

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

the Comforter, yet they seek comfort mostly from the Father or the Son, unable to say why and what in sense the Holy Spirit is especially called Comforter.

The early Church already felt the need of clear and exact distinctions in this matter; and the great thinkers and Christian philosophers whom God gave to the Church, especially the Eastern Fathers, expended their best powers largely upon this subject. They saw very clearly that unless the Church learned to distinguish the works of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, its confession of the Holy Trinity could be but a dead sound. Compelled not by love of subtleties, but by the necessity of the Church, they undertook to study these distinctions. And God let heretics vex His Church so as to arouse the mind by conflict, and to lead it to search God's Word.

So we are not pioneers exploring a new field. The writing of these articles can so impress those alone who are ignorant of the historical treasures of the Church. We propose simply to cause the light, which for so many ages shed its clear and comforting rays upon the Church, to reenter the windows, and thus by deeper knowledge to increase its inward strength.

We begin with the general distinction: That in every work effected by Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in common, the power *to bring forth* proceeds from the Father: the power *to arrange* from the Son; the power *to perfect* from the Holy Spirit.

In [1 Cor. viii. 6](#), St. Paul teaches that: "There is but one God the Father, *of whom* are all things, and one Lord Jesus Christ *by whom* are all things." Here we have two prepositions: *of whom*, and *by whom*. But in [Rom. xi. 36](#) he adds another: "For of Him and through Him and *to Him* are all things."

The operation here spoken of is threefold: first, that by which all things are originated (*of Him*); second, that by which all things consist (*through Him*); third, that by which all things attain their final destiny (*to Him*). In connection with this clear, apostolic distinction the great teachers of the Church, after the fifth century, used to distinguish the operations of the Persons of the Trinity by saying that the operation whereby all things originated proceeds from the Father; that whereby they received consistency from the Son; and that whereby they were led to their destiny from the Holy Spirit.

These clear thinkers taught that this distinction was in line with that of the Persons. Thus the Father is *father*. He generates the Son. And the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Hence the peculiar feature of the First Person is evidently that He is the Source and Fountain not only of the material creation, but of its very conception; of all that was and is and ever shall be. The peculiarity of the Second Person lies evidently not in generating, but in being generated. One is a son by being generated. Hence since all things proceed from the Father, nothing can proceed from the *Son*. The source of all things is not in the Son. Yet He adds a work of creation to that which is coming into existence; for the Holy Spirit proceeds also from Him; but not from Him alone, but from the Father and the



Son, and that in such a way that the procession from the Son is due to His sameness of essence with the Father.

The Scripture agrees with this in teaching that the Father created all things by the Son, and that without Him was nothing made that was made. For the difference between “created by” and “created from,” we refer to [Col. i. 17](#): “By Him all things consist,” *i.e.*, by Him they hold together. [Heb. i. 3](#) is even clearer, saying that the Son upholds all things by the *Word of His power*. This shows that as the essentials of the creature’s existence proceed from the Father as Fountain of all, so the forming, putting together, and arranging of its constituents are the proper work of the Son.

If we were reverently to compare God’s work to that of man we would say: A king proposes to build a palace. This requires not only, material, labor, and plans, but also putting together and arranging of the materials according to the plans. The king furnishes the materials and plans, the builder constructs the palace. Who, then, built it? Neither the king nor the builder alone; but the builder erects it out of the royal treasure.

This expresses the relation between Father and Son in this respect as far as human relations can illustrate the divine. In the construction of the universe two operations appear: first, the *causative*, which produces the materials, forces, and plans; second, the *constructive*, which with these forces forms and orders the materials according to the plan. And as the first proceeds from the Father, so does the second from the Son. The Father is the Royal Source of the necessary materials and powers; and the Son as the Builder constructs all things with them according to the counsel of God. If the Father and the Son existed independently, such cooperation would be impossible. But since the Father generates the Son, and by virtue of that generation the Son contains the entire Being of the Father, there can be no division of *Being*, and only the distinction of *Persons* remains. For the entire wisdom and power whereby the Son gives consistency to all is generated in Him by the Father; while the counsel which designed all is a determination by the Father of that divine wisdom which He as Father generates in the Son. For the Son is forever the effulgence of the Father’s glory, and the express image of His Person—[Heb. i. 3](#).

This does not complete the work of creation. The creature is made not simply to exist or to adorn some niche in the universe like a statue. Rather was everything created with a purpose and a destiny; and our creation will be complete only when we have become what God designed. Hence [Gen. ii. 3](#) says: “God rested from all His work which He had created to *make it perfect*” (Dutch translation). Thus to lead the creature to its destiny, to cause it to develop according to its nature, to make it perfect, is the proper work of the Holy Spirit.



Second Chapter.
THE CREATION.

