

*DISTINCTIONS OF EXTERNAL FUNCTION IN THE
HOLY TRINITY.*

THE purpose of this paper is to offer a slight contribution towards that branch of theology which is concerned with the distinctions of external function within the Holy Trinity. No attempt will be made to explain this distinction in terms of philosophy. The scriptural data and their patristic treatment will be more than sufficient material for our present study, and here again our investigation must be limited to those passages in which the three Persons of the Holy Trinity are mentioned together with reference to their work in the world.

1. Let us take first 1 Corinthians xii. 4 foll. There are *διαρέσεις χαρισμάτων*, but the same Spirit; *διαρέσεις διακονιών*, but the same Lord; *διαρέσεις ενεργημάτων*, but the same God, *ὁ ἐνεργῶν τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν*. The *χαρίσματα* here assigned to the Spirit as His work are the specific endowments for Christian service enumerated in the next verses; the *διακόνιαι* are not services rendered to Christ and His members, but types of ministry commissioned by Him as the one Lord; the *ἐνεργήματα* are not merely miracles, but all spiritual powers in exercise,—in the words of Bishop Andrewes' sermon on this passage "the effect of work done, wrought or executed by the former two, the skill of the gift and the power of the calling." The *διαρέσεις* that exist within each of these three categories are, as the history of the word suggests and as the context shows, a matter not of essential character but of providential distribution. The gifts, offices and works are as a matter of fact different in themselves, but the point is that they are assigned to different persons, They are the manifold exhibition or provision of the one divine purpose.

But this one divine purpose is itself threefold in its working. There was grave need at Corinth of mutual recognition and harmony among the possessors of these various gifts for service. To meet this need the Apostle lays stress, not only upon the unity of the divine economy of spiritual powers, but also upon the distinctions within the divine operation. The recipients of these different gifts are to be one in their distinctive exercise of the gifts just as the three persons of the Holy Trinity are one in their distinctive functions in the bestowal of the gifts. The order in which these functions are stated is determined, as St. Basil notes, by the standpoint of the recipient of the gifts. The Spirit comes first as the immediate imparter of the gifts, the Son next as the sender, the Father last as the source. The Spirit is the immediate source of active life, the Son is the channel of all ordered authority, the Father is the ultimate source of all effective power. *Δύναμις, ἐξουσία, ἐνεργεία*,—such would seem to be an apt triad of terms to express the distinction of Father, Son and Spirit, but for the fact that the verb *ἐνεργεῖν* is actually used in this passage both of the Father and of the Spirit. In other words, the function assigned to the Father is not merely a distinctive function of His own, it is a comprehension of all the activities that flow from His own. The Father is *ὁ ἐνεργῶν τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν*, the Spirit *πάντα ταῦτα ἐνεργεῖ διαιροῦν ἰδίᾳ ἐκάστῳ καθὼς βούλεται*. Is it hyperexegetical to distinguish *τὰ πάντα*, the scheme of spiritual powers as a whole, from *πάντα ταῦτα*, the different powers regarded in particular? If it is a permissible distinction, then within the one *ἐνεργεία* we have the all-bracing providence of the Father and the particular application of the Spirit. Even then the one includes the other.

A similar co-operation is to be noted in the subsequent passage on the members of the one body. Bengel suggests that the remainder of the chapter falls under the respective

heads of the one Spirit, the one Lord, the one God. But the second of these three sections, though it is the body of Christ which is being described, is largely occupied with the parable of the human body, and here it is God (*ὁ Θεός*) who assigns to each member its place. In fact across the distinction of functions so clearly marked for the Son and the Spirit there comes the complementary truth of that unity of the divine operation which is seen in the very description of the first person not as the Father but as God.

2. The next passage to consider is the concluding benediction of 2 Corinthians. Here we have not the precise statement of the doctrine of divine operation, but the rich tones of an apostolic prayer. It is the theology not of instruction, but of intercession ; but it is still theology. Here again is the idea of distinctive operation, not now in the work of the Church but in the life of the members. The change of order again is appropriate,—it is the order of Christian experience. First comes the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the preaching of the Gospel of the Incarnation,—in words that recall the earlier language of this same Epistle, “ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that being rich He became poor for your sakes, that ye through His poverty might become rich.” This grace is at once the fruit and the proof of the love of God, and finds its realization for the individual in the common life of the Spirit in the Church. Here again the Father is simply called God. The grace of the Son and the fellowship of the Spirit are not so much results as parts of the love of God.

3. We come next to the far less definite language of Romans xi. 36. It is unsafe to press the eloquence of adoration into the framework of theological analysis, or we might be tempted to follow Origen. Then the riches of God would be the Father, the source of power ; the wisdom of God would be the Son, the source of reason ; the knowledge

of God would be the Spirit, the source of conscious life. In 1 Corinthians ii. 11 the self-consciousness of the spirit of a man is regarded as analogous to the Spirit of God which knoweth the things of God. The Spirit might thus be recognized here in the *γνώσις* which is as it were the *σοφία* returning into the *πλοῦτος* of the mind of God in conscious self-recognition. But the distinction thus ventured is purely internal to the Godhead and therefore beyond our present scope. It is moreover precarious. Whether the *πλοῦτος* be taken separately from the *σοφία* and the *γνώσις* and interpreted of the goodness of God, or be taken in connexion with them as meaning the infinity of their resources, in either case St. Paul is concluding his treatment of the problem of the morality of God's predestination of man by insisting on the inability of man to fathom God's purpose, or to limit or exhaust God's love. It is the Godhead as a whole that is his immediate thought.

It is more material to our purpose to examine the words that follow: "For of Him and through Him and unto Him are all things." They have been explained again and again from Origen to St. Thomas Aquinas and onwards as an explicit reference to the three persons of the Holy Trinity, and this interpretation has found its latest and ablest defence in Liddon's analysis of this Epistle. It is *primâ facie* defensible, if the translation of *εἰς αὐτὸν* as *in ipso* be admitted. The Father is then the source of life, the Son the agent, the Spirit the instrument or the sphere. But the translation *in ipsum* or *ad ipsum* is beyond dispute, and the Holy Spirit can only by a forced exegesis be described as the goal of created life. We must therefore fall back upon the alternative view which regards the passage as describing "the relation of the Godhead as a whole to the universe and to all created things. God (not necessarily the Father) is the source and inspirer and goal of all things"

(Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, p. 340). It is, however, still justifiable to see in the three expressions, not indeed a distinct reference to each of the three Persons, but an enumeration of the three factors in the relation of God to the world which are revealed in the three Persons. A deeply suggestive analogy in Moberly's *Atonement and Personality* compares the Holy Trinity to the three stages of human action,—mind, purpose, achievement. In this sense the image of God embodied in the Son is reflected back to God from the world {by the Spirit working out the likeness of God in the world. The words *εἰς αὐτὸν* have then a reference to the Spirit. He is not Himself the *αὐτὸς* unto whom all things are,—God is the end of all life. But it is through the work of the Spirit that the world gives back to God (*εἰς αὐτὸν*) the reflection of the Father's purpose (*ἐξ αὐτοῦ*) revealed in the Son (*δι' αὐτοῦ*). We have here then distinct operations recognized as stages of the divine purpose though not assigned verbally to the different persons of the Holy Trinity.

4. We turn now to Ephesians iv. 4-6. "There is one body and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all and in all." The context deals with the need of diligence to preserve unity of feeling and action within the Church. To enforce the need and the possibility of this subjective unity the Apostle points to the objective unity of their spiritual life. The passage is parallel on one side to Ephesians ii. 18, "Through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father"; and on the other side to 1 Corinthians iii. 22, 23, "All things are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." It is difficult to avoid recognizing here also the triad of hope, faith, and love on their divine side. The three Christian graces correspond to the facts of divine

action,—creation, redemption, sanctification. Love is the human response to the Fatherhood of God, faith to the work of the Saviour, hope to the indwelling of the Spirit. When we examine the text more closely, it is the simple language of the third clause which presents the only difficulty. Either the first person of the Holy Trinity is here called God, and His function is marked by the term Father indicating the source of all life ; or He is called God the Father, and His function is defined by the phrase which follows, He is over all and through all and in all. In the latter case it will be observed that this phrase works backward over the other two persons. God is transcendent, pervasive, immanent. Deism, Theism, Pantheism are in one sense isolations and therefore perversions of the truths embodied in the respective functions of Father, Son and Spirit.

The phrase itself involves two difficulties. (a) *Ἐπὶ πάντων* clearly expresses the sovereignty of God the Father ; *ἐν πασίν* suggests the indwelling of the Spirit of God. But *διὰ πάντων* has been variously interpreted, as denoting (1) the providence of the Father (Chrysostom) ; (2) the charismatic influence and presence of God by means of the Holy Spirit (Calvin and Meyer quoted by Ellicott) ; (3) the creative power of the Son (Thomas Aquinas, who inverts it into “*per quem omnia facta sunt*”). Probably the reference is to the work of the Son, whether it be His creative action or His reconciling influence, as Ellicott suggests. The three relations are therefore clear on the whole, though it is not clear whether they are to be assigned to the three Persons respectively or to the Godhead as a whole or to the Father as the one *πηγὴ ἐνεργείας*, working through the Son and the Spirit.

(b) There remains yet the question of the scope or range of action. In the case of the one Spirit and the one Lord it is obviously the Church, regarded first as a whole and then

in its members. But the reiterated *πάντων*, is it masculine or neuter? Is it the Church or humanity or creation? The Vulgate takes *διὰ πάντων* as neuter, Beza as masculine. Uniformity seems to require the masculine. The reference of the previous verses to the Church, the necessity of understanding *ἐν πάσιν* of beings capable of the indwelling of a personal God, seem to limit *ἐπὶ πάντων* and *διὰ πάντων* also to humanity, if not to the Church. In any case there is no suggestion of a different sphere of action for each person of the Godhead. Their functions are distinguished in character but not in extent.

5. In the opening salutation of 1 Peter i. 2 the Christians of the dispersion are addressed as, "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Christ." The leading thought is their election. It originates in the foreknowledge of the Father, it is effected through the sanctifying power of the Spirit, its end and aim is obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. The difficulty here lies in the order and mutual relation of the work of the Spirit and of Christ. Assuming that the order is intended to mark stages in the progress of the Christian, we have then to decide whether it is the initial stage of Christian life which is here described or the subsequent development of that life. The clear allusion to the Mosaic covenant in the words "obedience and sprinkling" seems to refer the passage to that moment at which the obedience of man to God's call and the pardon of the man through the blood of Christ are sealed in his baptism. In that case the sanctification of the Spirit is either the consecration of the man's life by his baptism of water and the Holy Ghost or it is the preparatory influence of the Spirit in drawing him Christwards before his baptism. If, on the other hand, the sanctification of the Spirit be regarded as that progress in holiness which is the

sequel of union with Christ, then the obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Christ which are the end and aim of this progress must be something still ahead,—the perfect obedience unto death and the participation in the sufferings of Christ for which the Spirit trains and strengthens the Father's chosen servants. Here again all stages of the divine work alike,—the foreknowledge of the Father, the sanctifying influence of the Spirit, the application of the atonement of Christ or the realization of His sufferings, are common in their extent. They are regarded only in their relation to the elect. There is no hint of exclusion. Creation and humanity are simply not before us at this point. The Apostle is encouraging the elect with the thought that Father, Son and Spirit are all co-operating in their perfection.

6. With this last passage should be compared the thanksgiving of 2 Thessalonians ii. 13, 14,—“God chose you from the beginning unto salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, whereunto He called you through our gospel to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Election originating in the love of God, worked out in life by the sanctifying presence of the Spirit,—so far the parallel with 1 Peter i. 2 is exact. The end of the life thus begun and continued is to be *εἰς περιποίησιν δόξης τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ*. And the glory of Christ which is the reward of the Christian life is not merely the glory of which He is the possessor, it is the glory of which He is the giver. He is not only in Himself *ὁ κύριος τῆς δόξης* (1 Cor. ii. 8), He is for us the *ἀρχηγὸς τῆς ζωῆς* (Acts iii. 15; cp. v. 31), *τῆς σωτηρίας* (Heb. ii. 10), and *τελειωτῆς* as well as *ἀρχηγὸς τῆς πίστεως* (Heb. xii. 2). It is His work, not His position which is in question. But His work of redemption is here regarded not in the initial stage of atonement, as in St. Peter's salutation, but in the final stage of perfection. He is here *Christus consummator*.

7. There is another passage in which the work of each of the three divine Persons in the salvation of the individual is clearly marked, viz., Titus iii. 4-6. The entire work is attributed to the kindness and love of God our Saviour. Its realization for the individual is connected with the baptism which is the sign of the regenerating and renovating power of the Spirit. The Son is mentioned last here as in the two passages just considered. But here He is not the divine sufferer to whose death the Christian is to be made conformable, nor the conqueror whose glory the Christian is to share at last, but the mediator through whom the Father's gift of the Spirit is bestowed. But once more, though there is distinction of function, there is no distinction of object,—it is the elect who are alike the one object of the love that originates, the power that works, the grace that confers the salvation. And the unity of the whole of the divine operation is marked by the application of the term saviour both to God and to Jesus Christ. There is one salvation, the threefold work of the one God.

8. The last passage to be examined—Jude 20, 21—is not a prayer nor a doctrine, but an exhortation. “But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” This threefold application of the faith to life almost corresponds to the Pauline description of the Christian life as faith, hope and love. There is the faith which finds expression in prayer, the love which keeps the commandments of God and so keeps itself within the love of God, the hope which faces death and judgment as robbed of terror by the mercy of Christ. But conversely there is also a practical doctrine of the working of the Holy Trinity on and for man. There is the central, primal love of God ; there is the office of the

Spirit, prompting, guiding, sustaining, hallowing all devotion; there is the office of the Son to whom all judgment has been committed by the Father. Sanctification, justification,—the order is unusual but appropriate in this context, for it reminds the Christian that the life of prayer and obedience will yet need as it lies before the Judge the mercy of the Saviour whose earlier mercy made its beginning possible.

It would be a fairly true generalization from the passages here considered to say that the teaching of the New Testament contains the two ideas of distinctive functions within the Holy Trinity and of the unity of all action of the Holy Trinity, but that neither of the ideas is stated absolutely or defined precisely as a principle. The materials for a conclusion are all there, but the conclusion itself is not drawn. The doctrine is not given in the abstract; it is implied or rather applied in various practical forms. It is made the basis of instruction, of exhortation, of intercession. The functions assigned to the three divine Persons respectively are described in language that varies according as its context relates to the unity of Church life, to spiritual endowments for Christian service, to the sanctification of the individual, to human effort, or to divine grace, or to the relation of the Godhead to the world as a whole. To the Father are attributed love, foreknowledge, choice, sovereignty, all effective working; to the Son the grace of condescending, the atonement of suffering, mediation in the bestowal of the Spirit, the consummation of the glory of humanity, the mercy of final judgment; to the Spirit the regeneration and renewal of human nature, the fellowship of spiritual life in the body of Christ, the indwelling of the divine in the human, the growth in holiness. These attributes may fairly be grouped under the familiar headings of the doctrinal summaries of later ages,—creation, redemption, sanctification. But they are not regarded as

mutually exclusive. The language of some of the passages considered implies that the action of the Son and of the Spirit is embraced within the action of the Father. Other passages in the New Testament indicate that in each of the three stages of human destiny each of the three divine Persons has a share. Particular functions again imply different spheres of operation,—creation concerns the world, sanctification the Church. But nowhere is there a suggestion that the entire sphere of action of the Son or of the Spirit is less extensive than that of the Father. That doubtful and dangerous inference begins and ends with the peculiar teaching of Origen and his disciples, which lies beyond the scope of this article.

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NOTES ON RECENT NEW TESTAMENT STUDY.

IN the *North American Review* (June, 1906, pp. 861–874) Dr. C. A. Briggs discusses the relations of criticism and dogma with regard to the Virgin Birth. The accounts in Matthew and Luke are held to be derived from a common source, poetical in form, from which Luke has extracted more than Matthew, the editorial work of both being, however, “limited to translation and prose settings.” The poems of which this primitive source consisted originated in the Palestinian community prior to 70 A.D., i.e. during the lifetime of James and Jude, the half-brothers of Jesus. They are therefore “credible to as high a degree as any other document in the New Testament.” This nearness to Joseph and Mary guarantees the reliability of the tradition. The testimony of such witnesses, even to so unique a fact, must be admitted. Besides, “it is altogether improbable that any one in the first Christian century could have