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Christ, "the form of the soul":
The concept of symbol in
the theology of Horace Bushnell

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CHRIST, "THE FORM OF THE SOUL":
THE CONCEPT OF SYMBOL IN
THE THEOLOGY OF HORACE BUSHNELL

BY

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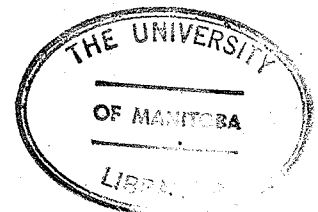
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THESIS Dawne McCance

Title: Christ, "the form of the soul": The concept of symbol in
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Outline

Introduction	1
Chapter One: Man and Nature: "God's Moral Economy"	5
Chapter Two: The Trinity: "language for God"	43
Chapter Three: The Person of Christ: "God's last metaphor"	64
Chapter Four: The Work of Christ: Atonement as the "art of God"	82
Footnotes:	
Introduction	129
Chapter One	130
Chapter Two	145
Chapter Three	155
Chapter Four	160
Bibliography	171

INTRODUCTION

We may assume it without rashness to be the supreme object of God as the creator and governor of men to bestow himself upon them or be inwardly communicated to them. For this men are constitutently made, even as an eye is made for the light. In a certain first view of things, observing chiefly the bounties of the world, one might guess that God's prime object here is the preparing of growths and fruitages that will grow men, growing animals for their sake; but in deeper second thought it will be seen that he is building for mind, to make himself the light of intelligence, the friend of guidance, the supreme joy of love. Physical production plainly enough is no main purpose with him. He glasses himself on every side in objects and forms related to mind. By music and fragrance and color he wakens the sense of his beauty. By unnumbered and persistent ways of discipline he trains experimentally to the knowledge of himself.

- The Spirit in Man, p. 13

Apart from the attention it has received in the context of his language theory, no attempt has been made to come to terms with the meaning and role of symbol in the theology of Horace Bushnell. This is surprising, considering the centrality of the concept in Bushnell's thought, its obvious relation to his own religious experiences, and the apparent tension between symbol and truth which underlies all of his major theological statements.¹ And in a sense, one can almost say that Theodore Munger, initiator of a great legacy of misinterpretation, hinted at a dimension of Bushnell's thought which has not been explored since.² For it is not so much that the natural and the supernatural are divorced from one another, but that all reality is an embodiment of

the divine, that the whole universe is one vast symbol of God.

Bushnell nowhere defined the crucial term "symbol", and he used the word synonymously with several other terms, such as "metaphor", "figure", "form", "image" and "type". Perhaps the best place to begin looking for his meaning of symbol is with the difference between the literal and the fanciful. For if the symbolic consciousness that was part of Bushnell's Puritan heritage had been lost to the New England mind after Edwards, Bushnell did not see its recovery in the "contrived" imagery of the New England left. If there were no mystics among the orthodox, neither could Emerson or Parker be called by that name. According to Bushnell, symbols could not be understood on the level of nature: "the roots of the known are always in the unknown". Every genuine symbol stands out from a background of mystery as a face through which the infinite and unknown looks out upon us, tempting us to struggle into that holy and dark profound which it is opening.

This does not mean, as we will see in Chapter One, that man is not a symbol-maker. Indeed, man is distinguished from all other forms of life on the basis of his symbolic imagination--his capacity to both generate and interpret symbols. Bushnell's definitions of "nature" and "supernatural" are part of an organic theory, according to which all supernatural powers live by embodiment, that is, by bodying forth symbols through the medium or means of nature. But it does mean that all symbol systems operate in terms of one grand and overarching whole, and that ultimately, the meaning of any symbol can be known only in terms of the whole.

In other words, the symbol is grounded in the Reality which it represents.³ This leads us to two fundamental dimensions of Bushnell's

symbolic theory: analogy and relationality. The correspondence between symbol and truth is not arbitrary, but "prepared". This principle of analogy applies not only to human language, but to all objective reality, to all "things and worlds". It gives Bushnell's symbolism its unlimited scope, and what he called its "moral" meaning.

One aspect of analogy is mystery--that the correspondence between symbol and truth is beyond investigation. We can never know what belongs to the symbol and what to the significance, but we can, through the universal presence of the form-element together with the discerning powers of insight, achieve a gradual spiritualizing of the symbolic world. This is our experimental training to the knowledge of God, the life-long drill in forms and images, prepared for the future benefits and uses of the practice.

The deepest meaning of symbol is as vehicle of God himself. God inspired us in a symbolic reality for the purpose of restoring a lost relationship, and ultimately, the role of the symbol is to conduct souls under sin back to God. Symbols are vehicles of God's own feeling, of the divine beauty and goodness and love. And as the truth which the symbol opens to us is a personal Being, our response to the symbol is one of commitment and trust. It is our embracing of the supernatural through the symbol that brings the inward communication of God.

It is the thesis of this paper that Bushnell's theology can not be interpreted apart from his symbolic theory. Any revelation, he said, whether it be a proposition of language, a vision or "a divine life in the flesh", takes place under conditions of symbol or form. Chapters Two, Three and Four of the thesis are concerned to examine Bushnell's understanding of God in Christ in terms of this basic theory;

in particular, in the light of an apparent tension which surfaces from within this theory and which is evidenced in Bushnell's theology in terms of a shift, or a gradual movement, which comes to a rather abrupt climax in the 1870's. It is the purpose of this paper not to "explain" that shift, but to put it in the context of Bushnell's symbolic theory, and further, to illustrate how central that symbolism is in Bushnell's doctrines of the person and work of Christ.

CHAPTER ONE

Man and Nature: "God's Moral Economy"

(i) Recovering the supernatural and the symbolic

Notwithstanding the interpretation of Theodore Munger, Horace Bushnell did not come down to Yale breathing some sort of nature-mysticism bred in the fresh, free air of Litchfield.¹ About four years before entering college, while tending a carding machine, Bushnell penned, a half-sentence at a time, an exposition of the ninth chapter of Romans. Says Mary Bushnell Cheney of this essay: "The method throughout is strictly logical, and has no trace of the spiritual insight which later characterized his thought on these and kindred subjects."²

Cheney sees this youthful essay as one of the many evidences that Bushnell was, prior to his college days, striving and straining to adapt himself to the arid religious orthodoxy of the day. But as time passed, and despite his exertions, "my religious character went down".³ He would later see his own experience in terms of the struggle faced by "every ingenuous young person" who, in his search after truth, had to grapple with the speculative logic of New England theology. Such a person, said Bushnell

. . . has either to clear his way out into the truth by himself, through years of sorest conflict and groans of private mental war that God only does not frown upon; or else, in fault of any such persistency, to settle back into the more facile embrace of a confirmed and scornful infidelity.⁴

Bushnell's first glimpse after truth came in 1831 while he was tutoring at Yale. It was, says Cheney, "the most important crisis in his life".⁵ Through the reading of Coleridge's Aids To Reflection, Bushnell was able to see beyond the confines of speculative logic to the possibility of intuitive knowledge.

My habit was only landscape before; but now I saw enough to convince me of a whole other world somewhere overhead, a range of realities in higher tier, that I must climb after, and, if possible, apprehend.⁶

Through Bushnell's own account of 1831, given in the autobiographical sermon, "The Dissolving of Doubts", we can recognize the nature and significance of this spiritual awakening. The sermon opens with a description of the questions which were confronting him and a large class of young thinkers in that "specially doubting age":

Science puts every thing in question, and literature distils the questions, making an atmosphere of them. We doubt both creation and Creator; whether there be second causes or only primal causes running ab aeterno in aeternum; whether God is any thing more than the sum of such causes; whether he works by will back of such causes; whether he is spirit working supernaturally through them; whether we have any personal relation to him, or he to us. And then, when we come to the matter of revelation, we question the fact of miracles and of the incarnation. We doubt free agency and responsibility, immortality and salvation, the utility of prayer and worship, and even of repentance for sin.⁷

Prior to 1831, Bushnell had, like a true son of the homespun mode, harnessed all his mental energies into the settling of these great questions, reasoning with restless urgency, "thinking of this and thinking of that". But such attempts "to find" the truth had brought him to a dead end, to what he called a "painful vacuity".⁸

My very difficulty was that I was too thoughtful, substituting thought for every thing 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.⁹

In 1831, Bushnell resolved to "begin at the beginning", to stake his life on the universal law of right.¹⁰ In judging the meaning of this experience, commentators have been less inclined to note the touch of Coleridge than the influence of Scottish common sense realism or Calvinistic moralism. And in all, the estimates given of 1831 as a "conversion" to duty rather than to faith, miss the full meaning of this experience for Bushnell's future life and thought.¹¹

For in 1831, with a deliberate dedication to moral rectitude, Bushnell first became experientially aware of a "higher sense", what he would later call "imagination". With his conscious commitment to a right God, he first "dimly felt" the reality of God; with his resolution to settle himself practically in the great first law of right, came his first apprehension of Christianity as a "practical truth".¹² In terms of his later theology, Bushnell's surrender of will had concomitantly revitalized his intuitive sense:

And this is the power of the will, as regards our moral recovery. It may so offer itself and the subordinate capacities to God, that God shall have the whole man open to his dominion, and be able to ingenerate in him a new, divine state, or principle of action; while taken as a governing, cultivating, and perfecting power in itself, it has no such capacity whatsoever.¹³

It is then in "that subtle gleam of sympathy", or in the assurance that "A Being so profoundly felt, must inevitably be", that Bushnell intimates the nature of his revelation of 1831.¹⁴ "The Dissolving of Doubts" provides several of Bushnell's own "aphorisms", and these show some results of his mind's "new conditions". The great questions were

not gone, but he had a new way of approaching them. Hereafter, Bushnell's life is marked by a growing sense of inner peace, which would carry him through years of illness and accusation. He would wrestle with the doctrines of trinity, incarnation and atonement to the end of his life, but never again would he be afraid to "hang up questions and let them hang".¹⁵

A soul thus dissolved of doubts, wrote Bushnell, "will undertake shortly some point that is not cleared at once by the daylight of his new experience, and will, by and by, master it".¹⁶ It is significant, then, that as early as the year following this experience, Bushnell first addressed himself to what he called "the great question of the age"--the concept of nature.¹⁷ The meaning of nature, the relation of nature to God and of man to God and nature, were issues challenging every enlightened American in the mid-nineteenth century, and specifically threatening inherited Christianity.¹⁸

In an article written in May, 1832, Bushnell distinguished the realm of nature ("inert and powerless, never truly acting, but only acted with or upon") from the realm of mind ("agency itself, power acting of itself and revealing its motions through physical symbols"). At a later time, Bushnell pencilled in the margin of this manuscript: "This article shows the ferment out of which my Nature and Supernaturalism grew into shape thirty years after."¹⁹

These early definitions are consistent with Bushnell's later elaboration of the themes of nature and supernatural, given in the 1858 treatise, Nature and the Supernatural as Together Constituting the One System of God, the 1868 collection of essays, Moral Uses of Dark Things, and in several shorter selections, such as "Progress", and "Science and

Religion".²⁰ They indicate a fresh expression, a new approach to the questions, and one which is basic to Bushnell's entire theological reformulation. But the significance of this new approach can be measured only against the overall naturalism of the day.

It was for Bushnell that "death-damp" which like an atmosphere permeated the mind of the age, that "insidious form of unbelief" which threatened to undermine the foundations of all knowledge and community. And he focused his attack against it in the two fundamental presuppositions underlying naturalistic philosophy: first, the belief that nature, as a physical order, is itself the single and whole sphere of reality; second, belief in the essential goodness and perfectability of man.

"From the first moment or birth-time of modern science", wrote Bushnell, "it has been clear that Christianity must ultimately come into a grand issue of life and death with it, or with the tendencies embodied in its progress".²¹ With the successful demonstration of the workings of cause-effect, the mechanical model was becoming normative for all reality, such that nothing could be true unless proved by the scientific method. It was a scheme alien to any concept of freedom or personality or relationship.²²

There had developed, said Bushnell, "a skeptical tendency by modern science, which has set the laws of nature, for the time, in such prominence, as to operate a real suppression of thought in the spiritual direction".²³ The abuse lay not so much in the apprehension of nature as in "the assumed universal extent of nature, by which it becomes a fate, an all-devouring abyss of necessity, in which God, and man, and all free beings are virtually swallowed up."²⁴ This is the "new infidelity" which can allow no supernatural or spiritual dimension,

nothing distinct or apart from "a world as being a world".²⁵

Busied in nature, and profoundly engrossed with her phenomena, confident of the uniformity of her laws, charmed with the opening wonders revealed in her processes, armed with manifold powers contributed to the advancement of commerce and the arts by the discovery of her secrets, and pressing onward still in the inquest, with an eagerness stimulated by rivalry and the expectation of greater wonders yet to be revealed,--occupied in this manner, not only does the mind of scientific men but of the age itself become fastened to, and glued down upon, nature; conceiving that nature, as a frame of physical order, is itself the system of God; unable to imagine any thing higher and more general to which it is subordinate.²⁶

While the new geology evidenced this secularity of nature, biology's "development theory" posed an even greater threat to the Christian view of man and history. Since progress ruled all life, man's story was also one of ascent. His progress hinged not on the action of God in history, but on the forward thrust of natural causes. His imperfections would soon be abolished through an inherent process of linear development. There are, said Bushnell, no sins, for there is nothing to sin against. Evil is good in the making, and man is on his way to all that is virtuous and true. Bushnell cited New England Unitarianism as a case in point:

Denying human depravity, the need of a supernatural grace also vanishes, and they set forth a religion of ethics, instead of a gospel to faith. Their word is practically, not regeneration, but self-culture. There is a good seed in us, and we ought to make it grow ourselves. The gospel proposes salvation; a better name is development. Christ is a good teacher or interpreter of nature, and only so a redeemer. God, they say, has arranged the very scheme of the world so as to punish sin and reward virtue; therefore, any such hope of forgiveness as expects to be delivered of the natural effects of sin by a supernatural and regenerative experience, is vain; because it implies the failure of God's justice and the overturning of a natural law. Whoever is delivered of sin, must be delivered by such a life as finally brings the great law of justice on his side. To be justified freely by grace is impossible.²⁷

With such ominous perceptions all around him, Bushnell embarked on Nature and the Supernatural, where he upheld and elaborated his 1832 distinction between matter and mind in terms of "nature" and "supernatural". To lift man out from nature, and recover a view of man as a creature of freedom, he followed Coleridge's distinction between "powers" and "things". And again, like Coleridge, he located the seat of personal freedom in the human will.²⁸

Nature, Bushnell defined as "that created realm of being or substance which has an acting, a going on or process from within itself, under and by its own laws . . . a chain of causes and effects, or a scheme of orderly succession, determined from within the scheme itself."²⁹ The supernatural, on the other hand, he did not confine to the divine. All beings, persons, or "powers" are supernatural, the basis for this designation being the will.

Man is thus distinguished from all other forms of organic life in that he is a being supernatural, a creature of freedom who is both in nature and partially sovereign over it.

He is under no law of cause and effect in his choices. He stands out clear and sovereign as a being supernatural, and his definition is that he is an original power, acting, not in the line of causality, but from himself.³⁰

Man is part of nature in the sense that all functions of his soul but the will are a nature, and as nature, operate under their own fixed laws of causality, partially subordinated to the uses of the will and its sovereignty over their changes and processes.

In certain parts or departments of the soul itself, such as memory, appetite, passion, attention, imagination, association, disposition, the will-power in him is held in contact, so to speak, with conditions and qualities that are dominated partly

by laws of cause and effect; for these faculties are partly governed by their own laws, and partly submitted to his governing will by their own laws; so that when he will exercise any control over them, or turn them about to serve his purpose, he can do it, in a qualified sense and degree, by operating through their laws. As far as they are concerned, he is pure nature, and he is only a power superior to cause and effect at the particular point of volition where his liberty culminates, and where the administration he is to maintain over his whole nature centers.³¹

It is not necessary, then, "to go hunting after marvels, apparitions, suspensions of the laws of nature, to find the supernatural; it meets us in what is least transcendent and most familiar, even in ourselves."³² Bushnell calls self-determination "the central attribute of all personality", imparting to man "what is personal in character". It is by virtue of his will that man is what Bushnell calls a "moral" being, and life is what he calls a "moral" affair.³³ At the basis of this term is not some scheme of morality, but the understanding of man as a personality, a self who is unable to live in isolation from other selves. It is a concept which comprehends man's freedom, his individuality, his capacity to respond to the other. And it is a concept which abhors any view of man conceived in mechanistic terms.

Hence, for example, it is that we look on the nobler demonstrations of character in man, with a feeling so different from any that can be connected with mere cause and effect. In every friend we distinguish something more than a distillation of natural causes; a free, faithful soul, that, having a power to betray, stays fast in the integrity of love and sacrifice. We rejoice in heroic souls, and in every hero we discover a majestic spirit, how far transcending the merely instinctive and necessary actings of animal and vegetable life It is no mere wheel, no link in a chain, that stirs our blood in this manner; but it is a man, the sense we have of a man, rising out of the level of things, great above all things, great as being himself.³⁴

But man is also part of nature in the sense that he is "in it, environed by it, acting through it". And that he is set in such close connection with it, Bushnell sees as no fortuity but predetermined in a reality where all supernatural expression is "embodied". "All vital or vitalizing powers are organific, and live by their embodiment".³⁵ This means that from his own point of liberty, man acts upon the laws of cause and effect in nature, thus bodying forth forms or symbols which the mere laws of cause and effect could not themselves produce. That is supernatural, according to Bushnell, which is capable of affecting nature in such a way as to produce results, which by mere nature, could not come to pass. And nature, in this view, is the medium through which such supernatural activity occurs.

And what is the supernatural? It is that which comes down upon nature out of will For nature, we shall see, is put down as a constant quantity, to be the medium or means, the coin or currency system, for exchanges going on between supernatural agents acting themselves into it and through it.³⁶

In rejecting naturalistic monism, Bushnell thus makes a radical distinction between matter and mind, nature and supernatural. Yet inherent in this duality is an underlying unity of structure: things and powers are always related, the one as "organ", "field", "instrument", "vehicle", "medium"; the other as "agent, or force, which acts from itself, uncaused, initiating trains of effect that flow from itself".³⁷ It is this structure that makes all of life a "supernatural transaction" or a "grand conversation of wills".

And thus it is that we find ourselves embodied in matter to act as powers upon, for, with, and, if we will, against each other, in all the endless complications of look, word, act, art, force, and persuasion; in the family and in the

state, or two and two upon each other; in marriage, fraternity, neighborhood, friendship, trade, association, protection, hospitality, instruction, sympathy; or, if we will, in frauds, enmities, oppressions, cruelties, and mutual temptations The powers act on each other, by acting on the lines of cause and effect in nature; starting thus new trains of events and consequences, by which they affect each other, in ways of injury or blessing. They speak and set the air in motion, as it otherwise would not move; and so the obedient air, played on by their sovereignty, becomes the vehicle of words that communicate innumerable stings, insults, flatteries, seductions, threats; or tones of comfort, love and blessing. So of all the other elements, solid, fluid, or aerial--they are medial as between the powers. The whole play of commerce in society is through nature, and is in fact a playing on the causes and objects of nature by supernatural agents.³⁸

In Nature and the Supernatural, Bushnell made his starting point man, not God. He defined man as a supernatural being through illustrations of his relation in freedom to nature. And having provided this familiar model, he saw no difficulty in the transposition to God's supernatural activity. "Is it then a thing incredible", he asked, "that God should do what we are doing ourselves? If we act our supernatural liberty into causes, without infringement of system, cannot God do the same?"³⁹

And if we say that man is a moral being at the point of his will, how are we to conceive of the supreme liberty of God? God will not be the Deist watchmaker sleeping away his "deaf and idle eternity", but an Agent, the Living God, who has made the world open to his access and permeable by his will, so that through his relation in freedom to nature, he may be ever going out to and for man. In this view, wrote Bushnell, "the supernatural is present always to nature, an imminent fomentation, working always in strict system with it, and doing, *pari passu*, just what nature at her given stage of progress may be ready for, and asking for the fulfillment of her true idea."⁴⁰

And this transposition to the conception of God's relation to nature in turn elevates nature to the status of a "universal medium" open to the commerce of all powers; in fact, an instrument of God's personality or a vehicle of divine intelligence.

And so also science itself, having learned to look after mind in things and above them, thus to inspect the goings on of nature, not as a mill operated by fate, but as a chariot wheeled by God's supreme liberty, will itself grow warm and free, as it gets more conversant, through nature, with the Supernatural Mind, and will make its highest reaches of discovery in the poetic and religious impulses, by which it will then finally be lifted.⁴¹

(ii) "Unnature" as symbol of sin

Basic to the theological crisis in New England in the nineteenth century was the debate over the question of human depravity. And while it is important to recognize the wide diversity of theories put forward through long years of controversy, it is perhaps equally significant to point to some common denominators. For whether one's source be Bennet Tyler's pamphlets, or Nathaniel Taylor's "Concio ad Clerum", or William Channing's "Unitarian Christianity", certain basic presuppositions prevail.⁴² Each is inclined to view human nature in essentially substantialist terms, from the extreme of a nature that is entirely depraved to one that is basically good.⁴³ It was this conception which Bushnell challenged in his first major publication, Discourses On Christian Nurture.⁴⁴ Two attendant conceptions he continued to challenge throughout his life: this view of human nature is essentially individualistic, and its correlate is a moralistic view of sin.⁴⁵

As Bushnell put it, sin was understood in terms of "misdeeds",

"this or that particular act of wrong".⁴⁶ And while all wrong acts presuppose sin, we must, he said, probe "back of the acts" to a state which they represent and express, in order to understand sin as "a lost condition". "There are", wrote Bushnell, "different kinds of vice, but only one kind of sin; viz., the state of being without God, or out of allegiance to God".⁴⁷

In the original scheme of things, man was created to be a complete being by reason of his continual inspiration or participation of God. This is the "true normal state" of man, continually inspired by God, "conscious always of God as of himself, actuated by the divine character, exalted by the divine beatitude."⁴⁸ Bushnell did not frame his understanding of sin in terms of inherited depravity; each man has to experience his own fall. The choice of wrong, for Adam and for every man, is a willful and free forsaking of God, a turning away, a change in the soul's love. This is the meaning of the fall:

It is not that man fell away from certain moral notions, or laws, but it is that he fell away from the personal inhabitation of God, lost inspiration, and so became a dark, enslaved creature,--alienated, as the apostle says, from the life of God.⁴⁹

The very seriousness of sin, the "very sin of the sin" is that it is against God and all that comes from God. There is no disguising the fact that sin comes out of man's will as a power transcending nature; it consists in a determination to have our own way, a casting off of the will of God and setting up of our own will; it is, in a word, "self-direction".⁵⁰

We cannot be righteous out of all right relation, for it is our only right relation to live as in God, conscious of God, penetrated and filled by the divine life, even as the stars

are filled with his orderly will and turned about by his counsel. But our sin has taken us away from God. In it we pass into ourselves, take ourselves into our own hands and undertake to shape our own way, as we do to accomplish our own ends.⁵¹

Now while Bushnell set forth a view of man at creation as "constituently perfect" by virtue of the fact that he is inspired by God, this man is, nonetheless, in a state more negative than positive in regard to character. Bushnell stood against a substantialist view in saying that man's character is not given at creation, but only "formed historically"; man begins life without "character begun by action"; "ready", but "weak". His faculties are perfect and he is spontaneous to the good, but his will is yet untrained or unschooled.⁵² Herein lies the weakness which Bushnell labelled man's "condition privative", by virtue of which his sin is "certain", while not necessary. This condition he described as "a moral state that is only inchoate, or incomplete, lacking something not yet reached, which is necessary to the probable rejection of evil".⁵³ Or, considering the first man, Bushnell gave a fuller description:

Considered as being simply made, he is a perfect structure, having all his parts in a balance of harmony, opening to goodness and God as a flower to the morning light. He is yet, with all his happy and pure inclinations, unestablished in anything happy and pure. Nothing good is confirmed in him or set on a footing above temptation. He has no experience and, so far, no character grounded in experience. He is curious and wants to know the unknown. He wants even to know disobedience, and has no sufficient countercheck of bitter experience to keep him from the trial of it. He knows it is wrong in principle, but the pains, the necessary hell of wrong that will be its effects, the knowing good and evil, is a mystery to him. Therefore with all his high native instincts, as created in the image of God, he is practically weak, a beautiful and glorious creature, but still weak as a character. He looks on the captivating tree, wonders what is there, craves the forbidden evil and finally says, I must know what it is. Thus he falls.⁵⁴

Innocent, holy, aware of obligation, yet weak because they are free, and left to act originatively--such is the condition of all men and of each individual man standing on the verge of sin. Deliberation, when it comes, will mean inevitably the fall of man's "weak" holiness. And yet we cannot say that anything positive accounts for sin, and we are left wondering at the "profound mystery that overhangs the question of wrong itself".⁵⁵

But only after a man has experimented in evil, only after he has known "the discord, bitterness, remorse, and inward hell of wrong" will the fascinations of mystery no longer tempt".⁵⁶ It is for this reason that Bushnell called life a "drill-practice", a "trial" or a "discipline"; it is a "training of consent" which is appointed by God not to punish or to tantalize man, but to form and consolidate character in him.

Hence apart from what is called probation or previous to it, man is to be looked upon as an incomplete or not completely finished creature, iron not yet converted into steel, or steel not hardened and tempered to its uses. And this is the object of his probation; it is not to break him if he will break, but it is to strengthen him finally that he may never break. It is to make him what as yet he is not, to carry him on beyond the state of raw being and perfect him in a character.⁵⁷

The consequences of sin are not trivial--in its depth and all pervasiveness, sin disorders all of man's existence. His soul, his body, his social life, and the physical world around him, are all alike shattered into a condition of "unnature". In one word, we may best describe the consequences of sin as "de-formation".

In its normal state, Bushnell described the soul as an harmonious instrument which includes the will or supernatural power, together with

all the faculties that are subordinated to the will by their laws. He likened the soul to a fluid whose "form" is the conscience. Or he used the analogy of a crystal whose order is determined by the immutable law of right or of love.

And then it follows that, if the will breaks into revolt, the instrument is mistuned in every string, the fluid shaken becomes a shapeless, opaque mass, without unity or crystalline order.⁵⁸

Exactly this fatal breach in the normal state or order of the soul is what Bushnell described as the "motions of sins". By turning away from God, man disjoins his very nature, dissolves "the primal order and harmony" of the soul, so that it ceases to be "a complete integer".⁵⁹

Every sin reacts upon the agent as a breach of his internal harmony. Being an act against God, it is an act against the organization of the soul as it comes from God. Accordingly it breaks the original harmony, shatters the order, defiles the purity of the soul.⁶⁰

No capacity of the soul can escape the disorder provoked by the misdoings of an evil will. Bushnell used the metaphor of disease, or of poison coursing swiftly through the body, to illustrate how sin leads to the death of the self. In the state of separation from God, man "dwindles painfully . . . and becomes a mere dry point, position without magnitude".⁶¹ His perceptions are discolored, his judgments overrun by passion, his reason at war with appetites, his faith the slave of sense. All the powers that should be strung in harmony are loosed from each other and flung into hopeless confusion. Meanwhile, the conscience disturbs, gnaws and damns man relentlessly. There are, said Bushnell, "abysses of the tragic sentiment" in the human drama, foreign to existence on the

level of things. A tacit sense of blame haunts the world and drives it from its rest. We are "plagued by the foul demon of guilt" such that "humanity is itself the sign of a bad conscience".⁶²

Despite this overall denaturing of man's soul, he is still a creature made for religion. No consequence of sin, Bushnell insisted, can be understood in terms of the traditional view of "total depravity". No law of the soul's nature is discontinued by sin, nor is any capacity proper to man fully taken away.⁶³ Man has been given a spiritual nature with a capacity to be permeated, illuminated, guided and exalted by God. And he has also been given a spiritual sense, the power of divine apprehension, "the power of distinguishing God and receiving the manifestation or immediate witness of God".⁶⁴ Bushnell said that man under sin has still this intuitive capacity; he is an "inspirable" creature whose religious capacities have been stunted and partially disabled.

All his capacities of love and truth are in him still, only buried and stifled by the smoldering ruin in which he lies. There is a capacity in him still to be moved and drawn, to be charmed and melted by the divine love and beauty. The old affinity lives though smothered in selfishness and lust⁶⁵

And here, said Bushnell, is the most profound reality of the soul's disorder, in the fact that despite its being an organ of sight, it can see only through tears. The will, by which the disorder was wrought, cannot, unassisted, repair it.

Considered as lost inspiration, then, sin is followed by a real deforming process with the soul. This "subjective" disorder has an objective antithesis; for sin has also what Bushnell called "dynamic" consequences without. As the revolted will throws all of man's faculties into disarray, so also does it disorder everything in the realm of nature

or matter. When the power called man begins to act as he was not made to act, against God, breaking out of all unity and harmony, then new forms are produced. The revolted will continually plays itself into the laws, combinations, chemistries, and conjunctions of nature, and the results are new shapes, signs, quantities, positions--the "furniture" of sin--"a face put on the world which God never gave it".⁶⁶ "What", asked Bushnell, "can his human disorder be, but a propagating cause of disorder? what his deformity within, but a soul of deformity without, in the surroundings of the field he occupies?"⁶⁷

And so it is that man is putting out symbols, "casting forms and figures" for every sort of sin. "There is no concealment; everything is out in visible shape, and is going to be".⁶⁸ The whole creation is visibly groaning under sin. Every department of life is somehow changed and put into disorder.

Who, for example, looking upon the form of a gormandizer or a drunkard, fails to see how surely retribution represents sin with a fit figure of expression? The abuses of the soul are abuses also of the body; as the body is the soul's organ, damage in the soul is propagated as disease in the body. "The fortunes of the body must, in this way, follow the fortunes of the soul, whose organ it is."⁶⁹ And we have visible tokens of sin all around us in the fevers, diseases, plagues and pestilences of the world.

Then, as society is made up of souls and bodies, that also becomes an element of discord, a pitiless and dreadful power, infested with lies, fears, frauds, enmities, jealousies, deeds of oppression, injustice and persecution. Because humanity is, in a very important sense, an organic whole, and because the power of sin is so all-pervasive, no man stands

alone in the state of sin. And while it is true to say that each man, like Adam, must face for himself the mystery of iniquity and temptation, it is also true that the sin of one man means the social lapse of the race.

If we are units, so also are we a race, and the race is one--one family, one organic whole; such that the fall of the head involves the fall of all the members.⁷⁰

Society thus falls or goes down as a unit, and we find humanity broken, disordered and plunged into unnature by sin, a brotherhood of corruption, a solidarity of bad wills witnessing to its woes through apposite tokens of destruction.

Nor can the state of sin exist apart from its objective embodiment in the physical or material world. In this sense, the consequence of sin is a vast unnaturing of man's environment. The world is "groaning and travailing in pain together with man, in the disorder consequent on his sin".⁷¹ Therefore, while naturalism grounded its denial of sin in nature's beauty and perfection, Bushnell could not define nature apart from sin.

In what is called nature, we find a large admixture of signs or objects, which certainly do not belong to an ideal state of beauty, and do not, therefore, represent the mind of God, whence they are supposed to come. The fact is patent every where, and yet the superficial and hasty multitudes appear to take it for granted, that all the creations of God are beautiful of course.⁷²

What can these signs and objects be, but a mirror of man's sin, forms through which nature represents man to himself? What is nature as unnature, but "an image under which he may conceive himself and fitly represent himself in language"?⁷³ "Given the fact of sin", Bushnell wrote, "what we call nature can be no mere embodiment of God's beauty

and the eternal order of His mind, but must be, to some wide extent, a realm of deformity and abortion; groaning with the discords of sin and keeping company with it in the guilty pains of its apostasy".⁷⁴

Tokens of deformity in nature are not only visible objects, but all disgusts of sense: "dis-gusts" of taste and smell; "dis-easement" of the sensibility; "dis-cords" of sound; "dis-temper"; "dis-proportions"; "dis-tortions"; "dis-locations"; "de-rangements".⁷⁵

And thus it is that the world itself is a kind of conscience without in the things of sense, "a bad conscience physically represented".⁷⁶

"If we descend into sin, we set the causes of nature in courses of retributive action, and this reveals what is in our sin".⁷⁷ Symbols of sin fill all tiers and orders of substance up to the stars. And in this sense, nature is indeed a "fit field of exercise" for man's training of will, and finally, even an organ of salvation for us. For we could not carry on our moral training if we were not insphered in conditions that reflect, express and continually raise in us the idea of what we are.

We could never have any just opinion of moral retribution as inexorably connected with moral conduct, unless these galleries, down which we go, were hung with just so many unsightly figures and objects of disgust. Sin will get fit discipline here only as it occupies the house it builds, looking on the forms it paints, and catching in the air the scent of its own low practice.⁷⁸

(iii) Nature as symbol of providence

Looking out, as he did, upon such a spectacle of groaning, writhing members as the world exhibits, Bushnell could yet reconcile the disorder with the perfect fatherhood of God. Despite the state of "unnature" which he saw within and without, he affirmed order, unity,

system, plan, the ideal, the whole. "Truth is one", he wrote, "a complete, universal system based in God's all-comprehensive intelligence".⁷⁹

If we call our present state "unnature", as truly we should, then we have yet stopped short of a higher and more significant truth. For man's de-formations are only part of a far wider picture, and one that has a "moral frame". To know any form, said Bushnell, be it object, or experience, or event, we must see it in terms of eternal providence, in terms of "the reality and ground of all realities and the highest possibility of knowledge".⁸⁰ The reality and the value of all forms and objects consists not in what the things are in themselves, but in what they signify, prepare, represent.⁸¹ This means that the symbolism of our world must ultimately be placed in a religious context, where alone we can find its true meaning. We must look at things temporal as "signs" or "shadows" of the eternal; or in other words, we must see the affairs of time as "preparations of eternity".⁸²

What is "unnature", then, but ideal and pure nature working according to a higher plan? Disorder and unnature are really order and nature chastising the false fact, sin.⁸³ Though man, through his sin, has stamped his mark on creation, God's typology overarches and includes this activity, such that all forms of unnature are in a higher sense part of system, and working to unity. It is the law of God's end, the moral perfection or holiness of God's being, round which all crystallizes into harmony.⁸⁴ This means that redemption is not some "patchwork" added on to the fabric of history, but the frame of order and counsel by which all things "con-sist", or come together into system. It means that the whole creation is made for Christianity, and that we do not understand the world until we "distinguish the interweaving of grace".⁸⁵

For Bushnell, then, all that is bears some spiritual significance, some meaning in terms of God's redemptive plan. There is no such thing as empirical reality apart from moral meaningfulness or divine purpose. It is the same perspective by which the Puritans saw all of life as simultaneously spiritual through God's special overruling providence. It involves Bushnell in the basic metaphysical postulate that all form providentially represents spiritual reality or truth. "On the one hand is form; on the other, is the formless. The first represents, and is somehow fellow to, the other; how, we cannot discover."⁸⁶ The universe is not a mere jumble of fortuities, but a great circle of uses with man at the center; it proceeds not only by cause and effect, but for a final cause that has been from all eternity, and that is "to form" man in character by restoring him to his "true normal relation".

Bushnell said, then, that God "plans" from before the foundation of the world to recover man from his certain lapse into sin. He would even say that God "allows" the fall that man might be schooled in his liberty and so realize "the perilous capacity of character".⁸⁷ God has created the world for man, as he has created man for a great eternity, so that when man falls under sin, "everything bends to his fortunes and becomes an operative grace for his recovery".⁸⁸ Sin in this view is no mere casualty, but "that central fact about which the whole creation of God and the ordering of his providential and moral government, revolves".⁸⁹ And redemption is no afterthought of probation, but the essence of it.

Into this scheme of reality, Bushnell resolved the apparent discrepancy between the findings of geologic science and the biblical account of paradisaic history. How can the disorders of nature be

explained as symbols of sin when the rocks open their tombs and display myriad deformities which were in the world long before the arrival of man? Bushnell answered with what he called the "anticipative consequences" of sin--tokens, forms or symbols put out by God into creation as both marks of divine intelligence and prophetic types.

Because mind works under conditions of intelligence, every plan ordered by intelligence will disclose from the beginning marks that relate to future events. And so we see the unity and harmony of God's system in the fact that prior to the appearance of man, God has set nature with types of man's sin. Long ages before the arrival of man, the whole creation, animate and inanimate, "was groaning, in all orders and degrees, from the rocks upward . . . prefiguring and symbolizing the great, sad history to come . . .".⁹⁰

And what can we look for, in this view, but that God's premeditations about sin, the images it raises, the counsel it requires, the deaths and abortions it works, and the new-creations it necessitates, will be coming into view, in all the immense, ante-dated eras and mighty revolutions of the geologic process? By the mere unity of God's intellectual system, they ought to appear, and, when they do, they will as truly be consequences of sin as if they were mere physical effects, subsequent in time to the facts.⁹¹

In part, the anticipative consequences of sin faithfully prefigure to man the fact of his lost condition. In part, they are evidence of the intelligence underlying all reality. Beyond this, Bushnell found in them a deeper dimension of meaning and grace. "It is the whole endeavor of his management to be known".⁹² It is for this reason that things temporal are related as signs and images to the truth of God. "Thus if God is to be himself revealed, he has already thrown out symbols for it, filling the creation full of them, and these will be played into

metaphor".⁹³ This affirmation lays open the view that the anticipative symbols of sin are given to man by God for the purpose of mediating knowledge about God.

To say that man is potentially redeemable means that he is capable of knowing God again by an immediate knowledge--but also that his redemption will be possible only as he is first affected with knowledge about God and about his need for God. This is the function of all knowledge which God mediates to man through nature, history and all the forms of life. "The inherent use of all medial knowledges . . . is that they bring us in, to know God by an immediate knowledge".⁹⁴

Holding this view of truth, "as presenting itself always by images metaphorically significant, never by any other possible means or media",⁹⁵ Bushnell could recognize in the findings of geology a grand reference to "last ends" and the conditions of trial and experience through which these ends are to be reached. For if the world has been disordered by sin, so has God "anticipatively disordered for the sake of order".⁹⁶ So has God prepared the creation with moral types that man might sense the hand of God at work, that he might perceive the nature of intelligence as active love.

For, in being set with types all through and from times most ancient, of suffering and deformity, prefiguring, in that manner, the being whose sublime struggles are to have it for their field, and showing him, when he arrives, how Eternal Forethought has been always shaping it to the mold of his fortunes--thus and thus only could he be fitly assured, in the wild chaos of sin, of any such Counsel, or Power, as can bring him safely through.⁹⁷

The overmastering idea is the training and restoring of souls. God's original plan comprehends a supernatural economy that will work through disorder to bring souls out into the established liberty of

holiness. Seen in this light, history, like nature, must be a field of exercise, trial or discipline. God must be working in history through retribution and correction, so that history becomes for each individual soul a "minister of salvation". Apart from this, the human story can be seen only as a current that runs nowhere, having neither dignity nor law, a mere rolling on of eras, the account of which is, for the greater part, lost to oblivion.

All history is the training of God, who by love and judgment is working salvation The world and its affairs are not otherwise intelligible. Life is a riddle forever inexplicable, if it be not solved in this way It has no meaning till we can say that God is in it with a great design ulterior.⁹⁸

But even more than this is history an organ of salvation for us, seen as the training of time. Not only is Christianity typed in the rocks of the world, in the whole frame of creation from the heavens downward, but it is prefigured or prepared in pre-Christian history through the story of a single people and the objective forms of their ritual. "History itself", said Bushnell, "is but a kind of figure, having its greatest value, not in what it is, but in what it signifies."⁹⁹ History preceding the gospel is pervaded by analogy, a "visible preparation" of time for the fullness to come, a "providential procession" of symbols moving toward the ascendancy of the "interpreter of all".¹⁰⁰ And history after Christ can be seen only in terms of the "new formation" of man according to the plan of God.¹⁰¹ The will of God, in short, is at work in history, governing in the interest of Christianity.

And just here we can glimpse Bushnell's understanding of progress in history. The world, or what we call creation, is not so much a

completed fact as a process, what Bushnell called a "conatus", "struggling up concomitantly with the powers that are doing battle in it for character; falling with them in their fall, rising with them or to rise, to a condition, finally of complete order and beauty".¹⁰² Progress in history is not development, and the deformities of the world are not incomplete or partially developed fruits. There is no such thing in history, Bushnell wrote, "as a progress without a God". Any outward transition in the events and objects of the world is but evidence or form for the work of God in shaping character within, "shaping and writing out a soul-history correspondent".¹⁰³

In the final analysis, Bushnell's moral-economy scheme provides the metastructure according to which he defines everything. The true meaning of nature, for example, is not its objective reality, but its symbolic use. The true meaning of system comprehends a moral dimension: the real wonder of system, said Bushnell, is not stability but counsel, constancy and order made flexible to use and expression.

And the true meaning of science, in this view, is religious quest. Herein lies the distinction between what Bushnell called "atheistic science" and true science. The former is "imposed upon by nature, not instructed by it; as if there could be nothing greater than distance, measure, quantity, and show, nothing higher than the formal platitude of things".¹⁰⁴

For to know matter simply as matter, laws simply as laws, or even to know the mechanical and physical uses of things and nothing more and higher, is indeed to miss of all that is most significant and loftiest in them. After all, the great thing is . . . to behold the face of the Creator in his works. Thus it is and only thus that they are truly comprehended. True science ends where the holy poet begins, climbing up through experiment and labor of reason into that

which faith seizes by a divine insight. The philosopher proves what the seer sees,--God, the inworking spirit of all work, the dominating force of all law, the underlying system of all system.¹⁰⁵

All the facts of science and all the objects of scientific study, are given as vehicles of grace, that God might disclose himself to man, that he might conduct man to himself. Only as the scientist is religious thinker, only as he has caught "the unity and composite wholeness of truth", only as he can see the world's solid structure as subservient to Christianity, will he be true to his high calling.

(iv) Nature as language

Leonard Bacon recalled being "sufficiently startled" by the preacher of the Concio at the 1848 Yale Commencement. His thought, said Bacon, was "so far removed" from the "mental habits" of his hearers, that "they could only misunderstand it".¹⁰⁶ Amos Chesebrough was present on the occasion at Yale, and though his closest attention was given to the discourse, his reaction to it was no less equivocal: ". . . I confess that I was more mystified than edified".¹⁰⁷ Within two months, Bushnell had proclaimed his views in three major addresses at Harvard, Yale and Andover, and on each occasion the reaction had been the same. Said Bacon:

If the first and second discourses were startling to many a good man whose mind could move only in well-worn grooves of thought, much more was the third. The hearers, and those to whom the report came of what was heard, had expected something new and strange--perhaps something of ecclesiastical disturbance; and some of them were not disappointed.¹⁰⁸

With considerable apprehension, then, and with more than ordinary

interest, readers turned to the Preliminary Dissertation introducing the published version of the three discourses, and identified by Bushnell as just such an explanation as would assist his readers in understanding his thought more fully. No simple introduction, these one hundred seventeen pages set forth a theory of language which would indeed prove to be received by the public as "the key" to Horace Bushnell. According to Mary Bushnell Cheney, these views of language form the "foundation" or the "key-stone" for the whole structure of Bushnell's thought. "Here", she emphasized, "is the key to Horace Bushnell, to the whole scheme of his thought, to that peculiar manner of expression which marked his individuality,--in a word, to the man."¹⁰⁹

What he intended in his Preface, said Bushnell, was not a fully developed philosophy of language. The crux of his study was semantics: the "significancy" of language, or "the power and capacity of its words, taken as vehicles of thought and of spiritual truth."¹¹⁰ If his hearers had been accustomed to the abstract language of an Emmons or the precise definitions of a Taylor, Bushnell here offered them a view of words as symbols only, of language as an instrument insufficient for the purposes of dogma. In short, Bushnell guided his readers into these three major statements of Christian theology by first denying the possibility of literal representation in them. "There is no such thing", he wrote, "as getting clear of form in human language."¹¹¹

One might anticipate, then, the importance of Bushnell's views of language for the overall interpretation and appreciation of his thought. Mr. Chesebrough, for example, who was wholly puzzled by the obscurity of the Yale discourse, found the same full of meaning and consistency after he had probed the Dissertation On Language.¹¹² But

it is well to remember in this regard, that Bushnell's theory of language, rather than being the foundation of his thought, is itself grounded in his principle of correspondence or analogy. The concepts, symbolism and language, overlap in Bushnell's thought, but they are not identical.¹¹³ Out of Bushnell's view of reality as symbolic or medial between supernatural powers, comes his view of language as the poetic embodiment of thought. As Feidelson acutely observed, Bushnell's semantic argument "is an oblique way of stating an organic theory."¹¹⁴

It is the great infirmity of man, Bushnell said, that he is so easily imposed on by his senses. "It cannot be denied that sensible things and objects do somehow exert a dreadful tyranny over his judgments and his character."¹¹⁵ For having lost the immediate consciousness of God, man's sensibility is low; he is coarse and undiscerning. And just here we apprehend the significance of moral ends in our existence, in that all the objects of our outward and visible state are yet given to us as media of knowledge, vehicles of grace, instruments of our recovery.

This is Bushnell's principle of spiritual correspondence. It means that all form has been prepared to represent somehow the formless, and this in order that we may be recovered to the perfect knowledge of God. It means that "there is an inner light of divine thought, which informs, not only objects, but laws, and which, if we can find it, is expressed in all things".¹¹⁶ Only because of this analogy is any revelation of God possible to a man bound down under sense. It means, for example, that we can see in all the forms and objects of creation some representation of the mind of God. And it is the same analogy which pervades the outward Providential history of past times.

We find but another example of God's revelation to man under conditions of form, in human language, which is "possible only on the ground of this vast, original and truly Sacred Analogy between things visible and invisible".¹¹⁷ To say, in other words, that the whole outer world is an organ of divine intelligence, opens the possibility for human language; because nature is the language of God, the human mind can find in it vehicles of its own thought.

When I affirm that moral and spiritual truths are communicated and communicable, only under conditions of form or analogy, the declaration supposes a certain correspondence between objects and terms of the outward state, and whatever subjects of thought, feeling, and spiritual being, we may speak of; that the world of space and time is a medium to the world of mind; that what exists, in form, is prepared, by a certain mysterious and perfectly uninvestigable relationship, to represent what is out of form.¹¹⁸

It was to validate this principle of analogy that Bushnell discussed the origin of human language. Thinking, he said, can take place independently of language, but the moment man would think discursively or represent his thoughts to another, language is required.¹¹⁹ This must first have originated as a human development--Bushnell accepted the theory of language as a divine gift only in so far as man was created with the instinct of language.¹²⁰ Indeed, any two human beings shut up wholly to each other from birth, would develop a language, and so affirm this God-given capacity for self-representation.

But how, Bushnell asked, would any two such un-languaged persons so thrown together, proceed to develop a language? Without difficulty they could generate a noun-language, or terms of physical import, merely by associating names or sounds with outward things and actions.¹²¹ It would not be so easy, however, to speak of a spiritual being, a thought

or emotion, i.e. to develop an intellectual language.¹²² Obviously, said Bushnell, our two language-makers would advance through the medium of sense, through the use of things, objects or acts in the outer world as signs of thought or interpreters between them. One language-maker would strike at some image or figure in the sensible world to represent his thought or emotion to the other, so that by sounding the name, the idea would somehow be represented to the other. And so an intellectual word would be generated.

But it was not enough for Bushnell to say that all terms of language are originally names of things or sensible appearances.¹²³ That the same form should represent a like idea between minds led him to reason that there is an inherent or pre-existing fitness at work whenever a spiritual thought enters a sensible form, that the association between image and idea is more than arbitrary. Here, then, is the principle of spiritual correspondence. There is, said Bushnell, a Logos in creation which finds a corresponding logos in mind. Even in the formation of grammar, this same logos is at work, so that the external grammar of creation answers to the internal grammar of the mind and becomes its vehicle. In short:

There is a logos in the forms of things, by which they are prepared to serve as types or images of what is inmost in our souls; and then there is a logos also of construction in the relations of space, the position, qualities, connections, and predicates of things, by which they are framed into grammar. In one word, the outer world, which envelops our being, is itself language, the power of all language.¹²⁴

Several hermeneutical implications follow from this view of language as grounded in analogy. If the correspondence between thought and sense is itself the very possibility of intellectual language, it

is at the same time the limitation of such language. For words of thought can be only names of forms, and as such mediators of the formless, "incarnations" or "insensings" of thought. We cannot suppose a thought or idea to have in itself any sensible quality whatever, so that when we clothe or embody such an idea in a form, the intellectual word we thus create can be used only as a symbol, to represent or express the idea. Hence, Bushnell's first hermeneutical emphasis is the inexactitude of all intellectual or spiritual language. The mathematical model of precision is not applicable here. Language is more an instrument of suggestion than of absolute conveyance for thought.

What, then, it may be asked, is the real and legitimate use of words, when applied to moral subjects? for we cannot dispense with them, and it is uncomfortable to hold them in universal skepticism, as being only instruments of error. 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 contents, or the generative power out of which to bring the thought required.¹²⁵

Beyond inexactitude, there is an element of falseness in every language. Words of thought or spirit are not only imprecise in their significance, but they always affirm something which is false or contrary to the truth intended. They impute form to what is out of form.

Being really images, therefore, of that which has no sensible quality, they do always impute or associate something which does not belong to the truth or thought expressed; viz., form. On which account, the greatest caution is needed, that, while we use them, confidingly, as vehicles, we never allow them to impose upon us anything of their own.¹²⁶

And because language cannot convey any truth whole, or by a literal embodiment, there will be some necessary conflict between the statements in which a truth is expressed. Contrary forms are needed as complementary representations of truth, and the element of paradox is essential to any full expression of truth.¹²⁷ We are, accordingly, to approach language with a comprehensive spirit, to take up all symbols and be guided by their many shades of meaning to a broad view of truth. Allow repugnances to stand, said Bushnell, and offer your mind to the wholeness of truth.¹²⁸

From the above emphases, we can anticipate the place of definitions and the role of the logical method within the sphere of intellectual language. Definitions, are only "changes of symbol"; they do not carry meaning by simple notation, and we misuse them if we take them to be more than "shadows of truth".¹²⁹ And just this kind of misuse is the result of our application of the logical argument in religious and moral reasonings. Bushnell did not assault logic itself as a science, but "that deductive, proving, spinning method" imposed upon "the plastic realm of life", where only insight or intuition can properly discover truth.

From the fact that the correspondence between thought and form is not arbitrary, but that there is a vital connection between the two, we can speak of the fitness of particular forms to represent certain ideas or feelings. We cannot say why this fitness exists in any particular case, for the analogy between mind and matter is "perfectly inscrutable". We can only feel instinctively why some form or image should be made use of to represent some feeling or idea. Language, then, is not merely the embodiment, but the creation of the thought.

Words are not merely units of construction, but living powers of thought.

"Poets", said Bushnell, "are the true metaphysicians, and if there be any complete science of man to come, they must bring it."¹³⁰

And in thinking thus of language not as mechanical product, but as living creation, we can appreciate another dimension of Bushnell's hermeneutics. No one should interpret another's language without a sense both of its personal character and its organic unity:

In every writer, distinguished by mental life, words have a significance and power breathed into them, which is wholly peculiar . . . his language is his own, and there is some chemistry of life in it that belongs wholly to him, as does the vital chemistry of his body . . . Life is organic; and if there be life in his work, it will be found not in some noun or verb that he uses, but in the organic whole of his creations. Hence, it is clear that he must be apprehended in some sense, as a whole, before his full import can be received in paragraphs and sentences.¹³¹

Bushnell spoke, then, of the personal life and character of language, and, correspondingly, of the interpreting power of sympathy. It requires some spiritually discerning sympathy extended over a length of time, to allow one to come into the whole sphere of another, to feel out the real meaning of his words, to come to some true understanding of his thought. In this regard, he referred to the moral dimension of interpretation, its requiring "conditions of character in the receivers"; and we may thus be reminded that for him, interpretation is essentially a religious act. Because of the relation of matter to mind, the act of making or perceiving symbols, is in its most profound sense, an encounter with God.¹³²

It follows that for Bushnell, the imagination was the most essential and active faculty in human language. He defined imagination as both a creative and perceptive capacity, "that power in human bosoms

which reads the types of creation, beholding the stamps of God's meanings in their faces; the power that distinguishes truth in their images, and seizes hold of images for the expression of truths".¹³³ It is not to be confounded with fancy, or understood as having to do with the ornamental or the superficial, for it is indeed the most critical and perceptive faculty which a man has. What distinguishes man as a being of intelligence, Bushnell asked, but that capacity to both employ and receive the types which the Logos offers?

All words that are names of mere physical acts and objects are literal, and even animals can, so far, learn their own names and the meaning of many acts done or commanded. But no animal ever understood a metaphor: that belongs to intelligence, and to man as a creature of intelligence; being a power to see, in all images, the faces of truth, and take their sense, or read (*intus lego*) their meaning, when thrown up in language before the imagination.¹³⁴

Such views of language as these preserved Bushnell from any lack of enthusiasm for the promises and achievements of modern science. Imagination, he said, is no less essential to the scientist than to the poet, for both are seeking truth in the outward forms of the universe, the spirit in the letter. But in particular, Bushnell was convinced that advance in the physical sciences could only mean advance in religious truth. We may expect, he said, that:

physical science, leading the way, setting outward things in their true proportions, opening up their true contents, revealing their genesis and final causes and laws, and weaving all into the unity of a real universe, will so perfect our knowledges and conceptions of them, that we can use them, in the second department of language, with more exactness.¹³⁵

But the question must be raised, what, according to these views of language, is the meaning and place of Christian theology? Bushnell

defined theology as "abstractive and systematic doctrine"; "what results, when the subject, God, is logically expounded or reasoned".¹³⁶ As it is an exposition of consciousness, therefore, a "bringing into form, what is out of form, and can be only figuratively represented in it",¹³⁷ pure dogmatism is, of course, ruled out. Even as dealing with real truths of consciousness, theology can handle these truths by analogies only. And as no doctrine can ever be immovably fixed, so no theology can ever be a law for anything, can never carry the weight of authority or infallibility. But in order to a right estimate of the meaning and place of theology, Bushnell proposed a distinction between "mere theology" and "Christian theology", the latter being grounded in "divinity".

Mere theology, said Bushnell, is a science built without experience. It is a theoretic account of the subject, God, made from the standpoint "of a simply natural consciousness". It is what Bushnell called "crustaceous" theology, being an encrusted or closed system; being "about" truth, but not "of" it.¹³⁸

If, however, the theologian begins at the point of a living consciousness of God, which Bushnell called a state of real divinity, and essays to expound that consciousness in speculative order, then the resulting system may be called "Christian theology" or evangelical theology. According to this distinction, faith precedes theology, and theology has its basis in experience. And this "experience" is the immediate experience of God, what is made conscious within a man through all the forms or media of divinity . . .

God as in the creation, God in history . . . in all the outward objects; and again in the Scripture, in the form

of political and religious annals, the biographies of distinguished saints, the teachings of prophets, the incarnate life and death of the Word made flesh . . . a vast realm of diving fact, radiant in every part with the light of God.¹³⁹

Christian theology is that interpretation of God which is made by experience, which grows out of a knowledge had of God by immediate consciousness; it is the fruit of a "Living State, the Life of God in the soul of man".¹⁴⁰ It is "the speculative or logical exposition of the Christian consciousness, considered as containing the divine".¹⁴¹

It is not based on values or ideas independent of origins, but rests on a personal relation to God revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. Consequently, it "rests on the Scripture body of fact, because, in that, the divine is bodied and expressed, and offered to experience".¹⁴²

However, one must not omit here a consideration of great importance, and that is that even as theology is grounded in divinity, even as it is built upon Christ, the foundation, it will never, said Bushnell, "be pure gold, or any thing like it". Remember, he said:

That the Christian, or divine consciousness, of which speculative theology is to be the expounder, differs from the natural consciousness in the fact that it is no constant quantity; that it fluctuates with the fidelity of the man and the spiritual temperament of his life; that it is always a mixed and never a pure state, mixed with lies, sensualities, and all manner of undivinities, and these so cunningly inserted as not to reveal their presence; that sometimes the investigator comes under the power of the world, stolen away from himself, and then, as the divine can not be held in the memory a moment after it is gone from the heart, he swings to a new center of motion, according to the balance of matter left in his consciousness. This being the true state, out of which a science or theory is to come, and which it is to represent, what is that science like to be? Is not every theologian, though it may cost him some mortification to confess it, moved to a very different way of speculation, at one time, from that which

seems truest at another. Such is our infirmity! Will the infirmity of our theology be less?¹⁴³

At the same time, we must not undervalue the worth of Christian theologies. In his discussions on language, and also in the Andover address, Bushnell directed himself to this question of finding a place or showing a true ground for speculative theology. In the first place, he said, man must theologize in order to satisfy the instinct in his nature. "We must define, distinguish, arrange and frame into order the matter of our knowledge".¹⁴⁴ In this way, man "comforts" his own intelligence; Bushnell would even say that the exercise itself is more important than the results.¹⁴⁵ As well, the exercise of system is both a discipline and a learning process. It draws a man's thought toward greater coherence and compactness; it gives the method by which to teach what he knows and what he does not. Christianity is thereby better able to meet the assaults of false belief and skepticism, and to form a valid connection with the truths of philosophy and science. Christian theology provides checks and balances, guarding against the illusory and the fantastic. "No person will ever become, therefore, a good and sufficient teacher or preacher of the gospel, without a strong theologic discipline."¹⁴⁶

But probably the greatest value of man's theologizing instinct is its redemptive role in God's moral economy. "The world", said Bushnell, "is not yet in the spirit, but in the life of nature. There it must be met, and somewhat on its own level. If it were addressed only out of the inner light, and in terms of the highest and purest Christian experience, it would be no better than if it were called in an unknown tongue".¹⁴⁷ Christian theology is a form, an objective structure of thought, and as such, a vehicle or place of contact, by which

Christianity "gets into the mental system of the world, and, through that, into the heart".¹⁴⁸ Christian symbols are, then, vehicles of insight and interpretation, forms of truth that can work in the mind as powers of thought and so as preparatives and grounds of faith.

Through his views of language, Bushnell sought a new approach to the whole question of interpretation, and so, he hoped, a decided mitigation of the endless divisions, schisms and denunciations within New England. "Without being at all aware of the fact", he said, "our theologic method in New England has been essentially rationalistic."¹⁴⁹ Denying the Unitarian method of reasoning "over" the scriptures, the orthodox were yet as active and confident rationalists "under" them. The supposition was that learning and debate could settle Christian truths, and consequently, he said, New England piety was "marvelously unspiritual", having "no real intimacy with God; but an air of lightness and outsideness rather, as if it were wholly of ourselves, not a life of God in the soul".¹⁵⁰

Bushnell's own views led to a different method. The scriptures would be approached not as a book of propositions and "mere dialectic entities", but as a poetic whole, full of contrarious aspects of one and the same truth, offered not to the scalpel of truth-by-analysis, but to the seeing eye of the mystic.¹⁵¹ And Bushnell hoped his views would lead his readers to discover that they had over-valued the organizing power of dogmatism. The constructive energy of formulas is not caused by their definite hold of the literal truth. And while there is no limit to the possible systems that may be framed or composed, theologies hold their power only as they are vehicles of one Life.



CHAPTER TWO

The Trinity: "language for God"

"Revelation", said William Ellery Channing, "is addressed to us as rational beings."¹ We ought not to expect from God propositions which we cannot reconcile with one another, or which in their literal sense appear repugnant to one another. If the Bible contains occasional obscurities, what in that book is necessary truth is revealed "too plainly to be mistaken, and too consistently to be questioned".²

According to these principles, Channing could in no way reconcile the scriptural revelation of God's unity with orthodox trinitarianism.

By the proposition of God's unity, Channing understood literally

that there is one being, one mind, one person, one intelligent agent, and one only, to whom underived and infinite perfection and dominion belong.³

But according to orthodox trinitarianism, he said, there are three Gods, "three infinite and equal persons, possessing supreme divinity, called the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost".⁴ Using the same literal method by which Nathanael Emmons could define the Godhead in terms of three distinct persons, Channing thus affirmed divine unity in terms of one person. This divine unity, he said, is not to be interpreted as anything different from the oneness of other intelligent beings; this is literal language and should be taken in no unusual sense.⁵

It seemed to Bushnell that such was the confusion into which New England orthodoxy had fallen over the trinity, that almost any reaction

against that standard had to be excused. Undoubtedly, he said, a very large portion of orthodoxy held to the view of three real living persons in the interior nature of God,

that is, three consciousnesses, wills, hearts, understandings. Certain passages of scripture supposed to represent the three persons as covenanting, co-operating, and co-presiding, are taken, accordingly, so to affirm, in the most literal and dogmatic sense. And some very distinguished living teachers are frank enough to acknowledge, that any intermediate doctrine, between the absolute unity of God and a social unity, is impossible and incredible; therefore, that they take the latter. Accordingly, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are, in their view, socially united only, and preside in that way, as a kind of celestial tritheocracy over the world. They are one God simply in the sense that the three will always act together, with a perfect consent, or coincidence But our properly orthodox teachers and churches, while professing three persons, also retain the verbal profession of one person. They suppose themselves really to hold that God is one person. And yet they most certainly do not; they only confuse their understanding, and call their confusion faith.⁶

And commenting on this orthodox-Unitarian debate, Bushnell remarked that a "metaphysical trinity" had been assaulted by a "metaphysical unity". One, he said, "mocks our reason"; the other "freezes our hearts".⁷

Channing's charge of tritheism had occasioned the publication by Moses Stuart, the most able orthodox spokesman in New England, of the Letters To the Rev. Wm. E. Channing, Containing Remarks On His Sermon Recently Preached and Published at Baltimore. The word "person", said Stuart, is not used by trinitarians "in its ordinary acceptance as applied to men".⁸ By "person" is meant not a literal "person", but a "distinction". What that distinction is in the Godhead which the word "person" is meant to designate, Stuart admitted that he did not know. The essence of his argument is that orthodoxy must abjure all

attempts to define that distinction which the trinitarian term "person" implies; the distinction is admitted, simply because the scriptures reveal it as a fact.⁹

Bushnell could not accept Stuart's view. Just as orthodox attempts to assert three persons who are yet one person, inevitably lost the unity in the threeness, so Bushnell thought that in Stuart's attempt, the threeness was obscured by the unity. Indeed, Bushnell said that

the class of teachers who protest over the word person, declaring that they mean only a threefold distinction, cannot show that there is really a hair's breadth of difference between their doctrine and the doctrine asserted by many of the later Unitarians. They may teach or preach in a very different manner, -- they probably do, but the theoretic contents of their opinion cannot be distinguished.¹⁰

Bushnell did not set forth his view of trinity, he said, as any new doctrine.¹¹ Nor did he propose to settle the opposing theories of trinity which were agitating so deeply the peace of the New England church. He regarded the New England trinitarian debate as an endless controversy because it arose from an attempt to settle a conception of trinity as pertaining immanently to the interior nature of God. This question, he said, is impossible, and he refused to take it up. Just here, he said in Christ In Theology, was the peculiarity of the exposition he ventured to offer, and its advantage over modalism, orthodoxy, and "all ontological and transcendental theories".¹²

But if Bushnell could not settle a conception of the trinity, he could offer a new view of the meaning of the subject as symbol. The Christian trinity, he said, is not offered to the abstract reason; its meaning cannot be apprehended under the definitions and rules of logic.

But this is not to say that the doctrine is meaningless or some hyperbolic ornament. It is to say that the truth of the trinity is to be found in its forms. The trinity, said Bushnell, "may be regarded as language for God";¹³ the figure or instrument through which God accomodates his infinite love to finite forms of thought and feeling. As such, the trinity is both "instrumental" and "practical", and it is under these aspects that we must first consider Bushnell's view of the doctrine.

First of all, Bushnell said, we must hold fast the strict unity of God. We must take it by assumption that God is "as truly one being as if he were a finite person like ourselves, and let nothing ever be suffered to qualify the assumption".¹⁴ Bushnell then addressed himself to the question why there is a trinity by attempting to account for what he called "the external fact of trinity", or to show that when the Absolute One is revealed to man, the process must involve a trinity. Holding the assumption of God's unity and infinity, he asked, "How shall we conceive God?". The starting point is not from the side of man, who will construct a metaphysical conception of Godhead, but the starting point is from God, revealing himself in history to man. Bushnell sought a trinity "that results of necessity from the revelation of God to man".¹⁵ Consequently, his argument begins at a point quite different from the orthodoxy of his day:

. . . instead of beginning transcendently at a point within the active life of God, it takes a humbler method, beginning at the consideration of our media and powers of knowledge, and of the conditions under which Infinite Being and Spirit may be revealed and expressed to us.¹⁶

What is necessary to a revelation of God, or how can God appear

before us? In answering, Bushnell set himself against both orthodox and Unitarian. Any revelation of God, he said, necessitates terms of both plurality and contrast. When God is revealed, it cannot be as Channing's "bald, philosophic unity, perfectly comprehended and measured by us".¹⁷ No, said Bushnell, the Infinite can reveal himself only through the finite, through signs, media, objects, "forms, colors, motions, words, persons, or personalities".¹⁸ And as no one of these forms can contain the Infinite, God will reveal himself through infinite finites, repugnant and contrary one to the other. The revealing process "will envelop itself in clouds of formal contradiction--that is, of diction which is contrary, in some way, to the truth and which, taken simply as diction, is continually setting forms against each other".¹⁹

Plurality, then, according to Bushnell's view, is no detracting from the unity of God. But the plurality of which he speaks is not of three finite terms, literally taken, but of media of divine representation which are necessary to an adequate revelation of the one God. "Holding firm the unity", he said, "use the plurality with the utmost unconcern, as a form of thought or instrumental verity, by which we are to be assisted in receiving the most unrestricted, fullest, most real and sufficient impression of the One."²⁰ To the Unitarian's question how one can be three, Bushnell answered that One must appear as three, or at least, considering only this aspect of trinity as instrumental in respect to the revelation of God, that any revelation of the Absolute One must involve a plurality of symbols, in the case of an incarnation, a plurality of personal figures. Rather than being shocked or offended by the notion of plurality, then, we should expect that ". . . assuming the strict unity of God, He will be revealed under

conditions of form and number; the Absolute by relatives, or in the case of an incarnation, by relative persons".²¹

Contrast will be the mode of the plurality.²² This principle of contrast is of course inherent in Bushnell's view of all objective reality as symbolic of truth. As nothing definite can be infinite, so formal contradiction is the condition under which knowledge is communicated to man; the nisus of "action and reaction" draws man up through higher levels of knowledge to a more perfect apprehension of God:

Now it is in this manner only, through relations, contrasts, actions and reactions, that we come into the knowledge of God. As Absolute Being, we know Him not. But our mind, acted under the law of action and reaction, is carried up to Him, or thrown back upon Him, to apprehend Him more and more perfectly. Nothing that we see, or can see, represents Him fully, or can represent Him truly; for the finite cannot show us the Infinite. But between various finites, acting so as to correct each other, and be supplements to each other, we get a true knowledge. Our method may be compared to that of resultant motions in philosophy. No one finite thing represents the Absolute Being; but between two or more finite forces acting obliquely on our mind, it is driven out, in a resultant motion, towards the Infinite. Meantime, a part of the two finite forces, being oblique or false, is destroyed by the mutual counteraction of forces.²³

And as God can bring himself into knowledge only through symbols, mystery is a necessary dynamic of expression for the infinite. Dogma, says Bushnell, is lifeless, "an end of question"; it is "having God by rote".²⁴ Doctrinal propositions restrain the freedom and mobility of the mind. As against what is definite and defined, symbolic knowledge is characterized by dynamism and openness; it "provokes to the highest activity of thought concerning God"; it involves "a lifting" of thought, and is no resting in easy conceptions.²⁵

Could some science of the trinity, or of God's immanent distribution, be perfected and established in a fixed form of dogma, so that nothing more would be left to us but to run over the logical terms and hear what they say, then manifestly, the labor of the world's mind would rest and the process of fertility be ended.²⁶

The Christian trinity, said Bushnell, is a "holy paradox", an "amazing riddle thrown out to the mind of the world".²⁷ As such, it represents both the limit of human understanding, "the last limit of possible investigation",²⁸ and the source of limitless senses of the possibilities included in the meaning of God and the mystery of infinite being. Because the precise relation between form and truth is ultimately uninvestigable, man can ever fathom the trinity at greater depth, but he can never reduce it to a doctrine.²⁹ "Nothing", said Bushnell, "strains the human mind to such tensity as a riddle or mystery, when that riddle or mystery is not a fiction, but is based in the depth of some stupendous reality".³⁰ The symbol is not the reality, but neither is it a blind, for underlying the Christian trinity is the same principle of correspondence which renders intelligible all that is.

We are not simply overtaken by darkness, or driven to a corner whence we can not escape, save by calling on Mystery to help us; but we meet her in the place of intelligence, and greet her as an acquaintance. For we have seen beforehand that the relation of form to truth in every term of language is a mystery quite insoluble, and now we only meet a particular example of the same fact.³¹

Thus, it must be the "incurious method" that is adopted as the law of interpretation of this doctrine, the "practical" rather than the speculative. To say that the trinitarian formula is addressed to the imagination means that it has the power to flood the soul with the sense of God, and so "release thee from the power of thy will", and be the spring of a man's faith. And so we are to receive it, poetically,

aesthetically, by faith to be experimented or known experimentally, "that feeling and imagination are sometimes good interpreters and proper inlets of knowledge".³² God "approaches us" in the trinity; it is "the algebraic formula of experience".³³

But why is the Christian trinity developed as the threefold denomination of Father, Son and Holy Spirit? To ask, Why these names?, or Why this language for God?, is to ask the question of the Christian trinity as a "practical" truth; and this is the trinitarian question for Bushnell--not whether God is comprehensible, but whether God is personal.³⁴ And the answer to the question, Why this trinity?, concerns why this threefold denomination is necessary to a full apprehension of God, or in other words, the answer concerns the power that these particular personal figures have in the work of ingenerating "the Life of God in the soul of man".³⁵ To his Unitarian friend, Cyrus Bartol, Bushnell wrote:

You seem to assume that Trinity, such as you qualifiedly acknowledge, is a human invention, to be finally overreached and antiquated. This I very much doubt. Much more likely is it to me that our human limitation, as finite, requires it, and always will,--that the infinite Unity becomes relational, and eternally will, through it.³⁶

To unfold the power of this threefold denomination, Bushnell began with the incarnation; the appearance of Christ, who represents that God is Father.³⁷ God cannot be represented and worshipped only in the type of a person, which is nothing but a metaphysically finite conception. Consequently, when the Logos appears in the human form as Son, he must have set over against him a relative, finite form:

A solitary finite thing, or person, that is, one that has no relative in the finite, is even absurd,--much more if

the design be that we shall ascend, through it, to the Absolute; for we can do this only under the great mental law of action and reaction, which requires relative terms and forces, between which it may be maintained.³⁸

So it is that the development of the term, "Father", begins with the appearance of the Son. True, God is called "a Father" before Christ, but there is no development of "the Father" which is older than Christianity. God is called "the Father" ordinarily by Christ, and thus the Son calls into our thought the Father, who is in fact God, brought into symbol. We are given a finite form of conception, "Father", in cross-representation with the form, "Son": by means of these two symbols and the relative history which is unfolded through them, man is borne up into a certain lively realization of God.

God communicates himself in the form of incarnation. That is, the Son appears to communicate God to the world as Goodness and Life; ". . . he signifies, or reveals the light and love of God, in and through the human or subject life".³⁹ But the Son does not stand before us as the single term, God, saying, "Look unto me, and behold your God"; but he comes as sent into the world by the Father, and his incarnation, then, involves a "double impersonation", that of the Father and that of the Son. Thus the Son exalts and deifies what he reveals by referring his mission to one who is greater than himself.

Moreover, the Son does not say that he came forth from the Absolute or from It, but he gives us a conception of God as person, as Father, "active, choosing, feeling Spirit".⁴⁰ And as in the human form expressing and representing the Absolute Being, the Son offers us a comprehensive view of God's kingdom which includes and harmonizes both nature and the supernatural. "He has even brought down the mercies

of His Heart to meet us on our human level."⁴¹ We now know God as Infinite, yet as Friend and Redeemer. There is, said Bushnell,

no intellectual machinery in a close theoretic monotheism for any such thing as a work of grace or supernatural redemption Accordingly, it will be observed that where this Unitarian conception is held, there is also discovered an almost irresistible tendency to naturalism, and so to a loss or dying out of all that distinctively constitutes the gospel.⁴²

By the Father and the Son, then, as relative conceptions, God's character, feeling and truth are expressed. But there is yet needed, to complete our sense of God, another kind of expression

which will require the introduction or appearance of yet another and distinct kind of impersonation. We not only want a conception of God in His character and feeling towards us, but we want, also, to conceive Him as in act within us, working in us, under the conditions of time and progression, spiritual results of quickening, deliverance, and purification from evil. Now, action of any kind is representable to us only under the conditions of movement in time and space, which, as we have seen, is not predicable of the Absolute Being abstractly contemplated. God, in act, therefore, will be given us by another finite, relative impersonation.⁴³

Accordingly, the word "spirit", signifying "breath" or "air in motion", is taken up as symbol or type of power, clothed with a divine personality, and offered to us as the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier, the Divine Power in souls, related personally to the Father and the Son. And as the Son appears in the human type, so the Holy Spirit is evidenced to us through physical images, a rushing wind, lambent flames, unloosed tongues.

We are thus given in the Christian trinity three finite terms, which when we use them freely in their cross relations, work in us as instruments of feeling and faith. These impersonations are relatives,

not infinites, yet taken representatively, they are infinites, because they express God. They are given to us to show us God, and by this Bushnell means, not to mirror before our minds a metaphysical formula, but to express the Infinite in all that he offers to us and in all that he plans for us. God reveals himself to us as trinity in order to produce mutuality between us and Him, that is, "to pour something of the divine into our nature".⁴⁴ The Christian trinity has its reality, in other words, as it is a vitalizing element within human souls. "They may each declare, 'I am He;' for what they impart to us of Him, is their true reality."⁴⁵

Consequently, Bushnell said, that the more we could conceive a "trinity of act", rather than a "trinity of essence", the more we could learn to use the plurality in the freest way possible, the more lively would be our apprehension of God, the more full and blessed our converse with him. This is why Bushnell's descriptive passages are always marked by action verbs:

The Father plans, presides, and purposes for us; the Son expresses his intended mercy, proves it, brings it down even 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; the Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son, to fulfill the purpose of one, and the expressed feeling of the other; each and all together dramatize and bring forth into life about us that Infinite One, who, to our mere thought, were no better than Brama sleeping on eternity and the stars.⁴⁶

And it was to demonstrate that our conception of trinity must be as practical and instrumental rather than as literal or logical, that Bushnell drew up a list of eight classes of "antinomies".⁴⁷ Each view of trinity held in New England he saw as representing but one or two

of these classes. The Unitarians, for example, fixing on the class of inequality as the central truth, then required all other classes to accept a construction logically consistent with the ontological or essential superiority of the Father. In other words, Bushnell said, these antinomies only show that we cannot reason out a logically consistent metaphysical trinity. Only an instrumental view could settle the import of such an eight-fold complication of cross-meanings, because it showed that given the fact of a true incarnation, such antinomies as these would result of necessity, and because it could receive such contrarities as symbolic of the highest truth.⁴⁸

How Bushnell had lamented before his college friends in 1831, the doubts he had nursed for years! "When the preacher touches the Trinity and when logic shatters it all to pieces, I am all at the four winds My heart wants the Father; my heart wants the Son; my heart wants the Holy Ghost . . .".⁴⁹ The God whom he could then but "dimly feel", Bushnell knew in 1848 as "worded forth" through three living persons; the Infinite One brought down even to his own level of humanity, without any loss of divinity.⁵⁰

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.⁵¹

The Christian trinity had become for Bushnell an "instrumental" and a "practical" truth. The view he offered in God In Christ and again in Christ In Theology was of trinity as a form of language which is accommodated to our finite wants and uses. It is "instrumental" in so

far as it is a way for the finite mind to conceive God; it is "practical" in so far as its forms work man's piety toward God in the matters of grace and redemption.

And according to this view, further discussion of the trinity as essential or immanent, is neither wise nor necessary. Bushnell prefaced his view of trinity in God In Christ with this assertion: "I do not undertake to fathom the interior being of God, and tell how it is composed."⁵² We know, he said, that the relation between the trinitarian symbols and the being of God is beyond investigation; that as symbolic, the trinitarian formula is given "for use and not for theory".⁵³ The persons of the trinity

are given to me for the sake of their external expression, not for the internal investigation of their contents. If I use them rationally or wisely, then, I shall use them according to their object. I must not intrude upon their interior nature, either by assertion or denial. They must have their reality to me in what they express when taken as the wording forth of God.⁵⁴

This is not modalism, he was careful to say. And while Bushnell had in God In Christ likened Friedrich Schleiermacher's general view of trinity to his own, he had also noted that their reasonings were not "in all points, the same".⁵⁵ "That there is some threefold ground in the divine nature, back of the Christian trinity, I was most careful not to deny."⁵⁶ What he did protest against were all inferences and judgments that undertook to leap the gulf between symbol and truth. It is clear enough, he said, that the terms, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, are finite conceptions, and that there certainly are not in the divine nature, three finite persons, answering as equivalents to these names. "But exactly what, in all respects, belongs to the vehicle and what to the

truth, we do not undertake to affirm."⁵⁷ Let it be enough to say that God is a being out of our finite range of personal consciousness, and yet personal; that it is not the object of his revelation to set forth number, but by means of number to set forth personality and character.

But Bushnell was offering a symbolic view to an abstract and unmoved audience. The publication of God In Christ was met with an overwhelming onslaught of criticism and accusation. The book was condemned by the accredited organs of doctrinal opinion in nearly every evangelical denomination in the country.⁵⁸ The pulpits of Hartford and its vicinity were barred to Bushnell and within his Hartford Central Association of ministers, a committee was raised to report on the book, with a view to bringing him to trial. This move initiated an ecclesiastical controversy which was to continue for nearly five years. While Bushnell was acquitted by his own Hartford Central Association in October, 1849, the sister association of the Fairfield West, not satisfied with this verdict, continued to press for trial, until finally, in June, 1852, Bushnell's North Church, in order to end the controversy, withdrew from the Hartford North Consociation.⁵⁹

Amos Chesebrough remarked that there are but ". . . few heresies on the doctrines of the Trinity and the Atonement, named in ecclesiastical history, of which he was not accused . . . a Socinian, a Sabellian, an Apollinarian, a Docetist--as if calling a man opprobrious names answered for evidence of heresy."⁶⁰ It seemed to Bushnell that most of these charges originated in a want of attention to the restrictions and the qualifications he gave, and that in general, there had been no effort made to reproduce his view as a whole.⁶¹ Perhaps the most impartial judgment came from the Hartford Central Association, uncertain

about the self-limitation of the view Bushnell offered. The question, they said, was not as to what doctrines are fundamental to the Christian religion, for on that point they saw no controversy, but the question was "as to what are the essential elements of the doctrines conceded to be fundamental, and how far they are retained in Dr. Bushnell's book."⁶² The ministers of Fairfield West, however, were less guarded in their judgement. In God In Christ, they said, Bushnell taught unequivocally "that there is no Trinity in the Godhead".⁶³ And the publication of Christ In Theology did not induce them to mitigate the charge. Bushnell's heresies, they said, aggravated by the groundless accusation that New England Congregationalists are Tritheists, were only more fully elaborated in Christ In Theology. The book might satisfy Pantheists. "To all others, it looks worse than the Sabellianism it is offered to screen."⁶⁴

Indeed, said Cyrus Bartol, ". . . he logically abolished the Trinity . . .";⁶⁵ and the charge has held. Williston Walker said that the doctrine of God In Christ is a "modified Sabellianism".⁶⁶ George Park Fisher wrote in 1881 that God In Christ adopted Schleiermacher's Sabellian hypothesis; and in 1899 he said that Bushnell had combined a Sabellian view of trinity with a Patripassian theory of the person of Christ.⁶⁷ For all practical purposes, said George B. Stevens, in a 1902 article comparing Bushnell and Ritschl, Bushnell held a "modal trinity".⁶⁸

It seemed to Bushnell that all the heresies of which he was accused were gendered by just that effort to comprehend the interior mystery of God's nature, the necessary futility of which he had made it a point of so great consequence to admit.⁶⁹ But the charges were

unsettling for Bushnell, and he began to doubt the adequacy of his trinitarian statement in God In Christ.⁷⁰ In the interim between its publication and the appearance of Christ In Theology, therefore, he applied himself to "the hardest and most difficult of all sorts of work", to a careful study of the history of the doctrine of the trinity, or as he said, he put himself "to the investigation of others".⁷¹ And in the introduction to Christ In Theology, he announced the results of his labour:

I have been examining my relations to proper orthodoxy more carefully of late than I had done before, and the result is a double surprise; in the discovery, first, that I am so much nearer to real orthodoxy than I supposed, and secondly, that the New England theology, so called, is so much farther off. Indeed, I am ready, for once, to venture a prophecy, . . . that when the smoke of this present commotion is blown away . . . I shall be found in the book you are examining, to stand in much better keeping with the orthodoxy of the Reformation, connected with the previous times reaching back to the Nicene era, than do the teachers generally and the current opinions of New England.⁷²

He had never intended, he said, to be orthodox in the New England sense. His design had been, in fact, to take issue with this, "and even to arraign it as a virtual heresy".⁷³ New England trinitarianism, said Bushnell, "is wholly unhistorical--a provincialism, a kind of theological patois".⁷⁴ Under the Edwardians, the doctrine of the trinity lost its true historic balance; the original church doctrine of a trinity in act was rejected in favor of a trinity in God as essence. The doctrine of eternal generation had been completely forgotten, with the result, said Bushnell, that many were charging him with heresy for no other reason "than because of the startling novelty of a doctrine which, in fact, is only a renovated form of lost orthodoxy itself".⁷⁵

But if Bushnell could align himself with the Nicene confession of a trinity of act rather than essence, his was yet a statement of eternal generation "more modestly conceived".⁷⁶ The problem, he said, was one of "form", of the relation between symbol and truth. And he could not resolve it any more in Christ In Theology than he could in God In Christ. In the latter book, he had offered the principle of eternal generation as the ground for a theory of immanence. In the "Word", he said, that property, or "power of self-representation in God" which is eternal, we have a permanent ground of possibility for the threefold impersonation called trinity.⁷⁷ But whether the Word is eternally Son, he could not say, "for I do not care to open God's secrets before the time".⁷⁸ "Son" is the finite form in which the Word is given to us, and how much of the distinct personality of the Word, when regarded as the Son, is referrible to the incarnation, is a question quite inscrutable. Accordingly, when we undertake to separate the form-element in the trinity, "we can not know how far we separate, or sink, or qualify, the personalities represented by the terms".⁷⁹

We only do not know exactly how much of the personal form of the Son or Sonship, as distinguished from the Word, is tropical and referrible to the incarnation or the revelation in time, and how much to the essential nature of the Word, as viewed in relation to the interior substance of the Godhead.⁸⁰

Therefore, Bushnell saw himself as deviating from the Nicene tradition, both in regard to its use of the term "Father", and in its affirmation of eternal Sonship. In both cases, he said, he found it necessary to refrain from Nicea's "supposed knowledge of God". He could not, for example, say "whether the name and personal figure of fatherhood, as conceived on earth, is past, or prior in use to the

incarnation"; nor could he "settle the question of the eternity of the Son, as related to the eternity of the Word".⁸¹ And even if we say that it is the nature of God to reveal himself, and assume, on that ground, that he will eternally be self-revealing as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that is, by a trinity of eternal generation, yet, we still must qualify this by saying again that it is not within our power to penetrate the interior mystery of God, "as to be sure whether his being most fitly revealed to finite beings in this way is required by truth to himself, or by a necessary accommodation of himself to them and to the symbolic and finite media by which their apprehension is conditioned."⁸² Bushnell said in Christ In Theology that he wished he could give a more categorical answer to the question of immanent trinity. "I can only say that God unrevealed must be as different from God revealed as truth from symbol . . .".⁸³

Perhaps it was the pastor in Bushnell, more than the theologian, who could not rest in this conclusion. He came to think of it as insufficient, even "an evasion of responsibility".⁸⁴ There is a "fatal want of depth", he said, in any conception of trinity as occasional or expedient, and he feared lest his own view of trinity as language for God might leave the impression that he regarded the doctrine as a "matter only of words, and not in any proper sense an eternal fact".⁸⁵ Bushnell included himself among those for whom that supposition was too painful and too remote. We must have, he would say, a personal God; God is either personal, or else he is naught. That his personality is merely an occasional matter, "an act of voluntary accommodation to our finite apprehensions, and not any part of his eternal property or idea", we cannot believe.⁸⁶

In the 1854 essay, "The Christian Trinity, A Practical Truth", Bushnell again took up the question whether there is anything in God answering to the personalities of revelation. We know, he said, that God is not a person, or a personal being, save in some qualified, figurative sense. And yet what is affirmed to us in the trinity is that God is practically related to us as person, that in revealing himself to us, God "assumes all the attitudes and acts all the forms of personality".⁸⁷ The trinitarian three are persons only in some undefinable way that puts them in practical relationship with us. We call them persons without knowing exactly what we affirm, but confident nonetheless, that we are affirming somehow the deepest truth: "that God is a being practically related to his creatures".⁸⁸

Indeed, it may be and very probably is true, that what we mean by asserting the personality of God is simply to predicate of him that sociality, conversability, or, to coin a word yet more general, that relationality which is verified to us, and practically realized in us by the Trinity.⁸⁹

In other words, to speak of essential trinitarianism, is to speak of the way God acts. When we affirm that God is person or a trinity of persons, we are saying that his incomprehensible nature is such as to permit us a practically social relation. The profound reality of the triune formula is "a reality of fact in the world of action".⁹⁰ And as we cannot possibly think that God acts the trinity as a mere dramatization to serve the occasional uses of redemption, it can only be by some "interior necessity" that he approaches us as Father, Son and Holy Ghost. And precisely here is the meaning of eternal generation: trinity as a "necessary act of God". Based on the "intensely inherent character of all necessary action", we can conceive God as "inherently

related in act to the finite . . . therefore a being who is everlastingly threeing himself in his action, to be known as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost from eternity to eternity".⁹¹

It was an affirmation which Bushnell could not make in God In Christ. What most discouraged him, he said then, from asserting the eternity of the three persons, was the declaration of Paul--"When all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that did put all things under him, that God may be all in all." And we can not know, he had said in Christ In Theology, how much is vehicle and how much is truth, exactly where form ends, or how much to refer to form in the trinity of revelation. In one of the last sermons he would ever preach, Bushnell returned to the text of Paul, "partly for my own sake, hoping to be drawn by the deliberate treatment of it, towards conceptions more satisfactory and determinate".⁹² That "interior necessity" which he had allowed in 1854, he now saw as one that "answers exactly" to the necessity of finite man, so as to eternally "fix the number three to be the exact number of persons If God is to be all in all, it must be as trinity and not otherwise."⁹³

However one might judge the apparent shift in Bushnell's doctrine of trinity toward a more immanent view, he himself undoubtedly saw it as an elaboration rather than a compromise of his basic symbolism. For he was able to give full meaning to his principle of analogy, with its concomitant element of paradox, only by asserting the personality of God. It was his earlier emphasis on instrumentality, which while it emphasized the transcendental element in the trinitarian symbol, yet threatened the truth of the revelation that God is somehow Person. And

it was Bushnell's own experiential need which in the end opened to him the practical impotence of a trinity which is merely subjective to us, without sustaining the necessary truth of relationality.

CHAPTER THREE

The Person of Christ: "God's last metaphor"

Speaking to his congregation on the twentieth anniversary of his settlement as their pastor, Bushnell remarked that for some time he had not heard any complaint of his preaching but two: "one that I preach too long sermons, which is sometimes true; and the other that I preach Christ too much, which I cannot think is a fault to be repented of, for Christ is all and beside him there is no gospel to be preached or received."¹ Indeed, a review of the titles of Bushnell's work is evidence enough that he shared the nineteenth century absorption in problems of the christological tradition. "[A]t this very time", he wrote, "Christ has . . . the attention, so to speak, of the world as never before He is not only the chief problem of theology and theologic learning, but the literature of the day recognizes him, and society has a kind of hope in him . . .".² What was needed, he thought, therefore, what was silently called for, was a new understanding of the "fact-form Christ".

It has been said, that to a significant degree, any account of New England theology must be rendered in terms of movements first appearing in the generation following the Great Awakening.³ And whether or not one would agree with Perry Miller that Horace Bushnell "transcendentalized" Calvinism, there is no gainsaying the significance for Bushnell's christological thought of the split in the Puritan

heritage which Miller detects in the theological movement from Edwards to Emerson, nor is there any denying the reintegration which is implicit in Bushnell's reappraisal.⁴ In other words, the christological problems which Bushnell faced were shaped for him by those movements which, by the time of his entrance into the Christian ministry, had issued in the Orthodox-Unitarian-Transcendentalist controversy. Consequently, any account of Bushnell's understanding of the person of Christ, in such distinctive terms as the "fact-form Christ", or the "metaphor" of God, should begin by recalling the context from which he wrote.

The doctrine of the person of Christ was itself the cardinal question underlying the Calvinist-Unitarian debates. In his letters to Channing, Moses Stuart remarked that ". . . all difficulties in respect to the doctrine of the Trinity, are essentially connected with proving or disproving the Divinity of Christ."⁵ New England theologians following Jonathan Edwards had developed, in conjunction with their trinitarianism, a christology based on the orthodox formula, "two natures and one person", a formula which, Bushnell said, is correctly worded only if it is taken in a symbolic, and not in an analytical or speculative sense. Revelation for the Edwardsians, however, was propositional truth, communicated to the believer as dogma or doctrine. In their apprehension of the doctrine of two natures as a theory or scientific formula, Bushnell said, New England Calvinists had come really and practically to hold a "bi-personal Savior".⁶ Instead of a person whose nature is the real unity of the divine and the human, orthodox trinitarians held a theory of two distinct or distinctly active subsistences in the person of Christ, between which their thoughts continually alternated, referring this to the human side, and that to

the divine. "Having lost out of mind the distinction between a twofold nature and two distinct personal activities", said Bushnell, "their Savior is two, and not one any longer".⁷

It was this view of Christ's person as a "partnership transaction" which the Unitarians exposed as artificial and absurd. For Andrews Norton, the doctrine of two natures was of greater incredibility than that of the trinity, and Channing deemed the theory "an enormous tax on human credulity":

According to this doctrine, Jesus Christ, instead of being one mind, one conscious intelligent principle, whom we can understand, consists of two souls, two minds; the one divine, the other human; the one weak, the other almighty; the one ignorant, the other omniscient. Now we maintain, that this is to make Christ two beings.⁸

With Jesus, Channing said, Unitarians worshipped the Father as the one and only true God. In Christ's obedience, his worshipping, and his suffering, Channing found plain evidence of a nature under limitation, therefore of a creature who could not be God. In George Park Fisher's words, Channing conceived of Christ "as a pre-existent rational creature, an angel or spirit of some sort, who had entered into a human body".⁹ According to Bushnell, neither the Unitarian nor the trinitarian had apprehended the reality of Christ, for both were thinking of his person in terms of measures or boundaries under the laws of space and time.

Christ, says the Unitarian, obeys, worships, suffers, and in that manner shows most plainly that his internal nature is under a limitation; therefore he is human only. Then 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.¹⁰

The christology which Bushnell offered was not based on the standard methods of his day. He was, he said, talking about another and more absolute kind of knowledge than that which is offered to man's constructive logic. Yet he persistently denied that intuition is itself the ground of all knowledge. There is nothing more true, he said, than that the soul is constituted for religion, as Theodore Parker maintained. And Bushnell found in Emerson's "Over-Soul" a remarkably rich sense of the presence of a divine spirit supernaturally permeative in mind. But in his critique of transcendentalism, Bushnell raised the distinction between that knowledge which comes out of report, or statement, or any bare intellectuality called truth, and that knowledge which comes only through relationship, "person trusted to person". The immediate knowledge of which he spoke itself presupposed a regenerative power not indigenous to man's personality; it is not an impersonal "intuitive principle" but a personal Being who becomes the "form of the soul". "There is a divine Word in the soul's own nature", he said, "but it shineth in darkness and is not comprehended till the Word becomes flesh and is represented historically without."¹¹

In dwelling on man's relation to substance and form, in inquiring after transcendentalism's hypotheses, Bushnell was actually working toward a definition of existence which is given in Christ. He offered what he called a "christology of manifestation", in which he tied man's intuitive faculties to the "world-astounding mystery of the incarnation" as completed in the life and death of Jesus Christ. He offered a christology which is by definition soteriological. Who is Christ? Bushnell answered not in terms of the anatomy of Christ's person, but in terms of what is communicated to man through Christ's person. The Lord

Jesus Christ, he said, came into the world simply to express God. The meaning of the incarnation is God making the closest possible approach to human feeling that he might thus draw man into union with Himself. The immediate experience of truth in a man's heart presupposes that Christ lived and was what he declared himself to be, the express image of God, thus the pillar and ground of all truth and the power of man's reinspiration.

Christ is in his person, "the form of a divine character";¹² "God's own formulization of himself".¹³ This means that spiritual discernment is the only qualified interpreter of what God wishes to communicate to us in Christ. The basic methodological question for Bushnell's christology of manifestation is "how to stay by the symbols or in them . . . to show how the forms in which God is offered to our faith may be used so as to get their true meaning and be themselves the truth to us".¹⁴

His symbolic approach allowed Bushnell to dismiss as impossible and irrelevant all "metaphysical or speculative" difficulties involved in the claim of Christ's divinity. The truth of the manifestation of God in Christ, he said, is a "revelation-form", not a "formula in words". Christ is in his person and life a "medium" of reconciliation with God; we can know nothing concerning him save precisely what externally appears, or is expressed. "As regards the interior nature of Christ, or the composition of his person", Bushnell said, "we perhaps know nothing".¹⁵ Here, as in the trinity, he advocated the "incurious method", based on the fundamental principle that no investigation can ever penetrate the interior relation of form to truth.

And precisely so, the reality of Christ is what he expresses of God, not what he is in his physical conditions, or under his human limitations. He is here to express the Absolute Being, especially His feeling, His love to man, His placableness, conversableness, and His real union to the race; in a word, to communicate His own Life to the race, and graft Himself historically into it Therefore, to insist on going beyond expression, investigating the mystery of the person of Jesus, when it is given us only to communicate God and His love, is in fact to puzzle ourselves with the vehicle, and rob ourselves of the grace it brings.¹⁶

The claim that Christ is God incarnate, of a double nature, at once divine and human, Bushnell affirmed according to his external view. The truth of Christ's twofold nature is conveyed through forms: we are to regard him as a person representable to thought only by means of two poles or denominations, the divine and the human; which, however we cannot investigate as regards the manner of their interior relation. If now one should ask about the interior contents of Christ's person, Bushnell answered that the question is "unpracticable, unphilosophic, dictated only by a false curiosity, and of course, not answered by scripture".¹⁷ It was Bushnell's great contention that the incarnation is not given to riddle man's curiosity, and that by probing the interior nature of the person of Christ, his contemporaries had lost not only the personal unity of the Savior, but his divinity as well, for "in maintaining the essential divinity of Christ, there is no difficulty whatever, till we begin to speculate or dogmatize about the humanity."¹⁸

The question whether Jesus had a human soul, Bushnell dismissed as likewise beyond human investigation. He did not intend, he said in God In Christ to deny that Christ had a human soul, or anything human but a human body. He only denied that this human soul or nature could be spoken of, or looked upon, as having a "distinct subsistence", so as to

live, think, learn, suffer, worship, 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 do not say that he is composed of three elements, a divine person, a human soul and a human body; nor of these that they are distinctly three, or absolutely one. 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.¹⁹

The christological question for Bushnell, the whole question he said, is "whether it is possible for the divine nature to be manifested in humanity".²⁰ We know, he said, that there is in God a capacity of self-expression, a generative power of form, by which he produces Himself outwardly in the finite; that in all the material creation God embodies himself to be mirrored before us.

A finite outward person, too, may as well be an organ or type of the Infinite as a finite thing or object; and God may act a human personality, without being measured by it, as well as to shine through a finite thing or world, without being measured by that.²¹

On the one hand, Bushnell feared lest his view of Christ was "too exclusively divine";²² on the other hand, the whole thrust of his exposition was against the naturalistic christologies of his day. He wondered if it were not better "to add more faith" and "subtract less of the divine" from Christ, than to preach a "sub-carnation" or to throw a tint over Christ's deity by some confusion practiced on his person.²³

In the end, the divinity of Christ is all for Bushnell, and he constantly presents his view of Christ in ways which contrast full divinity with any mere humanity. "By the divinity of Christ", he said, "I do not understand that Christ differs from other men, in the sense

that he is better, more inspired, and so a more complete vehicle of God to the world than others have been. He differs from us, not in degree, but in kind".²⁴ This way of putting the question bears on some of Bushnell's less guarded statements concerning the humanity of Christ, such as that Christ "is in such a sense God, or God manifested, that the unknown term of his nature, that which we are most in doubt of, or about which we are least capable of any positive affirmation, is the human".²⁵ If the man Jesus never made the experiment of sin, said Bushnell

. . . it must be because the divine is so far uppermost in him as to suspend the proper manhood of his person. He does not any longer act the man; practically speaking, the man sleeps in him. It is as if the man were not there . . . He acts the divine, not the human, and the only true reality in him, as far as moral conduct is concerned, is the divine.²⁶

The mark of Jesus' divinity is "the really astonishing self-evidence of his character".²⁷ Jesus proves himself, Bushnell said, "by his own self-evidence", and the simple inspection of his life suffices to show that "the character of Jesus forbids his possible classification with men".²⁸

He was born of a woman, grew up in the trade of a mechanic, was known as a Nazarene, stood a man before the eye, and yet he early began to raise impressions that separated him, and set him asunder inexplicably from the world he was in.²⁹

Christological thinking, then, takes its beginning with Jesus of Nazareth. All that Christ is and does as form or symbol is summed up in the person and life of the historical Jesus, "in the dramatic forms of his personal history". It is interesting, then, to note that while Bushnell's awareness of biblical criticism and historical reconstruction

is slight, his christology holds together history and proclamation. He rejects that theological method which takes its beginning with the mysteries of the divine nature instead of with a historical person. Jesus of Nazareth is the basis of the kerygma for Bushnell.

The revelation of God in Christ is made by the Savior's whole person. The profound separation of Christ from the sinners of mankind, and the impression he awakened in them of that separation, was made not by miracles, nor by words of assertion, nor by anything designed for that purpose; but it grew out of his life and character--"his unworldliness, holiness, purity, truth, love; the dignity of his feeling, the transcendent wisdom and grace of his conduct . . . his profound singularity as a being superior to sin."³⁰ Christ's whole ministry was a kind of discovery, and so a process of separation. Accordingly, Bushnell said, we need not look to the resurrection and ascension as some ultimate proof of Christ's divinity; these are "only a kind of final consummation, or complete rendering" of what was unfolded by Jesus' whole life and ministry.³¹

It accords with this that we will more closely approach God's object in the wonder of the incarnation, if we adhere as closely as possible, "to the simple historic matter of the gospel".³² What God is and will be to men is accurately shown by the incarnate life and ministry of Jesus. One must, then, Bushnell said, have the closest possible intimacy and be, as it were, one spirit with Christ. "You will need to make his character and life a perpetual study, and dwell on them till your intellectual life is filled with Christ-like thoughts and images of divine beauty drawn from his person".³³

The gospel is "all person", Bushnell said, "what a person is

and feels and does and suffers";³⁴ it has "nothing to do with any propositional truth whatever".³⁵ Bushnell's meaning in preaching Christ, then, is "to make Christ himself everything"; to present the gospel not as abstractive theories about Christ, but to make the person himself everything. The truth of Christ, he said, is "worded in his person and receivable only from his person".³⁶ It is a fact then to be carefully noted, "that all the best saints and most impressive teachers of Christ are those who have found how to present him best in the dramatic forms of his personal history".³⁷

This "living person", this "concrete personation", Bushnell said, we can speak of only in terms of purpose: the person and work of Christ cannot be divided. Christ enters the world as person rather than as theory, because only as person can he enter the world as power. "If Christ were a philosopher, a human teacher, a human example, we might doubtless reason him and set him in our present scales of proportion, but he would as certainly do nothing for us equal to our want."³⁸ The true gospel, Bushnell said, is that which brings a regenerative power and creates the soul anew in the image of God; it is the "life of God in the soul of man"; it is Christ dwelling in man's soul and giving it a form out of his own; it is Christ, "manifested in such love and divinity that, taken for salvation as a being, he can be trusted".³⁹ And so it is that Bushnell's answer to the question, Who is Christ?, is always given in terms of God's object in the incarnation:

The true answer is, that he is, externally viewed, a union of God and man, whose object is to humanize the conception of God, and so to express or communicate God.⁴⁰

To say that Bushnell offered a christology of manifestation, then, is to say that he proclaimed the gospel as a person, who is given as "a gift to the imagination". "The very purpose of the incarnation", he said, "is to get by or away from abstractions, and give the world a concrete personation".⁴¹ It was to get away from the abstractions himself that Bushnell framed his christology in forms and figures which he intended as images only. Correlatively, one may say that the strength or weakness of Bushnell's exposition depends not only on his own powers of insight and expression, but also on the capacity of his reader for intellectual or spiritual discernment.⁴²

It follows from this that the depth and fertility of Bushnell's exposition of the person of Christ can be opened more and more fully to the reader through the meanings of a single word or phrase. As the "form" of God, for example, Christ is both image and life. In Christ, the sinner beholds all the graces of God's internal character; "the beauty and truth of God" are visible in his person and life. Jesus Christ is the "face of God": in the life of the man is the feeling of God expressed, "God's full beauty and love in the human type or face".⁴³ And thus is the gospel relational to man's deepest needs. As the form of God, Christ is the form of the soul: he embodies or envisages the divine love and friendship powerfully enough to enter them into our life.⁴⁴

It seems to me that when a sinner of mankind beholds the gracious look of God in the life and passion of Jesus, when the graces of God's internal character and the depths of his feeling are opened there to his view, and when he is called to look into this glass with a face unveiled and be changed into this same image from glory to glory, it need not mortify him. What should he sooner do, were it only for ambition's sake, than to let what is loveliest and highest in God communicate with him and enter as a quickening and regenerating power into his nature. For this is the only aim and import of what we call salvation by grace.⁴⁵

Thus it is that Bushnell said we must "look into language itself" and see how the revelation of God is coming and to come. The spiritual comes out of the physical, meanings coming out of meanings; in other words, things visible have their highest meaning and reality when taken as being what they really are, images and signs of what is invisible. God is teaching us here to look for the solid, not in the visible, but in what is revealed through it. This is the secret leaven hidden in the life of Christ and by him incarnated in the world. And this is the sense in which Christ is the "embodied token" of all past history, the interpreter of our otherwise unmeaning world. All past history is language for Christ, a preparation of physical bases for the supernatural truth to come:

Adam is the figure of him that was to come, the second Adam, because he, Christ, was to be the head, correspondently, of a spiritual generation. Christ is David, Melchizedek, high priest, the spiritual Rock, a prophet like unto Moses. . . . All the past is taken up as metaphor for all the future. . . . that is, types for the expression of our higher truth.⁴⁶

It is this view of Christian truth which guides Bushnell's interpretation of the incidents of the life of Jesus. We have nothing to do, he said, but to look upon the life and passion of Christ "as belonging to the one divine person and, through these incidents, taken all as media of divine expression, come, as directly as possible, into the import and power of what is expressed."⁴⁷ Did Jesus suffer the limitations of a human person? Did he grow in wisdom and knowledge? Did he reason, obey, worship, suffer? The answer to any such question, Bushnell said, is one and the same:

If sometimes acts are attributed to him that seem to be divine, sometimes others that seem to be human, we can not say, 'this infers deity', 'this a human soul', we

can only refer them all alike to the one abnormal person, and the secret mystery of his consciousness . . . that God may thus express his own feeling and draw himself into union with us, by an act of accommodation to our human sympathies and capacities.⁴⁸

In the matter of Christ's obedience, then, we are not so much to consider the obedience as what the obedience expresses. "Man obeys for what obedience is, but the subject obedient state of Christ is accepted for what it conveys, or expresses."⁴⁹ Or, if we speak of the worship paid by Christ, we are to see here that Christ is expressing what is perfect in God, by using the human type according to its nature, and the conditions to which it is subject. And of the passion and death of Jesus, we can say nothing more adequate and complete than that herein is revealed to us the suffering holiness of God:

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, and that only his human part can suffer. We cannot thus intrude into the interior of God's mysteries. We are only to see the eternal Life approach our race--Divine Love manifested and sealed⁵⁰

The human personality, the obedient, subject, suffering state of Jesus, they are all "colors of the divine", vehicles of God to man. We are human, and incapable of apprehending the sensibility of God unless it is mediated to us in an objective form. And here is the precise relation of the agony to the cross: "One is the reality, the other is the outward sign or symbol".⁵¹ The value of the cross is not Christ's physical suffering taken simply as human suffering. Its real value is as form which mediates to us the suffering sensibility of God, a

revelation of such depth and intensity, that the "human vehicle breaks under the shock".⁵²

According to the Fairfield West Association, Bushnell had, in such statements as these, denied the distinct humanity of Jesus.⁵³

"Jesus, to his thinking, was God indeed," said Cyrus Bartol, "the man-part only appearance and costume".⁵⁴ George Park Fisher put it this way:

The existence of a human spiritual nature, if not expressly denied, was held to be of practically no account. It was substantially the Apollinarian idea . . . God surrenders himself to the restrictions of a human organization, and subjects himself to the conditions of an earthly life on our level, as a medium through which to manifest himself to us. It is all, literally speaking, divine thought, divine emotion, divine action, even divine suffering. This was the fundamental thought in Dr. Bushnell's Christology, - the thought which, whatever were his mutations of opinion, was always uppermost.⁵⁵

Bushnell said himself that he was aware of the importance of upholding Christ's real humanity, "For if Christ be taken as a mere show or theophany, having no real and historic place in humanity, then the gospel has no longer any solid import. It becomes a phantasm and nothing more."⁵⁶ But the charges brought against his view of Christ's person can nevertheless be substantiated. As Bushnell said, "The human element is nothing to me, save as it brings me to God, or discovers to me, a sinner, the patience and brotherhood of God as a Redeemer from sin . . .".⁵⁷ One does not find in Bushnell's christology a view of Christ's distinct personal manhood. The meaning of the incarnation is the movement of God to man, the historic fact that God has come nigh to us, or fully expressed himself to us, through the human type or form.

To raise the question of Christ's real humanity is to question