

III.

The Indwelling and Outgoing Works of God.

“And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.”—*Psalm xxxiii. 6.*



The thorough and clear-headed theologians of the most flourishing periods of the Church used to distinguish between the *indwelling* and *outgoing* works of God.

The same distinction exists to some extent in nature. The lion watching his prey differs widely from the lion resting among his whelps. See the blazing eye, the lifted head, the strained muscles and panting breath. One can see that the crouching lion is laboring intensely. Yet the act is now only in contemplation. The heat and the ferment, the nerve-tension are all within. A terrible deed is about to be done, but it is still under restraint, until he pounces with thundering roar upon his unsuspecting victim, burying his fangs deep into the quivering flesh.

We find the same distinction in finer form among men. When a storm has raged at sea, and the fate of the absent fishing-smacks that are expected to return with the tide is uncertain, a fisherman's awe-stricken wife sits on the brow of the sand-hill watching and waiting in speechless suspense. As she waits, her heart and soul labor in prayer; the nerves are tense, the blood runs fast, and breathing is almost suspended. Yet there is no outward act; only labor within. But on the safe return of the smacks, when she sees her own, her burdened heart finds relief in a cry of joy.

Or, taking examples from the more ordinary walks of life, compare the student, the scholar, the inventor thinking out his new invention, the architect forming his plans, the general studying his opportunities, the sturdy sailor nimbly climbing the mast of his ship, or yonder blacksmith raising the sledge to strike the glowing iron upon the anvil with concentrated muscular force. Judging superficially, one would say the blacksmith and sailor work, but the men of learning are idle. Yet he that looks beneath the surface knows better than this. For if those men perform no apparent manual labor, they work with brain, nerve, and blood; yet since those organs are more delicate than hand or foot, their invisible, indwelling work is much more exhausting. With all their labor the blacksmith and sailor are pictures of health, while the men of mental force, apparently idle among their folios, are pale from exhaustion, their vitality being almost consumed by their intense application.



Applying this distinction without its human limitations to the works of the Lord, we find that the outgoing works of God had their beginning when God created the heavens and the earth; and that before that moment which marks the birth of time, nothing existed but God working within Himself. Hence this twofold operation: The *first*, externally manifest, known to us in the acts of creating, upholding, and directing all things—acts that, compared to those of eternity, seem to have begun but yesterday; for what are thousands of years in the presence of the eternal ages? The *second*, behind and underneath the first—an operation

not begun nor ended, but eternal like Himself; deeper, richer, fuller, yet not manifested, hidden within Him, which we therefore designate *indwelling*.

Altho these two operations can scarcely be separated—for there never was one manifest *without* which was not first completed *within*—yet the difference is strongly marked and easily recognized. The indwelling works of God are from *eternity*, the outgoing belong to *time*. The former *precede*, the latter *follow*. The foundation of that which becomes *visible* lies in that which remains *invisible*. The *light* itself is hidden, it is the *radiation* only that appears.

The Scripture, speaking of the indwelling works of God, says: “The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, and the thoughts of His heart to all generations” (Psalm xxxiii. 11). Since in God heart and thought have no separate existence, but His undivided Essence thinks, feels, and wills, we learn from this significant passage that the Being of God works in Himself from all eternity. This answers the oft-repeated and foolish question, “What did God do before He created the universe?” which is as unreasoning as to ask what the thinker did before he expressed his thoughts, or the architect before he built the house!

God’s indwelling works, which are from everlasting to everlasting, are not insignificant, but surpass His outgoing works in depth and strength as the student’s thinking and the sufferer’s anguish surpass their strongest utterances in intensity. “Could I but weep,” says the afflicted one, “how much more easily could I bear my sorrow!” And what are tears but the outward expression of grief, relieving the pain and strain of the heart? Or think of the *child-bearing* of the mother before delivery. It is said of the decree that it hath “*brought forth*” (Zeph. ii. 2), which signifies that the phenomenon is only the result of preparation hidden from the eye, but more real than the production, and without which there would be nothing to bring forth.

Thus the expression of our earlier theologians is justified, and the difference between the indwelling and the outgoing works is patent.

Accordingly the indwelling works of God are the activities of His *Being*, without the distinction of Persons; while His outgoing works admit and to some extent demand this distinction: *e.g.*, the common and well-known distinguishing of the Father’s work as that of creation, the Son’s as that of redemption, and the Holy Spirit’s as that of sanctification relates only to God’s outgoing works. While these operations—creation, redemption, and sanctification—are hidden in the thoughts of His heart, His counsel, and His Being, it is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost who creates, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost who redeems, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost who sanctifies, without any division or distinction of activities. The rays of light hidden in the sun are indivisible and indistinguishable until they radiate; so in the Being of God the indwelling working is one and undivided; His personal glories remain invisible until revealed in His outgoing works. A stream is one until it falls over the

precipice and divides into many drops. So is the life of God one and undivided while hidden within Himself; but when it is poured out into created things its colors stand revealed. As, therefore, the indwelling works of the Holy spirit are common to the three Persons of the Godhead, we do not discuss them, but treat only those operations that bear the personal marks of His outgoing works.

But we do not mean to teach that the distinction of the personal attributes of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost did not exist in the divine *Being*, but originated only in His outward *activities*.

The distinction of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the divine characteristic of the Eternal Being, His mode of subsistence, His deepest foundation; to think of Him without that distinction would be absurd. Indeed, in the divine and eternal economy of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each of the divine Persons lives and loves and lauds according to His own personal characteristics, so that the Father remains Father toward the Son, and the Son remains Son toward the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from both.

It is right to ask how this agrees with the statement made above; that the indwelling works of God belong, without distinction of Persons, to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and are therefore the works of the divine Being. The answer is found in the careful distinction of the twofold nature of the indwelling works of God.

Some operations in the divine Being are destined *to be revealed in time*; others will remain *forever unrevealed*. The former concern the creation; the latter, only the relations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Take, for instance, election and eternal generation. Both are indwelling operations of God, but with marked difference. The Father's eternal generation of the Son can never be revealed, but must ever be the mystery of the Godhead; while election belongs as decree to the indwelling works of God, yet is destined in the fulness of time to become manifest in the call of the elect.

Regarding the *permanently* indwelling works of God that do not relate to the creature, but flow from the mutual relation of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the distinctive characteristics of the three Persons must be kept in view. But with those that are to become manifest, relating to the creature, this distinction disappears. Here the rule applies that all indwelling works are activities of the divine Being without distinction of Persons. To illustrate: In the home there are two kinds of activities one flowing from the mutual relation of parents and children, another pertaining to the social life. In the former the distinction between parents and children is never ignored; in the latter, if the relation be normal, neither the father nor the children act alone, *but the family as a whole*. Even so in the holy, mysterious economy of the divine Being, every operation of the Father upon the Son and of both upon the Holy Spirit is distinct; but in every outgoing act it is always the one divine Being, the

thoughts of whose heart are for all His creatures. On that account the natural man knows no more than that he has to do with a God.

The Unitarians, denying the Holy Trinity, have never reached anything higher than that which can be seen by the light of the darkened human understanding. We often discover that many baptized with water but *not* with the Holy Spirit speak of the Triune God because others do. For themselves they know only that He is God. This is why the discriminating knowledge of the Triune God can not illuminate the soul until the light of redemption shines within, and the Day-star arises in man's heart. Our Confession correctly expresses this, saying: "All this we know as well from the testimony of Holy Writ as from their operations, and chiefly by those we feel in ourselves" (art. ix.).



IV.

The Work of the Holy Spirit Distinguished.

“And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.”—*Gen. i. 2.*



What, in general, is the work of the Holy Spirit as distinguished from that of the Father and of the Son?

Not that every believer needs to know these distinctions in all particulars. The existence of faith does not depend upon intellectual distinctions. The main question is not whether we can distinguish the work of the Father from that of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, but whether we have experienced their gracious operations. The *root* of the matter, not the *name*, decides.

Must we then slightly value a clear understanding of sacred things? Shall we deem it superfluous and call its great matters hair-splitting questions? By no means. The human mind searches every department of life. Scientists deem it an honor to spend their lives in analyzing the minutest plants and insects, describing every particular, naming every member of the dissected organism. Their work is never called “hair-splittings,” but is distinguished as “scientific research.” And rightly so, for without differentiation there can be no insight, and without insight there can be no thorough acquaintance with the subject. Why, then, call this same desire *unprofitable* when it directs the attention not to the creature, but to the Lord God our Creator?

Can there be any worthier object of mental application than the eternal God? Is it right and proper to insist upon correct discrimination in every other sphere of knowledge, and yet regarding the knowledge of God to be satisfied with generalities and confused views? Has God not invited us to share the intellectual knowledge of His Being? Has He not given us His Word? And does not the Word illumine the mysteries of His Being, His attributes, His perfections, His virtues, and the mode of His subsistence? If we aspired to penetrate into things too high for us, or to unveil the unrevealed, reverence would require us to resist such audacity. But since we aim in godly fear to listen to Scripture, and to receive the proffered knowledge of the deep things of God, there can be no room for objection. We would say rather to those who frown upon such effort: “Ye can discern the face of the sky, but ye can not discern the face of your Father in heaven.”



Hence the question concerning the work of the Holy Spirit as distinguished from that of the Father and of the Son is quite legitimate and necessary.

It is deplorable that many of God’s children have confused conceptions in this respect. They can not distinguish the works of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Even in prayer they use the divine names indiscriminately. Altho the Holy Spirit is explicitly called