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# THEOLOGICAL DICTIONARY

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HERDER AND HERDER

## TRICHOTOMISM

He must not flinch from this situation but endure the little time we have to live (Jn 16:16ff.) in the strength of the Spirit (1 Thess 1:6), with confidence in God's grace in Christ (Jn 16:33), sharing the fate of Christ in hope and constancy.

### TRICHOTOMISM

The false doctrine, which nevertheless frequently recurs in the history of Western thought, that the nature of man is composed of three elements: body, soul, and spirit, all of which are really distinct (\*Distinction). Though such is often not its intention, this doctrine – which the Church condemns: D 148, 255, 338, 480f., 738, 1655 – divorces man's spirit (and so his person, his free spiritual history) from his material, bodily being. It cannot really see this bodily history as a history of the spirit and therefore cannot accept that our supernatural redemption was wrought in human flesh. The spirit becomes the adversary of the soul, finds itself not merely in historical or personal terms, but in essential and therefore irreconcilable contradiction with earthly history and the body (\*Soul, \*Form, \*Spirit). The "trichotomism" in Scripture means by "spirit" a particular – personal – aspect of the one soul, or man's supernatural grace, the Holy Ghost, who is not a component of human nature but is man's God-given salvation (\*Pneuma).

### TRINITARIAN MYSTICISM

This is the mystical experience, comparable with \*Christ-mysticism, in which man's gratuitous relationship to the three Persons in God is explicitly realized. In the history of mysticism it has not had the prominence one might expect in view of the importance of the mystery in saving history. The reason for this fact may be that union with the absolute, simple, "modeless" God (in the empty silence of the Godhead) has until modern times remained the basic theoretical pattern of \*mysticism.

### TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

Its task is to enable men to believe in this supreme \*mystery of Christian revelation as readily and as intelligently as possible. It reviews the history of the revelation of this mystery in OT and NT, the history of its theological formulation and of opposition to it (\*Tritheism, \*Sabellianism, \*Unitaria-

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nism), explains the terms used in expounding this doctrine (unity, \*person, \*nature, \*essence, \*relation, \*perichoresis), and seeks itself to state the doctrine in terms as clear and intelligible as may be. Today in particular, Trinitarian theology has the further duty of explaining the religious significance of this doctrine of the Trinity "immanent" in God; the absolute self-communication of God as of him who, being "unoriginate" is subject to no norm ("Father"), necessarily occurs in two modes of communication: the living historical presence in the world of God's self-utterance (\*Logos, "Son"), and the sanctifying gift-in-communication which effects its own acceptance in the depth of man's being ("Holy Ghost"). But these modes of communication must be conceived so entirely as modes of God's *self-communication* that no creature can account for the difference between them (for otherwise it would cease to be *self-communication*), but that these modes must be attributed to God "in himself". They must be the gracious, homogeneous diffusion of a twofold communication within the Godhead which constitutes a threefold relational distinction in God, bringing out the living plenitude of the one divine identity. That is, choosing either as its starting-point or destination the axiom that the "immanent" Trinity and the "economic" Trinity revealed for our salvation are the same, so that we may neither deny the one by a sort of Sabellianism nor reduce the other to mere \*appropriations, Trinitarian theology must show that to confess that we have been blessed with God's grace in Christ and his Spirit is already to confess our faith in the Blessed Trinity, difficult as the subtle formulation of this mystery in classical theology may sometimes seem to us to assimilate religiously and existentially.

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The name of the fundamental mystery of \*Christianity, that of the one Nature and the three Persons (Father, Son and Holy Ghost) in \*God.

TEACHING OF SCRIPTURE. (1) The Trinity looms in outline in the OT as a mystery ready for disclosure. God is the absolute \*mystery, yet deals historically with the fathers; it is above all through the "Word", in which he is actively present, and in the "Spirit", which enables one to understand the Word, that God reveals and offers himself to man. (2) The NT witnesses to the divinity of \*Jesus Christ (the Son): in him is the fulness of the Spirit (Lk 4:18), forgiveness (Mk 2:1-12 and parallels), dominion over the

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law God gave in the OT (Mk 2:23–28 and parallels), incomparable intimacy with God (Mt 11:25ff.; Jn 10:30), the “I am” (Jn 8:58; 10:11:25 and *passim*; \*Yahweh). Similarly the NT is aware of the divinity of the \*Holy Ghost, who being God’s Spirit is simply the plenitude of his salvation (Lk 4:18; Tit 3:5f.). Yet *as* the very presence of God the Son and the Spirit are not simply the One whom they reveal: they stand in relation to him, are sent by him, each has his own special “relationship” to the Father (Jn 1:1, 18; 15:26). Thus, whilst firmly adhering to the uniqueness of God, the NT recognizes just here a triplicity: Father, Son and Holy Ghost, distinguished from each other by their different salvific operations and yet so equal among themselves that the Son and the Spirit cannot be thought of as mere “forces” (at a lower power) of God’s work in the world. (See the many “Trinitarian” texts, such as Mt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:13; etc.).

TEACHING OF THE MAGISTERIUM. The Trinity is a mystery (*mysterium absolutum*) in the strict sense (D 1795), which could not be known without revelation, and even after revelation cannot become wholly intelligible. Its import is as follows: (1) The one God exists in three “Persons” (Subsistences) which are the one divine Nature (the one divine essence, the divine substance) (see D 17, 48, 428 and *passim*) and therefore are equally eternal and almighty (D 13, 19, 703f., 776ff. and *passim*). (2) These three Persons are (really) distinct from one another (D 39, 281, 703ff., 1655): the Father is in original possession of the necessary divine essence (D 3, 19, 39, 428, 703f.); the Son subsists through the eternal communication of the divine essence (“generation”, uttering of the “Logos”) by the Father alone (D 13, 19f., 275f., 432, 703f. and *passim*); the Holy Ghost is not begotten, but proceeds both from the Father and the Son (as from one principle) by a single “breathing” (*spiratio*) (D 39, 48, 460, 691, 704 and *passim*). (3) Through these two relationships of origination, therefore, there exist relations (D 208, 278, 281, 296, 703; \*Relation) and properties (D 281, 296, 428) in God (really) distinct from each other (D 278, 296, 703), but these in their turn are not really distinct from God’s nature (D 389, 432f., 703). Each Person is the one God, everything is common to them without distinction except where there is relative opposition (D 703). Each divine Person is wholly in each of the others (\*Perichoresis; D 704), each is the one true God (D 279, 343, 420, 461). *Ad extra* (with respect to creatures) they are a single operative principle (D 428, 703 and *passim*).

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HISTORY OF THE DOGMA OF THE TRINITY. The dogmatic history of this mystery reduces itself to the one strenuous effort to preserve the affirmations of the NT and to defend them by an ever subtler terminology (mobilizing and developing the whole of Western thought: \*Nature, \*Person, \*Essence) against ever subtler attempts to resolve the biblical mystery. The basic heresies which appeared (and were by the nature of the case to be expected) were: \*Modalism (the Trinity is only the aspect of God “for us”); \*Tritheism (Father, Son and Holy Ghost are simply three Gods; their “unity” is only a conceptual one); and \*Subordinationism (in various forms: the Son and the Holy Ghost are “creatures” of the Father; forces of the one God at a lower power.

“IMMANENT” AND “ECONOMIC” TRINITY. From the actual development of faith in the Trinity and from systematic theology today it is clearly necessary to hold that God’s \*self-communication to his creature has been so absolute that the “immanent” Trinity (existing in God himself) is the “economic” (that which deals with men and brings about their salvation; \*Indwelling of God). Conversely, the Trinity of God’s dealings with us is already the reality of God as he is in himself: tri-“personality”. From that experience of our faith which the Word of God himself (Jesus-Scripture) gives, we can therefore say that God’s absolute self-communication to the world, *as* a mystery that has approached us, is in its ultimate originality called Father; *as* itself a principle acting in history, Son; *as* a gift bestowed on us and accepted, Holy Ghost. This “*as*”, which is ordered to us, is really the self-communication of God “in himself”; the triplicity affirmed is thus a triplicity of God in himself. But since the communication of God is concerned in both cases (and not two effects that differ as creatures do), in both cases the “same” God is concerned.

PARTICULAR CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING THE THEOLOGY OF THE TRINITY.

(1) According to revelation, activity in God, as the principle of immanent, substantial and necessary vital functions, does not flow from a faculty (*processio operationis*), rather that which has been communicated flows from the pure actuality of the agent (*processio operati*): it does not flow from any need to come into being but is absolute, complete communication of God’s own uncreated being in *two* processions (*processiones*), corresponding to the nature of the eternal God as knowledge and love. The Father, knowing himself in one act of infinite knowledge, and in himself