approach him...Only Henry Durant tried carefully and cautiously to hit some joint in the armor. But even he, though free in his confidence, seemed to make no advance. When, all at once, the advance came bodily and voluntarily from Bushnell himself. Said he to Durant, 'I must get out of this woe. Here am I what I am, and these young men hanging to me in their indifference amidst this universal earnestness on every side.' And we were told what he said he was going to do -- to invite these young men to meet him some evening in the week, when he would lay bare his position and their own, and declare to them his determination and the decision they ought with him to make for themselves. Perhaps there never was pride more lofty laid down voluntarily in the dust than when Horace Bushnell thus met those worshippers of his. The result was overwhelming.."1

This decision did not end his struggles. Because of their bearing upon his later life, we quote further, from the account of a fellow-tutor:

"On one occasion he came in, and, throwing himself with an air of abandonment into a seat, and thrusting both hands through his black, bushy hair, cried out desparately, yet half laughingly, 'O men! what shall I do with these arrant doubts I have been nursing for years? When the preacher touches the Trinity and when logic shatters it all to pieces, I am all at the four winds. But I am glad I have a heart as well as a head. My heart wants the Father; my heart wants the Son; my heart wants the Holy Ghost -- and one just as much as the other. My heart says the Bible has a Trinity for me, and I mean to hold by my heart. I am glad a man can do it when there is no other mooring, and so I answer my own question, 'What shall I do?' But that is all I can do yet."2

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1. Cheney, op. cit., p. 33.
2. Ibid, p. 56.

This experience is a foregleam of his later life as a theologian. This same principle played a large part in his convictions.

That same year his decision for the Christian ministry was made. In the fall of 1831 he entered the Theological Seminary at Yale. Dr. Taylor of the Edwardian school was its head, and the chief thing about their relationship was their difference in point of view. Two years later, on May 22, 1833, Horace Bushnell was ordained as pastor of North Church, at Hartford, Connecticut.

#### C. His Ministerial Life.

##### 1. The Beginning of his Work.

Little is known about the first few years of his ministry. The first fifteen years were probably no different from that of any minister of a church of that size. It was a period of activity. Aside from his pastoral work, he wrote. In 1835, there appeared an article, which later became a part of "Christian Nurture". In 1837 death, and severe illness in the family brought its suffering. In 1839 the trouble with his throat began, -- the beginning of a life overshadowed with disease. The following years were filled with various kinds of work -- from theological writing, such as "The Growth of Law," to political addresses, such as "American Politics". "Five publications, the care of his pulpit, and the excitement of a presidential campaign rendered the year 1844 a hard one, and paved the way for a thorough breakdown in health the following year."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Cheney, op. cit., pp. 191-2.

This breakdown left him with weakened lungs, and necessitated a trip to Europe for his health.

## 2. The Writing of "God in Christ".

"The year 1848 was the central point in the life of Horace Bushnell. It was a year of great experiences, great thoughts, great labors."<sup>1</sup> Such are the words of his wife. We read further:

"Five years before, God has spoken personally to him in the death of his beloved little boy, drawing his thoughts and affections to the spiritual and unseen, until, by slow advances, the heavenly vision burst upon him... 'I believed,' he afterwards said, 'from reading, especially the New Testament, and from other testimony, that there is a higher, fuller life that can be lived, and set myself to attain it.'"

"In these studies and in the devout application by which he sought to realize, in his own experience, the great possibilities unfolding to his conception, the New Year came in. On an early morning of February, his wife awoke, to hear that the light they had waited for, more than they that watch for the morning, had risen indeed. She asked, 'What have you seen?' He replied, 'The gospel.' It came to him at last, after all his thought and study, not as something reasoned out, but as an inspiration, -- a revelation from the mind of God Himself."<sup>1</sup>

The immediate outcome of this experience was a sermon, entitled, "Christ, the Form of the Soul"; the text used was: "Until Christ be formed in you." This expresses his spiritually illuminated conception of Christ, as the indwelling, formative life of the soul -- the new-creating power of righteousness for humanity. Later, this conception was treated more adequately in his book, "God in Christ." The result of this experience in his own life is shown in his own definition of Christian faith:

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1. Cheney, op. cit., p. 191-2.

"Christian Faith is the faith of a transaction. It is not the committing of one's thought in assent to any proposition, but the trusting of one's being to a being, there to be rested, kept, guided, moulded, governed, and possessed forever...It gives you God, fills you with God in immediate, experimental knowledge, puts you in possession of all there is in him, and allows you to be invested with his character itself."<sup>1</sup>

Immediately following this experience, there came to him, almost simultaneously, invitations to be the Commencement speaker at three leading theological seminaries, Harvard, Yale, and Andover. The first address was delivered at Harvard, in July. Its subject was "The Atonement". The address at Yale, on "The Divinity of Christ" was delivered in August. The last one, entitled, "A Discourse on Dogma and Spirit, or the True Reviving of Religion", was given in September, at Andover. These three addresses form the three chapters of the book, "God in Christ", although not in the order in which they were delivered. Already in January of the next year, Bushnell wrote to a friend, "My book is now in the hands of the printer."<sup>2</sup> The following month it was ready for distribution.

### 3. The Stormy Reception of "God in Christ".

The reaction caused by this book can best be shown by quoting the account of a contemporary writer:

"At the time of the publication of 'God in Christ', the atmosphere was sensitively tremulous with suspicions in respect to the orthodoxy of the author, a state of things of which he himself was not ignorant. On the issue of the book from the press in February, 1849, a few of the religious newspapers and magazines spoke of it tolerantly, one or two perhaps kindly, but the larger number with decided expressions of dissent and denunciation.

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1. Cheney, op. cit., pp. 192-3.
2. Munger, op. cit., p. 138. From a letter to Dr. Bartol.

The May number of the 'New Englander' for that year contained a notice of 'God in Christ' from the pen of Dr. Leonard Bacon, kindly in tone, and marked by discrimination and fairness in the statement of its teachings. Two of the ministers residing in Hartford, afterwards abundantly friendly to Dr. Bushnell, published lengthy reviews, more or less dissenting from its statement of truth.

"But these criticisms, and others such as these, were the milk of human kindness itself, compared with the language employed by another class of writers. No sooner did the book see the light than it became apparant that the theological authorities were determined to strangle the infant in its very cradle...The first of these criticisms came from the Divinity School, at New Haven. Under the caption, 'What Does Dr. Bushnell Mean?' three articles, signed 'Omicron', appeared in successive numbers of the 'New York Evangelist'. On their completion, these were gathered into a pamphlet of twenty-eight pages and extensively circulated. In the course of a week or two, Princeton gave her weighty verdict, in an article of some forty pages, in the 'Biblical Reportory and Princeton Review'. This, though the most courteous and discriminating of all the reviews proceeding from centres of theological authority, yet failed in many respects to represent fairly the teachings of the book, and pronounced upon its alleged errors with judicial severity. The next assault was made by the 'Christian Observatory'...which devoted sixty pages of its issue for June to a criticism of 'God in Christ'. The tone of this review was bitter and severe to a degree almost unequalled in the history of modern controversial theology. About the same time, from Bangor Theological Seminary, emanated a volume of one hundred and eighteen pages, entitled, 'Review of Dr. Bushnell's God in Christ,' a book characterized by the calm and positively assured conviction that a well-settled theological system is the only touchstone of truth, and that the regions beyond are dangerous ground, nor worth exploring."<sup>1</sup>

This was not the only attack upon him. At the same time, there was a movement to bring him to trial before the Consociation. This could not be accomplished until he had been presented for such a trial by his Association. The first step to this end was taken on June 5, 1849, by the appointment of a committee, 'to examine the book in question, and confer with Brother Bushnell, and report at an adjourned meeting of this body whether he have, in fact, published

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1. Munger, op. cit., pp. 142-44. See also Cheney, p. 214f.

views fundamentally erroneous."<sup>1</sup> Two reports were presented. The substance of the majority was as follows: "He could not, in our view, be properly or justly subjected to the charge of heresy and a consequent trial, or be denied the confidence of his brethren."<sup>1</sup> The minority report declared that the book in question contains fundamental errors, justly subjecting the author to the charge of heresy. At a later meeting of the Association, the majority report was adopted by a vote of seventeen to three. This practical unanimity made it improbable that the Consociation<sup>2</sup> could ever bring him to trial, but the spontaneous withdrawal of his church from that body settled the matter.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, another Association, the Fairfield West, attempted to secure action in the General Association<sup>2</sup> but failed. Not satisfied, a letter was sent to each district Association, except the Hartford Central, urging action against Bushnell. Again the movement failed.

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1. Munger, op. cit., p. 149.
2. The meaning of "General Association" and "Consociation" needs to be defined, because they are sometimes confused. "General Association" usually applies to a state body of Congregational Churches. However, in the early history of Congregationalism in Rhode Island, "Consociation" meant the same. But in Connecticut, as a result of the Saybrook Platform, this term referred rather to a "standing court", usually within a county, which had charge of all ecclesiastical affairs. It came from the effect of Presbyterianism upon Congregationalism in that state. These courts, were later discarded from the Congregational polity. The term, "Associations" refers to smaller bodies of churches within the "Consociation". See Munger, op. cit., p. 148, and Walker, The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism", pp. 507-14.
3. Munger, op. cit., p. 149.

4. Bushnell's Answer in "Christ in Theology".

These charges against his book prompted Bushnell to write another book, which was intended to clarify his position. This book was called, "Christ in Theology", and was published in May, 1851.

The purpose of the book may be seen in the Preface:

"This volume contains the matter of an answer made to the ministerial Association of which I am a member, for the doctrines of my book, 'God in Christ;' a book in which it was rumored and extensively believed that I had published dangerous, or even fundamental errors...My intention was not so much to defend as to complete my doctrine by a fuller exposition of certain points. ...My principal endeavor in it is to make my position more intelligible."<sup>1</sup>

5. The End of Opposition.

In June, 1853, a third attempt was made by the Fairfield West Association to bring Bushnell to trial, in the form of a demand, signed by fifty members, that the Hartford Central Association be excluded from the general body because of its protection of Bushnell. An adroit resolution offered by Dr. Leonard Bacon, stating that the General Association had no fellowship with

"the opinions imputed to Dr. Bushnell by the complainants... but whether these opinions were justly imputed to Dr. Bushnell, or not, depends upon the construction given to certain quotations from his books; and upon that question we have nothing to say."<sup>2</sup>

The next year, the final effort of the complaining Association was made at the annual meeting in New Haven. It was in the form of a set of resolutions criticizing the General Association. Its tone

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1. Bushnell, Christ in Theology, pp. iii-iv.
2. Munger, op. cit., p. 184.

was so disrespectful to the body that it aroused general indignation. However, Bushnell himself offered a resolution, followed by a long address outlining the history of the controversy as it was related to the complaint, "that the resolutions offered by them be entered upon the records, and published with the minutes of the Association."<sup>1</sup> This was the last shot of the long and weary battle; gradually peace was again restored, and ruptures, even in personal friendships, healed.

#### D. Closing Years.

##### 1. The Climax in his Struggle with Ill-health.

In spite of previous ill-health, Bushnell lived twenty-two years after his sad experiences with the Fairfield West Association. But these years include long struggles with illness, with considerable travel in the search of health. Yet, they were also years of activity. During these years such books as "Nature and the Supernatural", and "The Vicarious Sacrifice", as well as a number of books of sermons, were published. His magazine articles of this time were numerous, and show his diversity of interests.

"It was in 1870 that the struggle of nearly twenty years began sensibly to draw toward a close. But though literally a decline, it was a period of work up to the very last, and more than all, it was a period of self-development and ripening into the ideal of his character. He began his life with a passion for God; it gave direction to his first theological expression; it runs through all his works and underlies all his alleged heresies; it fills and crowns his life in these last years."<sup>2</sup>

Thus writes Theodore Munger, a friend and biographer of Dr. Bushnell.

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1. Cheney, op. cit., p. 340.
2. Munger, op. cit., p. 337.



This did not keep him from activity. Letters, a series of articles on Prayer, and the arrangement of a new edition of his works, filled his time. "Forgiveness and Law" was also published during this time. But in the spring of 1874, just after its publication, sickness overtook him. A summer at Norfolk, Connecticut, was arranged, but did not improve his health. Yet death did not come. In spite of another illness the next spring, he lived on. But weakened from the several attacks, he could not last. Early in 1876 the illness recurred; gradually he sank toward the close.

## 2. Closing Days.

These last days show a continuance and deepening of his strongest qualities. When too weak to leave his bed, he kept his cane near him, as a sign of his continued interest in the outer world. There was constant humor in his talk; even his dying was "play" to him. Of the fourteenth and fifteenth chapter of St. John he said: "What a soft and sweet infolding of all highest things."<sup>1</sup> His household and the city were the last things that engaged his mind. On the last day of full consciousness it was announced to him that the Park he had conceived and brought to realization had been named for him. When the news came, he responded with a smile of gratitude.

Before he went, his benediction to his family was:

"Well, now we are all going home together; and I say, the Lord be with you -- and in grace -- and peace -- and love -- and that is the way I have come along home."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Munger, op. cit., p. 350.
2. Cheney, op. cit., p. 562.

"Early in the morning of the seventh of February, 1876, while the stars were still shining in the clear and silent heaven, Horace Bushnell passed away to that world, on whose borders he had so long dwelt."<sup>1</sup>

#### E. Summary and Conclusion.

We have surveyed the life of a man who fell into depths of doubt, and rose into heights of vision. Coming from an average home, struggling through days of mental conflict, giving his life to the Christ his heart longed for, but whom his intellect questioned, testing his beliefs by his experience, facing the coldness of friends, and the bitterness of enemies for his convictions, keeping through it all the calmness and gentleness of the Lord whom he worshipped -- such was Horace Bushnell. Certainly the visions that he had of the gospel were enhanced by their contrast with the nights of mental darkness.

What conception of Christ did this man have, who had such a difficult time to reconcile his heart with his intellect? Can this conception of Christ contribute anything to this age, which is also finding the same difficulties? These are the questions which will concern us in the following pages.

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1. Cheney, op. cit., p. 562.

CHAPTER III

THE CHRISTOLOGY OF HORACE BUSHNELL

### CHAPTER III

#### THE CHRISTOLOGY OF HORACE BUSHNELL

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CHAPTER III  
THE CHRISTOLOGY OF HORACE BUSHNELL

A. Introduction.

We are now ready to consider the Christology of Bushnell, for we have seen that his outstanding work has been in this field. A true understanding of the views which he had about Christ, however, depends upon the knowledge of the underlying assumption in his mind. The question, "Is Jesus a mere human being, or is He the Divine Son of God?" was not a problem for Bushnell. He accepted as basic the fact that Christ must be divine. This is especially true in the book which was the center of the controversy, "God in Christ". Later, in the booklet, "The Character of Jesus", this assumption is set aside for the time being -- not, however, because it had been discarded, but because his purpose was to analyze the human character of Jesus, with the purpose of reaffirming His Divinity. True, in "God in Christ" the writer gives a list of proofs concerning this doctrine, but they are not for the sake of establishing the point, but for the sake of clarifying the assumption.

The questions which grew out of this assumption were:

(1) What is the relation of the Divine to the Human in the person of Christ; (2) What is the mission of Christ, especially as seen in His death on the cross; (3) What is the relation of the Divine person in Christ to the other persons in the Trinity? Before answering

these questions, let us return to the assumed doctrine, that we may see more clearly why it should be thus accepted as a fact.

### B. The Assumption that Christ is Divine.

In the opening paragraphs of the chapter on "The Divinity of Christ"<sup>1</sup> Bushnell writes about Christ in these words:

"He differs from us, not in degree, but in kind...He is in such a sense God, or God manifested, that the unknown term of his nature, that which we are most in doubt of, and about which we are least capable of any positive affirmation, is the human. No person, I think, would ever doubt for a moment the superhuman quality of Jesus, if it were not for the speculative difficulties encountered by an acknowledgment of his superhuman quality."<sup>1</sup>

The question which at once arises, as one reads these words, is: "Why should it be assumed that Christ is Divine?" Bushnell's answer to this question can be divided into three parts, (1) the testimony of the Bible, (2) the testimony of Christ's life, (3) the testimony of human need.

#### 1. The Testimony of the Bible.

a. There are passages in the Bible which definitely affirm the pre-existence of Christ, such as "I came out from God", "I came down from heaven", "The glory which I had with thee before the world was". Concerning these passages, Bushnell says:

"If these passages do not affirm the pre-existence of Christ in the plainest manner conceivable, I mistake their import. And, in this view, they are totally repugnant to the idea of Christ's simple humanity."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 123.
2. Ibid, p. 124.

b. There are other passages which definitely affirm the incarnation of Christ: "The Word was made flesh," "That which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, which our hands have handled of the word of Life", "He that was in the form of God, and was made in fashion as a man." These passages call forth this comment:

"Who can imagine, without great violence, that language of this nature is applicable to any mere man? To make it even supportable, the man, so called, must be different from all other men, to such a degree that you may far more easily doubt his humanity than his divinity."<sup>1</sup>

c. Jesus is also exalted in the Scripture. Of Him is said, "In whom dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily," "The church which is his body, the fullness of Him that is all in all," "The image of the invisible God," and "Complete in Him which is the Head of all principality and power". Bushnell is unable to conceive these statements to be consistent with the simple humanity.<sup>2</sup>

d. The evidence which "winds up all debate"<sup>3</sup> is the holy formula of baptism -- "into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost". Conceding that the Father is God, and also that the Spirit is God, it would be inconceivable that between these two, there should be placed the name of one who is a mere human creature.

"Were they (the Unitarians) to read -- 'in the name of the Father, A. B. the carpenter, and the Holy Ghost', they would be sensible, I think, of some very great violence done to the words by any construction which holds the strict humanity of

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1. Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 124.
2. Cf. Ibid, p. 124.
3. Ibid, p. 127.

Christ."<sup>1</sup>

2. The Testimony of Christ's Life.

a. However, there is further evidence taken directly from the life of Christ. First of all, there is the miraculous birth. Bushnell recognizes that this event in history is "flippantly rejected by some"<sup>2</sup> but affirms that it has for him "the profoundest air of verity"<sup>2</sup>. And if it is true, "it denotes the entrance into humanity of something that is distinct from it."<sup>3</sup>

b. An investigation of Christ's life led Bushnell to see, furthermore, a unique relationship with the Father. "I and the Father that sent me"; "Ye neither know me nor my Father"; "That which I have seen with my Father"; "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father". Bushnell says:

"How can we imagine any mere man of our race daring to use language like this concerning himself and God?...He has the audacity (for what else can we call it, regarding him simply as a man?) to promise that he and the Father -- they two -- will come to men together, and be spiritually manifest in them."<sup>4</sup>

c. Christ's unique relationship with the Father only heightens the uniqueness of His relationship with the world. Supposing that Christ is only a human being, this relationship is most offensive, for

"imagine, now, a human being, one of ourselves, coming forth and declaring to the race -- 'I am the light of the world'...'I am the

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1. Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 128.

2. Ibid., p. 124.

3. Ibid., p. 123.

4. Ibid., p. 125.



living bread that came down from heaven'. 'No man cometh unto the Father but by me!' What greater effrontery could be conceived?"<sup>1</sup>

d. Another striking evidence in the life of Christ is His assumption of His own sinlessness. He never confesses a fault; He never asks pardon for any transgression. Recognizing that the outstanding characteristic of a human being is a tentative nature, which causes him to learn the import of good and evil by experiment, this fact becomes very important.

"Set in connection with this conclusion, the universal unqualified determination of the race never to believe in a perfect man -- always to assume the fallibility and imperfection of every human being -- and the sinlessness of Jesus becomes, itself, a stubborn evidence of his superhuman character."<sup>2</sup>

Bushnell summarizes the evidences of the Divineness of Christ, as shown in His life, in his booklet, "The Character of Christ", in these words:

"We have seen him unfolding as a flower, from the germ of a perfect youth; growing up to enter into great scenes, and have his part in great trials; harmonious in all with himself and truth...He is a lamb in innocence, a God in dignity; revealing an impenitent but faultless piety, such as no mortal ever attempted, such as, to the highest of mortals, is inherently impossible. He advances the most extravagant pretensions, without any show of conceit, or even seeming fault of modesty. He suffers without affectation of composure and without restraint of pride; suffers as no mortal sensibility can, and where, to the mortal view, there was no reason for pain at all; giving us not only an example of gentleness and patience in all the small trials of life, but revealing the depths even of the passive virtues of God in his agony and the patience of his suffering love. He undertakes also a plan, universal in extent, perpetual in time...laying his foundations in the heart of the poor, as no great teacher had ever done before...Finally, to sum up all in one, he grows more great, and wise, and sacred, the more he is

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1. Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 126.
2. Ibid, p. 126.

known...And this, we say is Jesus, the Christ; manifestly not human, not of our world -- some being who has burst into it, and is not of it."<sup>1</sup>

### 3. The Testimony of Human Need.

The most striking evidence, although not the final one in Bushnell's statement, is the fact that the human being needs a Divine Christ. He has enough of the real human. And the unreal human only sets up before him an unattainable ideal. For,

"This beautiful life, being sinless, is really not human, after all; and we cannot have it, unless our nature is overborne and acted wholly by God in the same manner which, alas! is no longer possible, for we are deep in sin already. No! let us have the divine, the deific itself...then we shall have both the pure ideal of a life, and the power flowing out from God to ingenerate that life in us. God; God is what we want, not a man; God, revealed through man, that we may see His Heart, and hide our guilty nature in the bosom of His love: God so identified with our race, as to signify the possible union and eternal identification of our nature with His."<sup>2</sup>

For these reasons then, supported by the testimony of the Bible, including the testimony from the life of Jesus, and the testimony of human need, Christ is accepted by Bushnell as Divine.

### C. The Relation of the Divine to the Human in the Person of Christ.

When it has been accepted that Jesus Christ is Divine, there is still the evident fact that he was a man, who walked the earth, and lived a normal life of a human being in history. There thus follows a question which is related to the above, namely, that of the incar-

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1. Bushnell, Character of Jesus, pp. 45-6.
2. Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 127.

nation. According to dictionary definition, incarnation means,

"the act of becoming incarnate, or of assuming a human body and human nature; specifically in the Christian religion, the assumption of human nature by Jesus Christ as the second person of the Trinity."<sup>1</sup>

It has been accepted that Jesus was a Divine being, and it is known that he seemed, outwardly, a human being. The question, therefore, is, "What was the relationship of these two natures, the Divine and the human, when this Divine being took upon Himself the form of man?" The first step in the answer of this question is the clearing away of objections to the possibility of such a union.

1. Objections raised and answered by Bushnell.

a. The first objection made to the claim for such a union is that it is an insult to reason to accept the assertion that God, the infinite God, is represented as dwelling in a finite human person, subject to its limitations, and even to its evils.<sup>2</sup>

But the study of other religions -- the most cultivated and speculative of the false religions -- show that they believed in, or expected, an incarnation of their deity. And more, whole nations of mankind, including thinkers, scholars, and philosophers, have been ready to believe or expect such an incarnation. Thus, it would not seem contrary to natural reason to believe in such an event. Instead,

"we are rather to suspect that some true instinct or conscious want of the race is here divining, so to speak, that blessed visitation, by which God shall sometime vouchsafe to give Himself to the world."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Funk and Wagnalls, New Standard Dictionary, p. 1241.
2. Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 148.
3. Ibid, p. 149.

Again, it is accepted that God is the Creator of the Universe. In this creation, man seems to have been "originally and specially related to the expression of God, specially fitted to be the organ of Divine feeling and character."<sup>1</sup> In this creation, in a sense, God has revealed Himself. But if it can be believed that God accomplished so great a miracle as is involved in the creation of the universe,

"why not a miracle also that has a necessity as deep, involves consequences of as great moment, and makes an expression of God as much lovelier and holier as it exhibits more of His moral excellence and grandeur -- His condescension, patience, gentleness, forgiveness, in one word His love?"<sup>2</sup>

Especially is this true when it is recognized that were God to inhabit a man, and live Himself as a perfect character into the biographic history, a result would follow which would be as magnificent as the creation of the universe itself, namely, "the incorporation of the Divine in the History of the world -- so a renovation, at last, of the moral and religious life of the world."<sup>1</sup>

b. The second objection is that limitations of the human being forbid the incarnation of an illimitable God in it. Yet, the first creation of God, the world, is limited. And yet men take a great delight in seeing God in the smallest particle of being.

"If, then, it be incredible that God should take the human to express Himself, because the human is finite, can the finite in the world, or in a living atom, express Him more

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1. Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 149.
2. Ibid, p. 150.

worthily, or do it more accordantly, with reason?"<sup>1</sup>

c. Another objection: since Christ was a living, intelligent being, you must view Him under the measures and limitations of a person. True, answers Bushnell, if you can measure the contents of His person by His body, which possibly you have ~~no~~ right to do. For,

"it no more follows that a human body measures God, when revealed through it, than that a star, a tree, or an insect measures Him, when He is revealed through it."<sup>2</sup>

It is also probably true that we know nothing about the interior nature of Christ, or the composition of His person. If then His outward person represents an unknown quantity, it may, for all that is apparent to us, represent an infinite quantity. It is also true that

"a finite outward person...may well be an organ or type of the Infinite as a finite thing or object; and God may act in a human personality, without being measured by it, as well as to shine through a finite thing or a world, without being measured by that."<sup>3</sup>

d. Finally, the objection is raised: Christ grew in wisdom and knowledge. Therefore, there must have been some kind of intelligence in Him which is under a law of development, thus implying that it is limited.

Two answers may be given to this objection. The language may be taken as an external description only. But it is more satisfactory to say,

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1. Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 151.
2. Ibid, p. 152.
3. Ibid, p. 153.

"that the body of Christ evidently grew up from infancy; and that all his actings grew out, so to speak, with it; and if the divine was manifested in the ways of a child, it creates no difficulty which does not exist when it is manifested in the ways of a man or a world. The whole question is, whether it is possible for the divine nature to be manifested in humanity, and as it belongs to humanity to grow, I see nothing in that to create a difficulty, more than when it is considered to be a part of humanity to inquire, reason, remember, have emotions, and move about in space; for none of these belong to the true Absolute Deity."<sup>1</sup>

All the answers to these objections are reinforced, especially to those who believe the Scriptures, by the fact that the Scriptures often represent Him in ways that indicate the same view of His person:

"He is Emanuel -- God with us -- the Word made flesh -- God manifest in the flesh -- the express image of His person -- the Life that was manifested -- ...the fullness of God revealed bodily -- the power of God --...the image of the invisible God. In all these, and in a very great number of similar instances, language is used in reference to Christ, which indicates an opinion that his advent is the appearing of God...Nor does it satisfy this language at all, to conceive that Christ is a good man, or a perfect man, and that so he is an illustration, or image of God. Such a construction might be given to a single expression of the kind; for we use occasionally an almost violent figure. But this is cool, ordinary, undeclamatory language, and the same idea is turned round and round, appears and reappears in different shapes, and becomes, in fact, the hinge of the gospel -- the central light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, shining unto me."<sup>2</sup>

In his later book, "Christ in Theology", Bushnell summarizes his view of the incarnation of Christ very well, in these words:

"Who is Christ? The incarnation of the divine nature. For what purpose? The manifestation of God -- therefore he is called the Life manifested -- God manifested in the flesh -- the Word made flesh, that we may behold in him the Father's glory -- God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. In his miraculous birth, too, he is seen to be of a double nature, at once divine and human, the Son of God and the Son of Mary.

"Two things then are evident. First, that he is a very

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1. Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 153.

2. Ibid, p. 150.

3. Ibid, p. 151.

peculiar being, who cannot be classed in the simple genus humanity;...Secondly, it is to be seen beforehand that he is not given as a riddle to our curiosity,...but simply that God may thus express His own feeling and draw Himself into union with us."<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Bushnell's Statement of the Unitarian and Trinitarian Position.

But, in the light of the life of Christ, some say, we must go farther. It is not enough to see the external person of Christ on the one hand, and the Absolute Jehovah on the other, and say that the former is simply a representative or expression of the other.

### a. The Unitarian Position.

It is when men come to the internal nature of Christ that they differ. The Unitarian finds that Christ obeys, worships, suffers, and thus shows most plainly that His internal nature is under limitation. "Therefore," he says, "He is human only." But the common Trinitarian replies, "Your argument is good; therefore we assert a human soul in the person of Jesus, which comes under these limitations, while the divine soul escapes; and so we save the divinity unharmed and unabridged."<sup>2</sup>

### b. The Trinitarian Position.

The Trinitarian division of the inner life of Christ may be traced back to the Council of Constantinople, in 680. While that council held that there were "two natures and one person" in Christ, it stated that the two natures involved two wills. Bushnell points out that much depends upon how the doctrine of two wills in Christ

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1. Bushnell, Christ in Theology, pp. 92-3.

2. Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 153.

is interpreted.

"If it means that the two wills are active, choosing powers, then I see not how a better assertion of two persons can be made. If it meant simply that the creature will goes into composition as mere timber...but has no action as a center of life and voice in itself, then it would seem to be a matter of very trivial consequence what it is, or what becomes of it."<sup>1</sup>

But there follows, from the admission of the phrase, "two wills", that many will interpret them as in distinct action, "and as soon as they begin to be spoken of in that manner, nothing can preserve them from being erected practically into two distinct persons, directly in the face of the older formula, 'two natures and one person.'"<sup>2</sup> This, says Bushnell, is the practical result in New England. Some things in the life of Christ have been referred to the action and choice of His human, and others to that of His divine nature,

"till finally, all guards and correctives being omitted, the churches had begun, really and practically, to hold a bi-personal Saviour...All the strictly human incidents of childhood, obedience, poverty and suffering, they refer to his human side, as a distinct human experience."<sup>3</sup>

### 3. Bushnell's Reply to their Positions.

#### a. Reply to the Trinitarians.

Bushnell attacks the Trinitarian position first. Such a theory of Christ's obedience and suffering is an affront to the plain words of Scripture. He points out that the Bible does not say that a human soul called Jesus obeyed and suffered, "but it says in the boldest manner, that he who was in the form of God humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."<sup>4</sup> The very

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1. Bushnell, Christ in Theology, pp. 105-6.
2. Ibid., p. 106.
3. Ibid., pp. 106-7.
4. Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 153.



point of the passage here referred to (Phil. 2:5f), is that Jesus, the Form of God, the real divinity, came into finite, was subject to human conditions. It is also true that the name "Son" is associated with passages implying limitation -- a name which refers to the divine person, because the word Son is always relative to the Father. Speaking of Jesus' prayer in the seventeenth chapter of John, he says,

"He also prays, 'O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory that I had with thee before the world was' -- a prayer which cannot be referred to the human soul, even if there was a human soul hid in his person; for that soul could speak of no glory it once had with the Father."<sup>1</sup>

Also, he charges that this theory of two distinct subsistences only creates difficulties much greater than any that it solves. The unity of the human and the divine is really denied, and there is substituted for it a co-partnership.

"Instead of a person whose nature is the real unity of the divine and the human, we have two distinct persons, between whom our thoughts are continually alternating; referring this to one, that to the other, and imagining, all the while, not a union of the two, in which our possible union with God is signified and sealed forever, but a practical, historical assertion rather of his incommunicableness, thrust upon our notice in a form more oppressive and chilling than it was to abstract thought. Meantime, the whole work of Christ, as a subject, suffering Redeemer, is thrown upon the human side of his nature, and the divine side standing thus aloof...has nothing in fact to do with the transaction, other than to be a spectator of it."<sup>2</sup>

For these reasons, Bushnell's conclusion is that there is no solid foundation for the common trinitarian view. It is not scriptural, and creates only greater difficulties.

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1. Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 154.
2. Ibid, pp. 154-5.

b. Reply Involving Both Parties.

Before turning his criticism upon the Unitarians, he makes another point which is applicable to both theories. He claims that both are basing their answers upon an unwarranted assumption, -- that finite limitations cannot be associated with an infinite nature. The same difficulty is raised when we name God, or ever speak of Him, for in so doing, we are always seeking to represent the infinite by the relative terms of the finite. But we never consider that incompatible, because we know that the reality of the words is in what they signify, not in what they are. The reality of Christ must be considered in the same way. We must judge His human limitations in the light of the purpose of His coming, namely, "to express the Absolute Being, especially His feeling, His love for man, His placableness, conversableness, in a word, to communicate His own life into the race, and graft Himself historically into it."<sup>1</sup> The element of mystery and even of contradiction in Him will not permit us to go any farther than that.

c. Reply to the Unitarians.

The Unitarians are particularly criticized for their tendency to investigate psychologically and physiologically the inner nature of Christ. Bushnell points out that it does not lie within the categories of ordinary, natural humanity. And yet,

"instead of turning to receive simply what is expressed of the divine, we immediately begin to try our science on the interior

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1. Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 156.

person of Jesus, to ascertain its contents, or elements, and the mode of its composition."<sup>1</sup>

It is as if Abraham, when the Jehovah angel came to him, would have turned aside from the message to inquire into the digestive process of the angel, or because he came in human form, to ask whether he had a human soul or not. "O Abraham! we should say, hear the Lord speak to thee; what He commands thee, do, what He promises, believe! Suspend thy raw guesses at His nature and take His message."<sup>2</sup> Taking the figure of Moses and the burning bush, he says,

"instead of putting off their shoes before the burning bush, they would put out the fire rather...Receiving nothing by their imagination or by their heart, the verities they embrace are all dead verities. And as dead verities cannot impregnate, they live as being dead themselves...They cannot imagine that even the babes of true knowledge, the simple children of Christian faith, who open their hearts to the reconciling grace of God in Christ Jesus, are really wiser and deeper than they."<sup>3</sup>

#### 4. Bushnell's Own Position.

We shall now attempt to state more clearly the position which Bushnell took -- of which we have already had intimations in the above stated answers.

Bushnell very frankly admits that he cannot solve the mystery of the relationship of the divine and the human in the person of Christ. Especially great is this mystery when it is applied to the suffering of Jesus. In spite of the view held by many that God cannot suffer, we cannot infer this concerning the person of Christ.

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1. Bushnell, God in Christ, pp. 157-8.
2. Ibid, p. 158.
3. Ibid, p. 159.

"The only question is, whether God, by a mysterious union with the human, can so far employ the element of suffering as to make it a vehicle for the expression of His own grace and tenderness--whether, indeed, God can be allowed, in any way, to exhibit those Passive Virtues, which are really the most active and sublimest of all virtues; because they are the most irresistible, and require the truest greatness of spirit. Therefore, when we come to the agony of the garden, and the passion of the cross, we are not, with the speculative Unitarian, to set up as a dogma, beforehand, and as something that we perfectly know, that God can set Himself in no possible terms of connection with suffering; nor believing with the common Trinitarian, that there are two distinct natures in Christ, are we to conclude that no sort of pang can touch the divine nature. We cannot thus intrude into the interior of God's mysteries. We can only see the eternal Life approach our race -- Divine Love manifested and sealed; the Law sanctified by obedience unto death; pardon certified by the 'Father Forgive'; peace established and testified by the resurrection from the dead."<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, he insists, even at the expense of Christ's humanity, that Christ must stand before us in a simple unity, "One person, the divine-human, representing the qualities of his double parentage as the Son of God and the son of Mary."<sup>2</sup> Otherwise, the whole work of Christ, His suffering, His death as a Redeemer, will be upon His human side; since the Divine did not suffer, His death will mean no more than the death of any other man. Furthermore, we will not be assured of the possibility of our union with the Divine, for the Divine will be as far away as it was before the Incarnation.

On the charge, however, that he denies the presence of a human soul in Christ, he disagrees, saying, "I only deny that his human soul, or nature is to be spoken of, or looked upon, as having a distinct subsistence, so as to live, think, learn, worship, suffer by itself."<sup>2</sup> He will neither deny, nor affirm anything concerning

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1. Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 162.

2. Ibid, p. 163.

the interior composition of the construction of His person. Taking a step in advance, he does state:

"There may be a human soul here or there may not -- that is a matter with which we have nothing to do, and about which we have not only no right to affirm, but no right to inquire, all that we have to do is, to take the person of Jesus at its face, speak of the human and the divine, assume their union, and receiving them in this perfectly trustful, incurious manner, let them enter our spirit as a new principle of life from God."<sup>1</sup>

He is willing to admit that in the history of the Church, the weight of opinion has been on the affirmative side of the question, and that the decision was probably right. In fact, the human soul in Christ is necessary, because otherwise we should not "find any place for using a large class of representations that present him on the human, or subject side of his mystery; and so the incarnation itself will vanish as a fact."<sup>2</sup> But, on the other hand, we must not be over-speculative on the matter; for since Christ is wholly abnormal in His person, we are forbidden to undertake the decision of the alternative. He compares the search for a human soul with the search for a certain drop in the sea. When we have discovered it, we only know that the drop is there.

"The sea is not any larger, or purer, or stronger; for if the reality of Christ be God, and God is infinite, what more or better is he for this drop of humanity that is merged thus eternally into the boundless ocean of his nature? -- so merged that, as regards its human existence, it shall never be distinctively active, or distinctively known?"<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, when he is charged with the denial of the real humanity of Christ, he refuses to accept the charge, recognizing

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1. Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 96.
2. Ibid, p. 105.
3. Ibid, p. 95.

that were Christ to be taken as a mere show or theophany, having no real and historic place in humanity, the gospel would no longer have a solid import, but would become nothing more than a phantasm.

But, he writes further,

"Do I then deny the real humanity, because I refuse, either to affirm or to deny, or to know anything in regard to his interior composition; insisting that the incarnation shall be taken at its face, as a real historic fact, valuable for what it reveals of God, and not for the riddle it offers to metaphysical science? Is the gospel reduced to a phantasm because I am not able to show in Christ's person the matter of a man, who is not a man, and never will be, and who, at the best, is only an inconceivable something?"<sup>1</sup>

In answer to the charge that he has rejected the eternity of the human nature in Christ, he admits that he has had difficulties with this doctrine. He admires the facility of faith of the theologian,

"who has never yet found a difficulty in supposing, either that the one God, or that an eternal person of the Divine Three, the Son of God, underwent a permanent change of state before all worlds, in the year 1 of our Christian era; that in this particular speck of the universe, at a certain date...he entered into union with humanity, and is hereafter and forever to reign over the known universe of angels and all the populations of the sky, in the humanity then assumed and shortly after glorified."<sup>2</sup>

Another difficulty with the acceptance of this doctrine is whether by this 'glorified body' one must accept a definite form under the terms of the limitations of space, which is implied in the very word 'body'. Bushnell will not accept the theory that some theologians advanced, that Christ will inhabit a kind of a sun-body, because it has too much the appearance of a phantasm. His conclusion

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1. Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 110.

2. Ibid, p. 112.

is stated thus:

"And yet the scriptures seem to affirm, and of the truth itself I have no doubt, that in some proper and virtual sense, the Christ is to be eternal and be known to us<sup>1</sup> as the glorified man or humanity. As to the precise manner, it is better to hold a position of modesty. It may be some external sense, but we know so little of the matter of externals in the world of spirits, what 'body' means, and 'glorified body', and 'glorified humanity', that it is better not to rush too boldly into those things we have not seen, lest we do it as they that are vainly puffed up in their fleshly mind."<sup>2</sup>

In concluding this discussion of the relation of the Divine with the human, we could do no better than quote in full Bushnell's own summary, part of which has been quoted before:

"Perhaps it may be imagined that I intend, in holding this view of the incarnation, or the person of Christ, to deny that he had a human soul, or anything human but a human body. I only deny that his human soul or nature, is to be spoken of, or looked upon, as having a distinct<sup>1</sup> subsistence, so as to live, think, learn, worship, suffer by itself. Disclaiming all thought of denying, or affirming anything as regards the interior composition or construction of his person, I insist that he stands before us in simple unity, one person, the divine-human, representing the qualities of his double parentage as the Son of God, and the son of Mary...I look upon him only in the external way; for he comes to be viewed externally in what may be expressed through him, and not in any other way. As to any metaphysical or speculative difficulties involved in the union of the divine and the human, I dismiss them all, observing that Christ is not here for the sake of something accomplished in his metaphysical or psychological interior, but for that which appears and is outwardly signified in his life...Regarding Christ in this exterior, and, as it were, esthetic way, he is that Holy Thing in which my God is brought to me, -- brought even down to a fellow relation with me. I shall not call him two. I shall not decompose him and label off his doings, one to the credit of his divinity, and another to the credit of his humanity. I shall receive him, in the simplicity of faith, as my one Lord and Savior, not any less so that he is my brother."<sup>3</sup>

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1. In this study italics in the original will be underlined, and the emphases by the author will be capitalized.
2. Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 113.
3. Bushnell, God in Christ, pp. 163-4.

#### D. The Mission of Christ.

This section will be especially concerned with the result of the coming of Christ into the world, as seen through the eyes of Bushnell. Although the effect of Christ's life will be treated, the center of thought will be the effect of Christ's death upon the cross.

According to Bushnell, there are in Scripture two distinct views of Christ and His work, which are yet radically one and the same. These he names (1) a subjective, speculative view -- "that which represents Christ as a manifestation of the Life, and thus a power whose end is to quicken, or regenerate the human character"<sup>1</sup>, and (2) an objective, ritualistic view -- "one that sets him forth to faith, instead of philosophy, and one, without which, as an Altar Form for the soul, he would not be the power intended, or work the ends appointed."<sup>2</sup> Both of these are included in the doctrine of Christ's work, which it is stated as "God in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself."<sup>3</sup> It will be the purpose of this section to clearly define these two views.

##### 1. The Subjective View.

As has already been stated, this view represents Christ as a manifestation of the Life. He has come into the world as a perfect, sinless, being. What is the effect of the coming of such a being? Beginning the lowest view of the effect of such a man, he affirms that, just as the world has not been the same world since Socrates lived,

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1. Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 203.
2. Ibid, p. 190.
3. Ibid, p. 191



so much more the character of Jesus,

"has an organific power. It enters into human thought and knowledge as a vital force; and, since it is perfect, a vital force that cannot die, or cease to work...The entering of one such perfect life into the world's history changes, in fact, the consciousness of the race."<sup>1</sup>

But the fact that Christ is the manifestation of Life -- "God expressed in and through the human", has effect of even higher significance. He comes as "the Eternal" incarnated in human history, "expressing, by the mysterious identification of his nature with theirs, a mystery yet more august -- the possible union of their nature with His." How the words and works of such a one will be remembered by men after He is gone! His appearing,

"is a new epoch in their history. He will live in their hearts, life within life. A divine light from the person of their Emanuel will stream through their history...A divine vigor from the Life manifested among them will penetrate their feeling, elevating their ideas and purposes, and even their capacity of good itself."<sup>2</sup>

The fact that this Life has been manifested in the history of an alienated and averted race adds even more significance, for He comes as a liberator. ~~His~~ has become "a kind of malign possession in the race, a prince of the power of the air, reigning unto death."<sup>3</sup> To overcome this Power, Christ comes into the world, uniting with and incorporating in it, the Divine. The result is that

"the Life manifested in him becomes a historic power and presence in the world's bosom, organizing there a new society or kingdom, called the kingdom of heaven, or sometimes the church...the Society of the Life, the Embodied Word...The principedom of evil is dissolved--the eternal Life, manifested in the world, organizes a new society

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1. Bushnell, God in Christ, pp. 205-6.
2. Ibid, p. 207.
3. Ibid, p. 208.

of life, breaks the spell forever of social evil, and begins a reign of truth and love that shall finally renew the world."<sup>1</sup>

In this reign of evil, the individual man has been blinded by sin and spiritual darkness. His moral conceptions have been dulled. His religious ideas have lost their verity. What can cure him of this condition? "A production of the divine in the human, a living Presence, a manifestation of the Life," says Bushnell. He continues,

"The true light now shineth. God...hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ...the understanding that was darkened, being alienated from the life of God, beholds once more a light in the manifested life...While the understanding is blockaded by doubt, a God streams into the feeling, and proves His reality to the heart."<sup>2</sup>

The incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Christ will have another effect upon the individual. As he sees the one who was in the form of God come into human life, passing through from the manger to the cross -- when he sees Him pass through the suffering of life to the sufferings of death -- when he realizes that all this was brought about by God to renew souls, he will realize the terrible import of his sin. He will ask, "If God, to renew the soul, moves a plan like this, what is it to be a soul, what to desecrate and destroy a soul?"<sup>3</sup>

A man, coming to this realization, will be full of discontent and bitterness. He will try to restore his own nature to goodness, but will fail, because sin has removed him from God, and he has no more the power to do good. But through the appearance of God, the dead affections are made alive, and

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1. Bushnell, God in Christ, pp. 208-9.

2. Ibid, p. 210.

3. Ibid, p. 211.

"the body of sin and death that lay upon the soul is heaved off, and the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, the Eternal Life manifested in him, and received by faith into a vital union -- quickens it in good, and makes it free."<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, the life and death of Christ has a negative influence in the life of the sinner -- a subduing power over the human will. There has grown in the life of the sinner an enthronement of self interest, making the man a centre to himself. It is necessary "that there be a captivating, or subduing power displayed, one that will break his will, take him away from his self-seeking, engage his love, and regenerate the liberty of his fallen affections."<sup>2</sup> Then Christ comes into the world, to live a life that is parallel to his -- entering into all his wants, losses, and needs. He sees the submission of this Christ -- how "the only perfect being that ever lived in the flesh, becomes the most insulted and abused being"<sup>3</sup>, taking it all with the patience of a lamb, without an answer, or a complaint. What is the result?

"He outreaches, by his love, the measure of our animosities -- the wrong will in us, all the malignities of our devilish passion feel themselves outdone. Evil falls back from its apparent victory, spent, exhausted, conscious, as it never was before, of its impotence...Before this cross, we feel ourselves weak in evil. Into our angry spirit, chafing against the rule of law, there steals a gentler feeling -- some secret centurion, hid in the heart's inmost cell, whispers, 'truly this was the Son of God'. And then embracing, as love, what we have rejected as law, or commandment, we do, in fact, accept all law."<sup>4</sup>

Bushnell anticipates the question: "What becomes of the law and justice of God? Does it not need vindication in order to

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1. Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 213.
2. Ibid, p. 240.
3. Ibid, p. 241.
4. Ibid, p. 242.

save the moral rigor of God's integrity, in the view of His subjects?" Granting this, he affirms that the act whereby God is satisfied need not be equal to the punishment merited, nor must God's abhorrence of sin be poured upon the person of Christ. In fact, we do not know whether any such "grand judicial and penal demonstration"<sup>1</sup> is wanted before the "high court of the universe". If there is any vindication of God's law necessary for forgiveness, it is for effect in this world -- to make man "feel the intensest possible sense of the sanctity of the law, and the inflexible righteousness of God".<sup>2</sup> Rejecting both the orthodox view -- that God cannot forgive without the penal suffering of Christ, and the Unitarian view -- that God, because of His simple goodness, will forgive any sinner who is truly repentant, he suggests that Christ died on the cross,

"in order to make men penitent, and so to want forgiveness -- that is, to keep the world alive to the eternal integrity, verity, and sanctity of God's law -- that is, to keep us apprized of sin, and deny us any power of rest while we continue under sin."<sup>3</sup>

In fact, this involved not only His death, but also His life, in which the cross was the climax. Bushnell names four methods by which Christ brought the law closer to men's souls. These are summarized very ably as follows:

"First, by the more rigorous and impressive announcements of its penal retributions, in the future life. Secondly, by his own transcendent obedience to its precepts, and the exhibition of its sacred beauty in his character. Thirdly, by the expense and pains-taking of his suffering life and passion, viewed as undergone to reestablish it in us. Fourthly, in the article of his bloody death, con-

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1. Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 217.
2. Ibid, p. 218.
3. Ibid, p. 219.

sidered as counterpart to the uses of blood in the ritual service; where blood, as containing the life, is regarded as a sacred element which, by its application, consecrates again, the Just Name and Law of the Being whose altar it sprinkles."<sup>1</sup>

We have now stated the subjective view of the effect of the life and death of Christ. Before undertaking to present the other view held by Bushnell, let us present Bushnell's own summary of all that has been said in this section:

"My doctrine is summarily this: that, excluding all thoughts of a penal quality in the life and death of Christ, or of any divine abhorrence to sin, exhibited by suffering laid upon his person; also, dismissing, as an assumption too high for us, the opinion that the death of Christ is designed for some government effect on the moral empire of God in other worlds, -- excluding points like these, and regarding everything done by him as done for expression in our minds of the essential sanctity of God's law and character, which it was needful to produce, and without which any proclamation of pardon would be dangerous, any attempt to subdue and reconcile us to God, ineffectual. Meantime, it may comfort some to add, that he does by implication, or inferentially, express in all that he does, the profoundest abhorrence to sin; for, if he will endure so much to resanctify his law, and renew us to the spirit of it, how intensely signified is the abhorrence of his nature to the transgression of his law."<sup>2</sup>

Yet, when he is through presenting this view, he asks himself the question: "Is it satisfactory -- is it the gospel of Christ?" Admitting the greatness of such a plan, he confesses that, "taken by itself, it is not satisfactory to me, and I could not offer it as the full and complete gospel of Christ." In order to see what is further necessary, let us examine the objective view.

## 2. The Objective View.

Bushnell admits that there is a defect in the subjective view, which he defines thus, "it offers no altar Form for the soul's

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1. Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 281.
2. Bushnell, God in Christ, pp. 236-7.

worship, but only something to be received by consideration -- such a remedy for sin that, if we had it on hand always to act reflectively, and administer to our moral disease, it would be well."<sup>1</sup> Taking the analogy of a sick man, he says that such a sick man wants

"not a store of drugs out of which he may choose and apply for himself, but to commit himself, in trust, to one who shall administer for him, and watch the working of his cure; so the soul that is under sin wants to deposit her being in an objective mercy, to let go self-amendment, to believe, and in her faith to live."<sup>2</sup>

Self-culture would be the outcome, if Christianity were presented merely as subjective, philosophical doctrine. He would be held "to that which he needs most of all to escape, viz. the hinging of his life on himself."<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, it is the mental instinct of the human mind, says Bushnell, to "throw all its subjects into objectivity."<sup>4</sup> Thus, he points out that when a scene is described as pitiful, or joyful, or delightful, it is "not because the scene itself was really full of pity, or joy, or delight, but because we were so ourselves."<sup>4</sup> This fact has been evident in all religions that the world has ever seen. Especially is this true of the religion of the Jews. It was not a set of subjective exercises carefully and logically stated, but consisted of an exact ritual of outward exercises.

This is also true of Christianity. Judaism is not displaced, but fulfilled by Christianity, in that the outward objectivities of the

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1. Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 248.
2. Ibid, p. 250.
3. Ibid, p. 263.
4. Ibid, p. 246.

old religion are superseded by the inward objectivities of the new.

Thus,

"instead of a religion before the eyes, we have one set up in language before the mind's eye, one that is almost as intensely objective as the other, only that it is mentally so, or as addressed to thought."<sup>1</sup>

An illustration of the projection of subjective truth into objective form is found in the idea that God keeps a judgment book, in which He records all our actions. The subjective truth, says Bushnell, is that every soul contains in itself a perfect memory, one that remembers all the things of the past, and will, at some future day, be roused to report to us all the acts and thoughts of our past lives.

But how is this related to the life and death of Christ? In answering this question Bushnell maintains that Christ was not offered up as a sacrifice according to the human view, but only in a figurative way, the truth of which God alone could discern.<sup>2</sup> The fact that He can be both a sacrifice, and a high priest and mercy-seat, shows that His sacrifice must not be taken literally but spiritually.

Now what is the real meaning of the objective "altar forms" such as "a sacrifice", "an offering", "remission of sins in His blood", and others of this nature? These, according to Bushnell, must be interpreted in the light of the ancient ritual service. For example, in what sense in Christ the propitiation? Bushnell says,

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1. Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 249.
2. Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 241.

"in such a sense...as a Hebrew, accustomed to offer his propitiatory sacrifice for sin, would find in the figure, taken as a figure... What is the feeling or thought he has, when he comes to offer his propitiatory sacrifice upon the altar? Comprehensively, it is this; that he is here to propitiate God. His soul is burdened by his sin. God is angry. He wants peace. He comes therefore with his offering, to propitiate or reconcile God, and obtain absolution or the remission of his sins."<sup>1</sup>

If now one were to tell this Hebrew that Christ is offered as such a propitiation for sin<sup>2</sup>, and that all that is necessary to have a sufficient and everlasting propitiation is to believe in Christ, he might conceive that Christ is the sacrifice. Through Him God's wrath was turned away, and there came reconciliation. Now, says Bushnell, going back to the Hebrew, who is trying to propitiate God, "we venture to ask him whether, after all, is it God that wanted propitiating, or himself that wants reconciling to God?" What would be his answer?

"If he be a man of the earlier ages under ritual, he is likely not to understand the question. But if he be a worshipper of the later times, the time, for example of David and the prophets, when the reflective habit is a little more unfolded, and piety is growing more subjective, he will begin to revolve the question internally, and will finally reply that he finds the need of a sacrifice in himself, and the wants of his own character as a sinner, and not in God. He will also bring into view the fact that God is unchangeable. 'No, I do not suppose,' he will answer, 'that God wants propitiating so much as I want changing in my spirit...Yes, one thing is clear,' he will say, 'that no offering propitiates God, unless the heart goes with the offering and ascends to God in the smoke of it.' And the moment such a thought occurs to him, or dawns upon his understanding, and he begins to see the objective forms of the rite as related to his subjective exercises, it will be as if he were just coming to a distinct apprehension of its nature

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1. Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 241.
2. It must be recognized that Bushnell is superimposing Christian ideas upon a pre-Christian period to explain the Christian idea in terms of the old Hebrew ritual.



and value...the objective propitiation will be executed by a state of inward conformity, love, and confidence."<sup>1</sup>

In the same way, Bushnell points out that in the propitiation through the Son, it will be found "that while the form of the thought is objective, the real change is subjective -- NOT A CHANGE IN GOD, BUT A CHANGE RATHER, IN THE SINNER HIMSELF."<sup>2</sup> Propitiation has only been used as an example. The same process will resolve all the kindred terms of the altar-service -- 'offering', 'sacrifice', 'blood', 'atonement', 'ransom', 'remission', and the rest. Each are in the same way the objective expression for a subjective action.

What then is the relationship between these two views?

Bushnell answers:

"In a word, the objective view, that which looks to the propitiating of God to sinners, is seen to be one and the same, when sounded to the bottom, with the subjective, that looks to the reconciling of sinners to God...They are different in form, different in power, and fulfill different uses; and yet they issue at the same point where they get their practical meaning and verity, viz., IN THE SUBJECTIVE RENOVATION OF THE SINNER...When God represents the history under these altar forms, an impression is made that is both impossible and inconceivable under any other; an impression that transcends the mere speculative understanding and the natural symbols of language...Still the grand issue is the same, whichever of the two conceptions of propitiation we take, the representatively objective, or the subjective; that which looks at a pacification of God, or that which contemplates a change in us. And it is sufficiently accurate to say that the former, representatively taken is the latter."<sup>3</sup>

But some will say that the objective religion then is only a rhetorical accident -- that the apostles and evangelists only took up certain Jewish figures, made ready for their hands, using them to

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1. Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 243.
2. Ibid, p. 245.
3. Ibid, p. 246.

convey the Christian truths. Bushnell answers:

"Contrary to this, it is my conviction...that God prepared such a result, by a deliberate, previous arrangement. It is the Divine Form of Christianity, in distinction from all others, and is, in that view, substantial to it, or consubstantial with it. It is, in fact, a Divine Ritual for the working of the world's mind. It is not more necessary, indeed, that the Life should find a body, than it is that the power Christ deposits in the world should have an operative vehicle. The Christ must become a religion for the soul and before it, therefore a Rite or Liturgy for the world's feeling -- otherwise Christianity were incomplete, or imperfect."<sup>1</sup>

### 3. Objections Answered.

Before closing this section, we must present Bushnell's answers to the outstanding objections to his interpretation of the mission of Christ.

One question which he had to answer was with respect to the reality of this representatively objective view. The question was: "What is it but a figment having no real substance or value?" No, he answers, for it is far more efficient and more powerfully true and closer to our wants, than the other. It is the subjective form of thought which is the most impotent and unreal. It is the objective view by which we are inspired and kindled. He asks:

"Is it a mere fiction or unreality, when I say, objectively, 'it is dark', instead of saying, subjectively, 'I am dark', for this is the real fact, -- 'it is cold', instead of 'I am cold'-- or that 'death is our enemy', instead of 'we dislike and dread our own act of dying'...No, truth, we may almost say, is perfectly represented till it has found some objective form."<sup>2</sup>

In his book, "God in Christ" (pp. 201-2) Bushnell made the statement that the suffering of Christ is real and efficacious only

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1. Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 258.
2. Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 248.

in virtue of the fact that it is incidental, in that He suffered only in His grand attempt to regenerate the world and re-establish the lost union of souls with the divine nature. The question asked is: "Is not the death of Christ an indispensable necessity?" Bushnell answers:

"But if, nevertheless, I affirm the indispensable necessity of this part or condition, subordinate though it be; if I say that, in order to make pardon a want as well as to make it safe, it must be dispensed as to cut off all appearance of license and establish, before and upon all consciences, the authority and sanctity and certain perpetuity of the law violated by transgression, is it then a breach upon the doctrine of justification that I affirm its necessity for a double reason? If it is necessary, first, for the subordinate reason commonly asserted, and then, secondly, to disturb the evil conscience of transgression...which is the comprehensive reason and last end of all, then it would seem to be made quite as necessary under a double necessity as under a single."<sup>1</sup>

The third objection is that Bushnell has dissipated the meaning of such terms of the altar as "sacrifice", "propitiation", and explained them away. He answers:

"This certainly was not my design. I seem, on the contrary, to have found a most real and powerful meaning for them all; a meaning of so great a value that they are endeared to me a hundred fold...It is objected, for example, that I deny the sacrifice of Christ. Yes, I deny anything and everything of the outward form of sacrifice in the death of Christ, and so does the objector. Or, if not, he sees at a glance that he must. Perhaps he has thought and been accustomed to say that he holds the literal sacrifice of Christ. But the moment his attention is held to the subject a little more closely, he sees that he cannot hold the literal, in the sense of an outward, formal sacrifice. Then, admitting this, the question arises, what does he hold? A spiritual sacrifice certainly, one that is analogical to the outward sacrifice of the altar, and of which that is a type or figure. So of all the substitutional terms in question."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 219.
2. Ibid, pp. 223-4.

### E. The Relation of Christ to the Trinity.

In the sections above we have concerned ourselves with the nature of the person of Christ, and with the nature of His work. We have seen that He is a Divine Being. The question of this section is: "What is the relationship of the Divine person in Christ to the other persons in the Trinity, and how may this relationship be maintained without violation of the unity of the Godhead?"

#### 1. Contemporary Background.

There has always been difficulty in reconciling the three persons in the Christian Trinity with the unity of God. The Bible presents the three Divine beings, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and yet affirms the unity of God. There were several efforts to solve this problem among orthodox theologians during Bushnell's time.

It was generally accepted that these three persons belonged not to the 'machina Dei', by which God is revealed, but to the very 'esse'. They were all equal, infinite, of the same substance. Many held that there were three living persons in the interior nature of God, with three consciousnesses, wills, hearts, understandings. Since this view could not be reconciled with the Absolute unity, they accepted a social unity. "They were one God simply in the sense that the three will always act together, with perfect, or coincidence."<sup>1</sup> At the same time many holding this view yet professed that they believed that God was one. Their claims, however, did not hold upon

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1. Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 13.

closer investigation; there was a tendency to tri-theism.<sup>1</sup>

Convinced of the unity and the supremacy of God, Bushnell was dissatisfied with the common answers. His problem was, "How shall we resolve the divinity or deity of Christ, already proved, so as to make it consist with the proper unity of God?"<sup>2</sup> Holding immovably the strict personal unity of God, there must be reconciled with it the three of scripture, and "the living person walking the earth in human form, called Jesus Christ -- a subject, suffering being, whose highest and truest reality is that he is God."<sup>2</sup> Bushnell believed that he had a satisfactory answer. Again, as in the discussion concerning the two natures in the person of Christ, he states that he will not undertake to fathom the interior being of God, for that is impossible.

To understand Bushnell's answer, we must first understand his view of the unrevealed God, as He was previous to creation or the incarnation.

## 2. Bushnell's Conception of the Unrevealed God.

He states that God unrevealed is God simply existing, as spirit, in Himself. Who, now, is God, thus existing in Himself?

He answers:

"Has He any external form, by which He may be figured or conceived? No. Is He a point without space -- is He space without limit? Neither. Is His activity connected with any sort of motion? Certainly not; motion belongs to a finite creature ranging in the infinite. Is there any color, sound, sign, measure, by which He

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1. Bushnell, God in Christ, see pp. 132-4.

2. Ibid, p. 136.

may be known? No. He dwells in eternal silence, without parts, above time. If, then, we can apprehend Him by nothing outward, let us consider, as we may without irreverance, things of a more interior quality in His being. Does He, then, act under the law of action and reaction, as we do? Never. This, in fact, is the very notion of absolute being and power, that it acts without reaction, requiring no supports...He simply is, which contains everything. Does He, then, reason? No, for to reason in the active sense, as deducing one thing from another, implies a want of knowledge. Does He then, deliberate? No; for He sees all conclusions without deliberation. Does He inquire? No; for He knows all things already. Does He remember? Never; for to remember is to call up what was out of mind, and nothing is out of mind...Where, then, is God? by what searching shall we find Him out? by what sign is He to be known or conceived? Does He think? No, never, in any human sense of the term; for thought, with us, is only a finite activity under the law of succession and time; and besides this, we have no other conception of it...What, then shall we say; what conception form of God as simply existing in Himself, and as yet unrevealed? Only that He is the Absolute Being -- the Infinite -- the I Am that I Am, giving not sign that He is, other than that He is."<sup>1</sup>

### 3. The Necessity of the Incarnation to Reveal God.

Bushnell admits that this is a very unsatisfactory and unpleasant view of God. But it is the best we could have, without the Trinity, and incarnation.

It must be remembered, however, that when God is revealed, it cannot be as the Infinite, or Absolute, but must be through media, and since there are no infinite media, He must use the finite.<sup>2</sup> It is only through relative terms that we can come into the knowledge of God. "Nothing that we see, or can see, represents Him fully, or can represent Him truly; for the finite cannot show us the Infinite."<sup>3</sup>

God first revealed Himself in the creation. Here Bushnell

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1. Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 138.

2. Ibid, p. 139.

3. Ibid, p. 144; see also Christ in Theology, pp. 136-7.

definitely brings in the idea of the Logos. He says that God has a capacity of self-expression which is peculiar, by aid of which He can produce Himself outwardly, or represent Himself in the finite. This is the Logos, who elsewhere is called the Form of God, who is

"God mirrored before His own understanding...Conceive Him now as creating the world, or creating worlds, if you please, from eternity. In so doing, He only represents, expresses, or outwardly produces Himself. He bodies out His own thoughts. What we call the creation is, in another view, a revelation only of God. And it is in this view that the Word, or Logos, elsewhere called Christ, or the Son of God, is represented as the Creator of the worlds."<sup>1</sup>

But there was still more of God to be revealed. God created the first light. One thing more is possible that will yield a still more effulgent light, viz., that, as God has produced Himself in all the other finite forms, so now He should appear in the human. This was especially necessary because men, who were to be the visible revelation of the truth and beauty of God, had come under the power of evil. "Sin, prejudice, passion, -- stains of every color -- so deface and mar the race, that the face of God, the real glory of the Divine, is visible no longer."<sup>2</sup> Now, therefore,

"God will reclaim this last type of Himself, possess it with His own life, and feeling, and through that, live Himself into the acquaintance and biographic history of the world. 'And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us; and we beheld his glory, as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.'"<sup>2</sup>

Before this time, there has been no appearance of Trinity in God's revelation. But with the incarnation, there begins to offer itself to view, a threefold personality or impersonation of God. As

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1. Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 146.

2. Ibid, p. 147.

a result many are confused by the difficulties involved, which they say are contrary to reason, and therefore impossible to faith. Bushnell answers:

"I think otherwise. In these three persons or impersonations I only see a revelation of the Absolute being, under such relatives as by their mutual play, in and before our imaginative sense, will produce in us the truest knowledge of God -- render Him most conversable, bring Him closest to feeling, give Him the freest, least obstructed access, as a quickening power to our hearts."<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. The Meaning of the 'Instrumental Trinity'.

But, one asks, how can these three persons be reconciled with the one Absolute Being? There have already been intimations of Bushnell's answer. We will now attempt a clearer answer.

It has been seen that the Trinity resulted of necessity from the revelation of God to man. Assuming the strict unity of God's nature, He could not be efficiently revealed to us without evolving a Trinity of persons. These persons, says Bushnell, are the *dramatis personae* of revelation, and their reality is measured by what of the infinite they convey in these finite forms.

The best name that Bushnell could give to this conception of the Trinity was 'instrumental trinity' because,

"in and through these living persons or impersonations, I find the Infinite One brought down even to my own level of humanity, without any loss of His greatness, or reduction of His majesty."<sup>2</sup>

In another place Bushnell presents this concept in a different way, which clarifies his meaning. The Trinity, he says, is

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1. Bushnell, *God in Christ*, p. 148.
2. *Ibid*, p. 175.



to be viewed,

"as being a VEHICLE that imports into our measures a somewhat that is above our measures; a LENS that gathers some of the few rays of the Infinite Pleroma of God, and brings them to a luminous center without our finite apprehension and before our personal feeling. This Infinite Pleroma...becomes, when revealed in a triad of persons, each to be embraced in turn, and all together, effectually personal, and possible to their love, while effectually infinite."<sup>1,2</sup>

Bushnell summarizes this view of the Trinity as follows:

"Thus we have three persons, or impersonations, all existing under finite conditions or conceptions. They are relatives, and in that view, are not infinities; for relative infinities are impossible. And yet, taken REPRESENTATIVELY, they are each, and all, infinities; because they STAND FOR, AND EXPRESS THE INFINITE, ABSOLUTE JEHOVAH. They may each declare, 'I am He'; for what they impart to us of Him, is their true reality. Between them all together as relatives, we are elevated to proximity and virtual converse with Him who is above our finite conditions, -- the unapproachable, and as far as all measures of thought or conception are concerned, the Unrepresentable God."<sup>3</sup>

##### 5. Christ's Place in the Instrumental Trinity.

In this view of the Trinity, Christ is the going forth of God, representatively speaking, for a special purpose. He goes into the human from the Absolute, that He might communicate God to the world, and thus to ingenerate into the world Goodness and Life as from Him. In order to meet man as closely as possible,

"he makes his advent through a human birth -- Son of man, and Son, also of God. Regarding him now in this light, as set out before the Absolute Being (who he representatively is) existing under the condition of the finite and the relative, we see at once that, for our sakes, if not for his own, he must have set over against him, in the finite, his appropriate relative term, or impersonation...when he appears in the human state, bringing

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1. Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 144.
2. See also Ibid., pp. 152-3. Here Bushnell discusses the Scripture passage, "The God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all." (Eph. 4:6) He applies it to his concept of the trinity, showing that others before him have done the same.
3. Bushnell, God in Theology, p. 173.

the divine into the human, there results, at one and the same time, a double impersonation, that of the Father and that of the Son -- one because of the other, and both as correspondent or relative terms."<sup>1</sup>

Both the Father and the Son are the Absolute in themselves. Because Christ is revealed as the Son, in order to bring God to human beings, there is also represented the Father, who is the Absolute in such a form that He can be conceived by the human being. Then also, through the coming of Christ, there is another representation, of the motionless Absolute Being, namely the Holy Spirit -- "a Vital Presence, residing ever with us, to work in us all that we need, and to strengthen us to that which none but a divine power can support."<sup>2</sup>

The relation of the three is stated very well in the following summary:

"The Father plans, presides, and purposes for us; the Son expresses his intended mercy, proves it, brings it down to the level of a fellow-feeling; the Spirit works within us the beauty he reveals, and the glory beheld in his life. The Father sends the Son, the Son delivers the grace of the Father; the Father dispenses, and the Son procures the Spirit;...each and all together...bring forth into life about us that infinite, who, to our mere thought, were were no better than Brahma, sleeping on eternity and the stars... Now, the sky, so to speak, is beginning to be full of Divine Activities, heaven is married to earth, and earth to heaven, and the Absolute Jehovah, whose nature we before could nowise comprehend, but dimly know, and yet more dimly feel, has, by these outgoings, waked up in us, all living images of his love and power and presence, and set the whole world in a glow."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 168.
2. Ibid, p. 171.
3. Ibid, pp. 173-4.

F. Summary.

The Christology of Bushnell may be summarized under the following points.

1. The fact that Christ is a Divine being is accepted. It is established by the Bible, Christ's life, and the demand of human need.

2. The relationship of the Divine to the human in Christ involves these points:

a. The inner nature of Christ cannot be investigated, but must remain a mystery.

b. Christ must stand before us in a simple unity.

c. Christ must be accepted for what is expressed through Him, without speculation with respect to His psychological composition.

d. However, Christ must have had a real humanity in order to effectively accomplish His mission. But the status of this humanity cannot be dogmatically stated.

e. Christ will probably have an eternal, glorified body, but its exact nature cannot be defined.

3. The mission of Christ involves these points:

a. It may be summarized in the verse, "God in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself."

b. This may be viewed from two aspects, the subjective view, and the objective view.

c. The main purpose of Christ's life and death was not to cause some effect upon God, but to impress the minds of men with the

CHAPTER IV

AN EVALUATION OF BUSHNELL'S CHRISTOLOGY

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### AN EVALUATION OF BUSHNELL'S CHRISTOLOGY

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## CHAPTER IV

### AN EVALUATION OF BUSHNELL'S CHRISTOLOGY

#### A. Introduction.

We have stated, to the best of our ability, the doctrines about Jesus Christ, as Bushnell conceived them. The task which still remains is an evaluation of these concepts. This is a difficult task.

Our first difficulty lies in the fact that the doctrines are inexplicable in nature. Since the beginning of the Christian era men have been trying to explain the full meaning of Christ, but they have been unsuccessful because experience has taught men that there is more in Christ than can be put into words, or into creedal statement. Each new attempt, may it seem orthodox or heretical in form, has added truth, and yet men are always seeking a fuller explanation of the meaning of this Christ. The inexplicable nature of these doctrines makes us recognize truth in Bushnell's concept; yet we are not satisfied, because we feel that there is more to it than that.

Another difficulty lies in Bushnell's theory of language, which according to Mrs. Cheney,

"is the key to Horacé Bushnell, to the whole scheme of his thought, to that peculiar manner of expression which marked his individuality -- in a word, to the man."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Cheney, op. cit., p. 203.

What is that theory? Bushnell sums it up best in his "Preliminary Dissertation" in these words:

Words, then, I answer, are legitimately used as the signs of thoughts to be expressed. They do not literally convey, or pass over a thought out of one mind into another, as we commonly speak of doing. They are only hints, or images, held up before the mind of another, to put him on generating or reproducing the same thought; which he can do only as he has the same personal content, or the generative power out of which to bring the thought required. Hence, there will be different measures of understanding or misunderstanding, according to the capacity, or incapacity, the ingenuousness or moral obliquity of the receiving party."<sup>1</sup>

Trumbull states it more clearly. Commenting on Bushnell's essay entitled "Our Gospel a Gift to the Imagination" -- a reshaped and condensed form of the "Preliminary Dissertation" -- he says,

"It aims to show that, necessarily, the truth concerning the spiritual and the infinite cannot be stated in precise human language, since all human words have a human origin with human limitations. Such words, when employed to convey truth which is beyond the realm of sight and sense, have their main value in suggesting, not in defining, the higher meaning."<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the question in the mind of one who tries to evaluate Bushnell's position is, "How literal can these definitions be taken? What is hidden beneath the human words?"

However, it is important that we judge the value of his positions; and the evaluation must be objective to be correct. Therefore, the standard of judgment must be the historic creedal statements. As we compare Bushnell's position with these, both his short-comings and his contributions will become evident.

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1. Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 46.
2. Trumbull, H. Clay, My Four Religious Teachers, p. 74.

B. An Evaluation of Bushnell's Doctrine  
of the Person of Christ.

1. A Statement of the Orthodox Position.

The doctrine of the Person of Christ was first formulated into a creedal form, which was accepted by the Church Universal, at Chalcedon, in 451, when the fourth ecumenical council met. The part which has particularly to do with this doctrine is as follows:

"Following the holy Fathers we teach with one voice that the Son (of God) and our Lord Jesus Christ is to be confessed as one and the same (Person), that he is perfect in Godhead and perfect in manhood, very God and very man, of a reasonable soul and (human) body consisting, consubstantial with the Father as touching his Godhead, and consubstantial with us as touching his manhood; made in all things like unto us, sin only excepted; begotten of his Father before the worlds according to his Godhead; but in these last days for us men and for our salvation born (into the world) of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God according to his manhood. This one and the same Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son (of God) must be confessed to be in two natures, unconfusedly, immutably, indivisibly, inseparably (united), and that without the distinction of natures being taken away by such union, but rather the peculiar property of each nature being preserved and being united in one Person and subsistence, not separated or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son and only-begotten, God the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>1</sup>

Goodwin states that "this symbol is the basis of most of the Confessions of Faith of the Reformed Churches, and is accepted by the majority of Christians at the present day."<sup>2</sup> That this is true can be shown by comparison with two of the outstanding Catechisms, the Shorter Catechism, and the Heidelberg Catechism. To the question, "How did Christ, being the Son of God, become

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1. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. XIV, pp. 264-5.  
Edited and translated by Henry R. Percival.
2. Goodwin, Henry M., Christ and Humanity, p. 241.



man?" the Shorter Catechism answers: "Christ, the Son of God, became man, by taking to himself a true body, and a reasonable soul, being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and born of her, yet without sin."<sup>1</sup> In the Heidelberg Catechism, question thirty-five is, "What is the meaning of: Conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary?" The answer is:

"That the eternal Son of God, who is and continues true and eternal God, took upon Him the very nature of man, of the flesh and blood of the Virgin Mary, by the operation of the Holy Ghost; so that He also might be the true seed of David; like unto His brethren in all things, sin excepted."<sup>2</sup>

A comparison of the creedal statements of other Protestant churches with these will show that all accept, if not in word, at least in thought, the content of the Chalcedon symbol.

## 2. The Two Theological Extremes in New England.

Taking the Creed of Chalcedon as a standard, there were two extreme parties in New England, the Trinitarians, and the Unitarians.

### a. The Trinitarians.

In spite of their claim of orthodoxy, the Trinitarians

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1. Whyte, Alexander, A Commentary on the Shorter Catechism, p. 52.

2. Richards, George W., Studies on the Heidelberg Catechism, p. 237.

The original is as follows:

"Frag. Was heist das er empfangen ist von dem heiligen Geist, geboren auss Maria der Jungfrawen?

Antwort. Das der ewige Son Gottes, der warer und ewiger Gott ist, und bleibet, ware menschliche natur, auss dem fleisch und blut der Jungfrawen Maria, durch würckung des heiligen Geists, an sich genommen hat, auff dass er auch der ware samen Davids sey, seinen brüdern in allem gleich, auss-genommen die sünde."

were forced to their extreme position by their defence of the divinity of Christ. Maintaining that Christ was divine, they yet had to account for the man Jesus. Maintaining the impassibility of God, they had to admit that Jesus suffered and died on the cross. As a result they formed a theory of "two distinct substances, still maintaining their several kinds of action in Christ -- one growing, learning, obeying, suffering; the other infinite and impassible."<sup>1</sup> Their doctrine of two wills in Christ was also pushed to the extreme. The final result was that they had a bi-personal Saviour, with all the human characteristics attributed to His human person, and all His divine characteristics attributed to the divine.

b. The Unitarians.

On the other hand, the Unitarians, who saw the human characteristics in Christ, could not reconcile these with the impassibility of God. Guided by their desire for a Unity in the Godhead, they met the same dilemma that faced the Trinitarians, in the person of Christ. But their solution was that Christ was one person -- namely, human. This position is forcefully brought out in one of Bushnell's letters to his Unitarian friend, Dr. Bartol, in which he compliments him for a fine article. But he writes,

"And yet, there is a want in it, a vital defect of something. My heart cries, More, more! It leaves God too far off, interposing, between me and God, a CREATURE-BEING, whom I want to worship more than him, and who really deserves my worship more than he; for surely it was more in him to die for me, and deeper love, than it was for the Father simply to let him."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 154.
2. Cheney, op. cit., p. 219. Written to Dr. Bartol, April 11, 1849.

In the same letter, Bushnell gives us another glimpse of the Unitarian position, when he writes, "Nay, your HUMAN AND CREATURE SAVIOUR is, in one view, an offence to us."<sup>1</sup>

A comparison with the Creed of Chalcedon will show the extreme of each party. The one violated the clause, "the peculiar property of each nature being preserved and being UNITED IN ONE PERSON AND SUBSISTENCE, NOT SEPARATED OR DIVIDED INTO TWO PERSONS.." The other violated the clause, "that He is PERFECT IN GODHEAD, and perfect in manhood, VERY GOD and very man."<sup>2</sup>

### 3. The Contrast of Bushnell's Position with These.

It was against these two extremes that Bushnell fought. We have seen that he wanted both Divine and an undivided Christ. We remember how he insisted that Christ stand before us, "A SIMPLE UNITY, ONE PERSON, THE DIVINE-HUMAN, representing the qualities of his double parentage as the Son of God, and the Son of Mary."<sup>3</sup> In this he was right, for when we read the Creed, we see how it insists for such a unity:

"...the Son of God, and our Lord Jesus Christ is to be confessed as ONE and the same Person...the peculiar property of each nature being preserved and being UNITED in ONE PERSON AND SUBSISTENCE, NOT SEPARATED OR DIVIDED INTO TWO PERSONS, but ONE and the SAME SON."<sup>2</sup>

### 4. Bushnell's Overemphases.

But in seeking to counteract these two extremes, Bushnell

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1. Cheney, op. cit., p. 219.

2. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, op. cit., pp. 264-5.

3. Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 163.

himself over-emphasized certain ideas. In maintaining that Christ is the "manifestation of God", he leaves very little room for the human Christ. He comes very close to Apollinarianism, when he writes, "There may be a human soul here or there may not -- that is a matter with which we have nothing to do, and about which we have not only no right to affirm, but no right to inquire."<sup>1</sup> This is also evident when he compares the human in Christ with a drop in the sea. He writes,

"The sea is not any larger, or purer, or stronger; for if the reality of Christ be God, and God is infinite, what more or better is he for this DROP OF HUMANITY THAT IS MERGED THUS ETERNALLY INTO THE BOUNDLESS OCEAN OF HIS NATURE? so merged that, as regards its human existence, it shall NEVER BE DISTINCTLY ACTIVE, or distinctly known?"<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, he overemphasized the inability to inquire into the inner nature of Christ. While it is true that it is difficult to make a psychological analysis of Christ, with the purpose of finding the human and the Divine, and study of the New Testament clearly shows us that Christ was not only the Son of God, but that He had human intelligence, human affections, and a human will -- that He was a complete human being.

##### 5. Bushnell's Contributions.

Bushnell's contribution in his doctrine of the Person of Christ may be given in these points:

a. He re-emphasized that Christ was the Divine Incarnation of God when a group of Christians were denying that fact.

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1. Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 96.
2. Ibid., p. 95.

b. He insisted, and reaffirmed that Christ must have a united personality, Divine-human, when a group of Christians were dividing the person of Christ into two, a Divine person, and a human person.

c. He again made it clear that the experience of faith must take the place of the exactness of logic, and that Christ must be approached and considered not as a metaphysical problem, but as the revelation of God.

### C. An Evaluation of Bushnell's Doctrine of the Mission of Christ.

#### 1. A Statement of the Orthodox Position.

As we turn to this doctrine it is more difficult to define exactly the accepted position of the church. In the doctrine of the Person of Christ, the Reformation Churches took over the accepted creeds of the Catholic Church. The atonement, however, has never been defined by a council. Nor is it true that the church has held only one view of Christ's death. From time to time men have interpreted the meaning of the cross in different ways. However since the Reformation two interpretations have been held by orthodox men.

As Miley puts it,

"In a strict or scientific sense there are but two theories of atonement...This fact we have, that the vicarious suffering of Christ is an objective ground of the divine forgiveness. There is a necessity for such a ground; his sufferings are an atonement only as they answer to this necessity. Hence the nature of the atonement is determined by the nature of its necessity. Now this necessity must lie either in the requirement of an absolute justice which must punish sin, or in the rectoral office of justice as an obligation to conserve the interest of the moral government...Thus there is place for two theories, but only two.

There is a place for a theory of absolute Substitution, according to which the redemptive sufferings of Christ are STRICTLY PENAL, and the fulfillment of an absolute obligation of justice in the punishment of sin. This is the theory of satisfaction, and answers to a necessity in the first sense given. There is also place for a theory of conditional substitution, according to which the redemptive sufferings of Christ were NOT THE PUNISHMENT of sin, but such a SUBSTITUTE FOR THE RECTORAL OFFICE as renders forgiveness, on proper conditions, consistent with the requirements of moral government. This answers to a necessity in the second sense given, and accords with the deeper principles of the governmental theory."<sup>1</sup>

Hodge defends the former view<sup>2</sup>: Miley defends the later.

Strong presents the Satisfaction theory in a modified form.<sup>3</sup> All however agree that there is objective value in the death of Christ.

## 2. The New England Position.

The New England Theologians were for the most part advocates of the Governmental theory. But here again they went to extremes. Their great emphasis upon the sovereignty of God tended to take out of the hands of men any share in the process of coming into the relationship with Him. This is shown by Emmons' words:

"Though Christ suffered, the just for the unjust, though he made his soul an offering for sin, and though he suffered most excruciating pains in the garden and on the cross, yet he did not lay God under the least obligation, in point of justice, to pardon and save a single sinner."<sup>4</sup>

They went to another extreme. In their insistence of the incompatibility of the just God with sin, most of their emphasis was upon the wrath and abhorrence of God toward sin and the sinner; so

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1. Miley, Systematic Theology, Vol. II, p. 112. See also pp. 155-194.
2. Hodge, Systematic Theology, Vol. II, pp. 480-543.
3. Strong, Systematic Theology, Vol. II, pp. 750-773.
4. Foster, A History of the New England Theology, p. 222.

much so that there was very little said about the love of God.<sup>1</sup>

These words by Foster summarize the situation:

"When Bushnell began his career, the doctrine was still encumbered with many artificial and erroneous elements. The prevailing theology was still forensic, artificial, external. Ethical relations were feebly perceived and little emphasized."<sup>2</sup>

### 3. Bushnell's Objections to the New England View.

Against those who still held the Satisfaction or Penal View, Bushnell objected that in permitting Christ to suffer the penalty of sin,

"the divine government, instead of clearing itself, assumes the double ignominy, first of letting the guilty go, and secondly, of accepting the sufferings of innocence."<sup>3</sup>

The idea that an innocent Christ should be the victim of the wrath of God gave him a "sensation of horror"<sup>3</sup>.

The Governmental view was objected to for several reasons. First, it was groundless to assume that punishment was necessary to the sustenance of God's law. Secondly, it is impossible to conceive of God frowning, "for a moment, on the soul of innocence and virtue."<sup>4</sup> A God that could do that, says Bushnell, is not the God that he has loved and worshipped. Thirdly, if Christ is God manifested in the flesh, the transactions of Christ must be taken as transactions of God. "The frown, then", concludes Bushnell, "if it be said to be of God, is quite as truly on God."<sup>5</sup> Finally, Bushnell claims that

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1. Cf. Bushnell, God in Christ, pp. 194-6.
2. Foster, op. cit., p. 416.
3. Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 196.
4. Ibid., p. 199.
5. Ibid., p. 201.

"the very laws of expression...require that suffering should be endured, not as purposed...but that the evil be a necessary incident encountered on the way to some end separate from expression."<sup>1</sup> Otherwise it expresses nothing.

#### 4. Bushnell's Overemphases.

Bushnell's answer to the New England position has been presented in the preceeding chapter. In attempting to counteract the tendency of New England Theologians to put the effect of the suffering and death of Christ entirely upon God, Bushnell went to the other extreme. Not only is such a "grand judicial and penal demonstration"<sup>2</sup> unnecessary before God; it may not even be wanted by God. No, the chief effect of the cross is upon man, to bring God into his life, to show him the terrible import of his sin, to show him the value of his soul, to subdue his human will, and to sanctify God's law. The question arises in one's mind: "Assuming that the cross does have such an effect upon the sinner, how can God wipe out past sins? Sin demands punishment."

A word must here be said of Bushnell's subjective and objective views. They are a product of his theory of language. Having presented the mission of Christ as we have summarized above, Bushnell still felt the necessity of an objective "Altar Form". In spite of Bushnell's assertion that this Altar Form, as he has presented it, is not a figment of the mind, but very real, the

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1. Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 202.

2. Ibid., p. 217.



writer has felt that it would not be very satisfactory. Bushnell claims that the subjective truth is made real in the objective Altar Form. But how can I trust the objective Altar Form if I know that it only expresses a subjective truth?

#### 5. Bushnell's Contributions.

And yet it would be unjust to say that there were no contributions to Christian thought in Bushnell's interpretation of the Atonement. To a generation which considered the effect of the Cross chiefly in the nature of God, Bushnell re-emphasized the great fact that Christ's suffering and death has a distinct effect upon the hearts of sinful men. Experience has proved the truth of this fact. The beautiful hymn by Rev. Isaac Watts<sup>1</sup> is an evidence of that,

"When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a present far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all."

Paul also made use of this fact when he wrote to the Philippians,

"Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, existing in the form of God,...emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Taken from "Hymns for Worship" No. 106. Written by Rev. I. Watts, 1707.
2. Phil. 2:5-8, American Revised Version.

A second contribution was Bushnell's emphasis upon the love of God. In an age when many theologians emphasized only the hatred of sin in the nature of God, there was need of reaffirmation of the great truth in John 3:16, "God so LOVED the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life."

This section could not be closed more fittingly than with the tribute of Phelps, when he says:

"Differing from him essentially, as I supposed, in his theory of the atonement, I still could not but see, that in its effect upon his personal character, that theory had been to him apparently just what the faith of other believers in Christ is to them. It was indeed no theory: it was a faith and a life. Few men have I known to whom Christ as a Saviour seemed to be so profound a reality as to him. Christ had been obviously the center of his thinking and believing for two-score years."<sup>1</sup>

#### D. An Evaluation of Bushnell's Doctrine of the Relation of Christ to the Trinity.

##### 1. A Statement of the Orthodox Position.

Very early in the life of the church, it had to recognize the difficulty of accepting Jesus Christ as Divine, yet holding to the conviction that there was one God only. The early Christians were convinced of both facts. The first authoritative attempt to unite the two into a creedal statement was at the Council of Nice, in 325, thus:

"We believe in One God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of

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1. Phelps, Austin, My Portfolio, p. 228-9. Essay XXIV, entitled, "A Vacation with Dr. Bushnell".

God, the only-begotten of his Father, of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father. By whom all things were made, both which be in heaven and in earth... And whosoever shall say that there was a time when the Son was not, or that he was made of things that were not, or that he is of a different substance or essence (from the Father) or that he is a creature, or subject to change, or conversion -- all that so say, the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes them."<sup>1</sup>

About two hundred years later this same position was re-emphasized in the so-called "Athanasian Creed", which states that the Church worships,

"one God in trinity, and the Trinity in unity, neither confusing the Persons, nor dividing the Substance; for there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost; but the Godhead of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost is one, the glory equal, the majesty coeternal."<sup>2</sup>

In article 15 and 16 the unity of the Trinity is more definitely affirmed, in these words: "So the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Ghost is God; and yet there are not three gods, but one God."<sup>2</sup> A representative statement of this doctrine in the Protestant churches is found in the Westminster Confession, Chapter 2, Section III.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. The Extremes of New England Theology.

The authoritative statement of these two facts, however, did not keep men from attempting to reconcile them according to reason. Such was the case in New England. In the previous chapter we have touched upon the two directions which this attempt followed.

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1. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Vol. XIV, p. 3.
2. Babcock, F. J., The History of the Creeds. The entire creed, both in the original and translated may be found on pp. 193-197.
3. Macpherson, John, The Westminster Confession of Faith, p. 44.

The orthodox Trinitarians tended toward tri-theism, as is shown by Emmon's words: "According to these representations (the ability for independent action), the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost are THREE DISTINCT PERSONS or agents."<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, men such as Channing and Norton, in their search for one God, were inclined to lessen the place of Christ.<sup>2</sup> Foster describes the result of this struggle when he says that the doctrine of the Trinity "had taken a depotentiated form from which it did not recover during the career of the school."<sup>3</sup>

### 3. The Contrast of Bushnell's Position with These.

Bushnell was vitally interested in the answer of this problem, for it was the core of his intellectual struggles, earlier in his life. It has been noted how he conceived first of an unrevealed God, devoid of time and space. It has further been noted that this unrevealed God had to be brought to man by means of a "vehicle" which could be grasped by the mind of man -- the "dramatis personae of revelation". The focal person in this "vehicle" was Christ -- the Logos, the manifestation of God. The Father and the Spirit are relative to Him, and all three are relative in representing the Absolute Being. This reconciled for Bushnell the Unity and the Trinity in the Bible.

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1. Foster, op. cit., p. 290.
2. Ibid. Channing's position may be found on pp. 284-7. Norton's position may be found on pp. 301-3.
3. Ibid., p. 314.

#### 4. Bushnell's Position Evaluated.

It must first be recognized that Bushnell's concept of the unrevealed God is purely speculative and philosophical. It is striking to note the similarity of this concept with the "Monas" of Sabellius. It is not surprising that Bushnell was accused of Sabellianism.

Bushnell's views resemble Sabellian doctrine, further, in the fact that the Logos is the means of God's revelation. Bushnell agrees with Sabellius, also, in the statement that the Trinity begins only in history, as God reveals Himself to men.<sup>1</sup>

However, there are several important distinctions that must be drawn between Bushnell's position and the heresy of Sabellius. The first important distinction is that Bushnell's Trinity is not a successive one, but occurs simultaneously. This is shown by the place Bushnell gives to the Son in creation. To Bushnell, the Logos of creation is the Son. The second important distinction is that Bushnell did not consider this "instrumental trinity" transient, as was the trinity of Sabellius, but eternal. This is clearly shown in these words:

"Undoubted the distinction of the Word, or the power of self-representation in God thus denominated, is eternal. And in this, we have a permanent ground of possibility for the three-fold impersonation, called trinity. Accordingly, if God has been eternally revealed, or revealing Himself to created minds, it is likely always to have been and always to be as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Consequently, it may always be in this manner that

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1. See Orr's Progress of Dogma, pp. 95-7, for a fine discussion of the Sabellian heresy.

we shall get our impression of God, and have our communion with Him."<sup>1</sup>

Bushnell did not deny the immanent Trinity, but says simply that it is an impossibility for him, or for any other human being, to fathom the inner being of God.

To those who have believed the orthodox position, who have never had to fight intellectual battles because of this question, Bushnell's position does not satisfy. They feel that Bushnell does not go far enough. But we go back to Bushnell's days as a tutor, shortly after he had given up his skepticism for a life in Christ. We remember the words,

"O man! what shall I do with these arrant doubts I have been nursing for years? When the preacher touches the Trinity and when logic shatters it all to pieces, I am all at the four winds. But I am glad I have a heart as well as a head. My heart wants the Father; my heart wants the Son; my heart wants the Holy Ghost -- and one just as much as the other. My heart says the Bible has a Trinity for me, and I mean to hold by my heart. I am glad a man can do it when there is no other mooring, and so I answer my own question, What shall I do? But that is all I can do yet."<sup>2</sup>

This is the way that Bushnell reconciled his mind and his heart. Was not that reconciliation worthwhile, judging from the life of the man? Must we not agree with Phelps when he writes these words in a letter:

"What shall we say of such men in our theological classifications? Where shall we locate them in the schools? It will never do to set them aside as heretics, and leave them there. They are not heretics, in any invidious sense of the title. If faith means character, if 'the faith in Christ' be anything more than the most

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1. Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 177.
2. Munger, op. cit., p. 25.

lifeless of ossified forms, such men are believers beyond the depth of venerable creeds. So much the worse for ourselves, and for the formulas which we revere, will it be, in the ultimate and decisive judgment of mankind, if our faith cannot find a place for such believers near to our hearts, because near to Christ."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Munger, op. cit., pp. 358-9.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

#### A. Restatement of the Purpose and Method of This Study.

It has been the purpose of this thesis to make a study of the Christology of Bushnell, as found especially in his three Christological writings, "God in Christ", "Christ in Theology", and "The Character of Jesus". Upon stating his position, an attempt has been made to evaluate that Christology, seeking to discover Bushnell's contribution to the thinking of his day. The objective standard of evaluation has been the creedal statements which have been historically accepted by the church. An introductory chapter consisting of a biographical sketch has preceeded these other chapters to enable us to appreciate Bushnell's position in the light of his personal experience.

#### B. The Results of This Study.

The biographical study has shown us a man, who grew up in a family where morality was stressed more than creedal conformity. This man then passed through the fires of skepticism and doubt, finally reaching a life of devotion to Jesus Christ. His Christology, however, showed definite marks of this struggle.

The study of the Christological position of Bushnell covered three aspects, (1) the relationship of the Divine with the human in the Person of Christ, (2) the Mission of Christ, (3) the

relationship of Christ to the Trinity. His position may be summarized as follows:

1. Christ is God manifested in the flesh, and must stand before us as a simple unity, even at the possible expense of the human in His person.

2. The mission of Christ was to reconcile men to God. This was accomplished chiefly through His incarnation and life among men as a man. His death on the cross was only the incidental result of such a life -- a part of the life lived to impress men with the sanctity of the law of God, and the necessity of reconciliation with God.

3. Christ as the Logos is the instrument of God's self-revelation of Himself. In this revelation two other instruments are necessary -- the Father and the Holy Spirit, all three relative to each other, and representing the Absolute Being.

The study of the Christology of his contemporaries revealed that Bushnell's position was a reaction against two extremes resulting from an over-emphasis laid upon exact logical definition.

His insistence on the unity of the Person of Christ on the one hand was a corrective for the orthodox theologians of his day, whose logic had formed a divided Christ. His insistence on the Divinity of Christ on the other hand was a corrective for the Unitarians, who had accepted a human Christ. His insistence on the effect of the suffering of Christ on the heart of the sinner was a contribution to the theologians who saw only the forensic effect upon God. His concept of the cross as the manifestation

of the love of God for men was a necessary re-emphasis in an age which saw in it only the wrath of God. His "Instrumental Trinity" served as an answer to a demand for the reconciliation of two great facts -- the unity of God and the Divinity of Christ -- when the logic of the time caused many to give up either one or the other.

A comparison with the historic positions has caused us to recognize the fact that in his attempt to meet the over-emphases of his day, Bushnell himself over-emphasized some aspects of his doctrines to the brink of heresy. While we cannot lessen these, the study of his times and the tributes paid to him by Unitarians and Trinitarians alike, show that he deserves an important place in the history of theology. He only looked "at truth from another corner."<sup>1</sup>

The place that he had won in the hearts of his fellow-ministers, in spite of theological differences, is shown by an incident at the last Association meeting which he attended, as reported by Trumbull:

"At a meeting in the South Church, one of the last that Dr. Bushnell attended, he began to fulfill an appointment by saying, 'Brethren, I am going to read what is probably my last sermon', and then announced his subject: 'Our Relations to Christ in the Future Life'. We listened with eager, tender attention. When he finished there was a long silence. No one cared or dared to speak. At length the Doctor said, 'Come, Burton, tell us what you think of it.' Dr. Burton hesitatingly said, 'Dr. Bushnell tells us that this is his last sermon.' He got no farther, but bowed his head and wept. And we all wept together. Then we knew how we loved him, and how he loved us, and what an irreparable loss his departure would be for us. The dear old Doctor, calmest of all, his deep eyes full of tears, his wan face radiant, looked on as with heavenly grace

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1. Trumbull, op. cit., p. 88.

and benediction."<sup>1</sup>

C. Bushnell's Contribution to the  
Present Day.

This study has brought the conviction that Bushnell has a definite contribution to the present day. This lies in Bushnell's great emphasis upon the supremacy of spiritual experience to logic in the field of religious thought. We recall that the thing which first led him to formulate his Christology was a spiritual experience, in which he made "a personal discovery of Christ, and of God as represented in Him."<sup>2</sup> Second to this was his acceptance in faith, the truths which came out of such an experience. In this scientific age, when everything must be proved and must be reasonable, Bushnell's claim that there are some things which are above scientific analysis or logical statement may well be heeded.

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1. Trumbull, op. cit., pp. 111-12.
2. Cheney, op. cit., p. 193.

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