

Thoughts on the Tripartite Theory of Human Nature

A. McCaig

[p.121]

That man consists of three distinct parts which may be separately called body, soul and spirit, has been held by theological thinkers of repute, both in ancient and in modern times. Some colour is undeniably given to the theory by the passage in 1 Thessalonians v. 23, where these terms occur. Whether that passage does or does not really support the theory we shall by and by consider. Meanwhile we are faced with the difficulty that when we begin to enquire into the exact belief of those who have held or do hold the theory, there is little unanimity and not a little of vagueness. Upholders of the theory are wont to refer to Plato as a strong supporter on the philosophic side. But those of our readers who have studied Plato will know how different is his position from that of our Tripartite friends. Of course even if he could be proved to be a supporter of it that would not greatly help the cause, as the theory must find a sure basis in Scripture if it is to maintain itself; though we readily grant that a clear pronouncement from such a thinker as Plato would raise a philosophical presumption in its favour. But as a matter of fact, Plato is not clear, and in so far as he is clear, his opinion is very different from that of the theorists in question.

He frequently speaks of human nature as made up of soul and body and when in other places he distinguishes more minutely, he divides the soul into *three* parts τὸ λογιστικόν (the reasoning faculty) τὸ θυμοειδές (the passionate) τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν (the desiring). So that his *tripartition* is very different from that which we are considering. We need not follow his view out in detail. While he sometimes speaks of one of these three parts of the soul, the "intelligible," as necessarily immortal, while the other two parts are mortal, he also speaks as if there were two souls in one body, one immortal and divine, the other mortal. Another division is found in his writings according to which man as an image of the "tripartite universe" is composed of Reason, Soul and Body. This may seem to approach nearer to the ordinary modern tripartite view, but there is not much in common between them and it is significant that Plato in all these divisions and classifications never uses the word πνεῦμα spirit.

[p.122]

Some of the early Fathers seem to have held a tripartite psychology but their views are vague and on the whole seem to be more after the Platonic model.

Of modern writers who hold some form of the Tripartite view may be mentioned: Delitzsch, Liddon, Ellicott, Heard, Ed. White. Liddon and Ellicott, and with them perhaps maybe classed Lightfoot, can hardly be said to have seriously discussed the subject; their statements are more in the nature of incidental reflections. Ellicott indeed has a sermon specifically dealing with the text in 1 Thess. but he does not go very fully into the matter. Delitzsch has written a volume on Biblical Psychology which is full of valuable suggestions, but also contains a good deal of vague mysticism. White has incidentally discussed the view in his notable book, *Life in Christ*, and Heard has written an elaborate volume in defence of the most thorough-going Tripartition.

I can only incidentally refer to these various aspects of the view, as my main object is to set forth what I consider to be the Scriptural teaching on the subject.

The simplest and we may say the crudest form of the theory is that "the body is the material part of our constitution; the soul or ψυχή is the principle of animal life; and the mind or πνεῦμα the principle of our rational and immortal life. When a plant dies its material organisation is dissolved and the principle of vegetable life which it contains disappears. When a brute dies the body returns to dust and the ψυχή or principle of animal life by which it is animated passes away. When a man dies, his body returns to the earth, his ψυχή ceases to exist, his πνεῦμα alone remains until re-united with the body at the resurrection. To the πνεῦμα which is peculiar to man, belong reason, will and conscience. To the ψυχή which we have in common with the brutes, belong understanding, feeling and sensibility or the power of sense perception. To the σῶμα belong what is purely material.

I have taken this statement of the case from Dr. C. Hodge. Dr. Laidlaw calls this the "crudest and most frequently quoted form of the theory" and declares that this is plainly not the construction which any tolerable interpretation can put upon the Scripture account. Laidlaw also affirms that this crude view is often presented in popular writing as an account of the Trichotomy, and as an example he adduces the account which

[p.123]

Dr. Hodge gives and says, "His refutation of it as unbiblical would accordingly be entirely successful if this were the only thing to be discussed." It is but fair to Hodge, however, to say that he also has in view and states the subtler theory of Delitzsch. Delitzsch held that the soul was a sort of efflux of the spirit; the link between the spirit and body. He asserts that the soul and spirit are of the same nature, but of different substances, "whatever that may mean." That the spirit has the threefold power of willing, thinking and expressing; the soul is the doxa of the spirit and has a sevenfold manifestation.

Ellicott, Liddon and others speak of soul and spirit as a lower and higher side of man's nature, having to do with different departments; the spirit being the region of the intellectual forces; the soul of feelings, affections and impulses.

The view of Heard and others is much grosser, and is illustrated in a very coarse way. "Soul is the resultant of the union between body and spirit the animal and spirit combining make a soul as oxygen and hydrogen combining produce water. The soul midway between the body (flesh) and spirit at first was in a state of equilibrium; it might either incline to the demand of the body or to the spirit. By the fall man inclined to the flesh, and the spirit or image of God was deadened in him." Sometimes he speaks of the spirit as being lost at the fall and to be restored in regeneration and so the unconverted have no πνεῦμα or according to his representations at other times, it is dead or dormant, or rudimentary or fragmentary. He also holds that it is only the spirit that can come into contact with God, and immortality consists in the quickening or restoring of the πνεῦμα.

Now in opposition to all these views, I note:

I

THE CREATION ACCOUNT GIVES NO SUGGESTION OF MORE THAN TWO CONSTITUENT ELEMENTS IN MAN

I need only name this as it is so clear in the Biblical record. The impression left upon any ordinary reader by perusing the Creation narrative is surely that man is composed of body and of soul. The body was formed out of the dust of the ground, and into the nostrils, the being thus formed, God breathed the breath of life and man became a living soul, a *nephesh chayah* (נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה)

[p.124]

I need hardly remind the student that the wards in Hebrew answering to the Greek *ψυχή* and *πνεῦμα*—soul and spirit—are נֶפֶשׁ and רוּחַ (German, *seele* and *geist*; French *âme* and *esprit*).

But in this Creation account רוּחַ does not occur at all. Surely if the רוּחַ in man was something different from the נֶפֶשׁ we should find some mention of it here. The breath of God which is breathed into man constituting him a living soul is נְשָׁמָה, and that is also applied to the lower animals. If it were the case that man was created with a *ψυχή* and a *πνεῦμα*, a נֶפֶשׁ and רוּחַ, while the beasts had only a *ψυχή*—and that is part of the theory; man is distinguished from the brute by the possession of a *πνεῦμα*, a spirit—we should expect the distinction to appear in the account. But the lower animals as well as men are called “living souls” (נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה Gen. i.24; ii. 19; ix. 10, 12 &c.) and they are said to have נְשָׁמָה “the breath of lives.” And in other parts of the Ward רוּחַ, *πνεῦμα*, spirit is attributed to the brutes as well as to man.

That there is an immeasurable difference between the nature of man and the animals, between their souls or spirits, we fully believe. That difference is indicated in the Creation account by the statements that while the beasts came into existence by the simple Divine fiat, the soul of man was the direct product of the Divine inbreathing and man was made in the image of God. But the difference is certainly not expressed as the Tripartite theory, would require it to be expressed, by the ascription of spirit as well as soul to man and only soul to the beasts.

I may add that it is generally admitted by Tripartites that the Creation account does not clearly support their view—they have to look elsewhere for its foundations.

II

THE BIBLICAL USAGE OF THE TERMS LEADS TO THE CONCLUSION THAT SOUL AND SPIRIT ARE ESSENTIALLY ONE. THE ONE IMMATERIAL NATURE UNDER DIFFERENT ASPECTS

I. There are passages which indicate that *soul and body or spirit and body make up the whole man*. Here we might refer to the many passages which speak of the soul or spirit leaving the

body, but taking these for granted note the following in addition. Isa, x. 17, "And shall consume both soul and body."

[p.125]

Micah vi. 7, "Shall I give the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" Daniel vii. 15, "I, Daniel was grieved in my spirit in the midst of my body." Matt. x. 28, "Fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." 1 Cor. vii. 34, "That she may be holy both in body and in spirit. 1 Cor. vi. 20, "Glorify God in your bodies and spirits." James ii. 26, "The body without the spirit is dead." Rev. xviii. 13, "Bodies and souls of men."

The number of such specific passages is naturally not large because the Scripture, especially the Old Testament, so generally considers the whole man under the term "soul" and is more disposed to exhibit the *unity* of human nature than the *duality*. Such passages when they do occur are all the more significant.

With these might be classed passages where the personality is distinguished from the body. Rom. xii. 1, "Present your bodies." 2 Cor. v. 6, "Whilst we are at home in the body" and "absent from the body." 2 Cor. xii. 2, 3, "Whether in the body or whether out of the body" and many others. So also might we add those passages where "flesh" is used as representing "body" and with the spirit making up the whole man. Matt. xxvi. 41., "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." Luke xxiv. 39, "A spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have." Col. ii. 5, "Though absent in the flesh yet am I with you in the spirit." Heb. xii. 9, "We have had fathers of our flesh... shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live." I Peter iv. 6, "Judged according to men in the flesh... live according to God in the spirit."

2. *The words "soul" and "spirit" are used interchangeably.* Thus in I Sam. i. 10, it is said of Hannah, "She was in bitterness of *soul*" and in i.15, she says to Eli, "I am a woman of a sorrowful *spirit*." Job vii. 11, you have the Hebrew parallelism which shows that the two terms are used of the same thing: "I will speak in the anguish of my *spirit*, I will complain in the bitterness of my *soul*." Psalm xxxiv. 22, "The Lord redeemeth the *soul* of his servants." Psalm xxxi. 5, "Into thy hands I commend my *spirit*, for thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth." Psalm lxvii. 2, "My *soul* refused to be comforted"; third verse, "I complained and my *spirit* was over Psalm cxlii. 3, "When my *spirit* was overwhelmed"; fourth verse, "No man cared for my *soul*"; verse 7, "Bring my *soul* out of prison." Psalm cxliii. 3, "The enemy hath persecuted

[p.126]

my *soul*, he hath smitten my life down to the ground," "Therefore is my *spirit* overwhelmed within me, my heart within we is desolate." (According to the Tripartite way of distinguishing we should here have four entities—the soul, the life, the heart, the spirit.) In this same Psalm v. 6, we have the prayer, "My *soul* thirsteth after thee" and in the next verse, "Hear me speedily, my *spirit* faileth." In the eighth verse, "I lift up my *soul* unto thee" and in the eleventh and twelfth verses, "Bring my *soul* out of trouble," "destroy all them that afflict my *soul*." In comparison with these statements about the *spirit* failing, being overwhelmed, etc., note the repeated phrase in the forty-second and forty-third Psalms, "Why art thou cast down, O my *soul*."

Isaiah xxvi. 9 is another case of parallelism, "With my *soul* have I desired thee in the night, yea with my *spirit* within me will I seek thee early." Isaiah lvii. 16, "For the *spirit* should fail before me and (even) the souls which I have made."

Coming to the New Testament, note Luke i. 46, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my *spirit* hath rejoiced in God my Saviour"; a true Hebrew parallelism. In the twofold account of the agony in Gethsemane (Matt. and Mark) Jesus says, "My *soul* is exceeding sorrowful," so in John xii. 27, where a phase of the same experience is recorded, He says "Now is my *soul* troubled"; but in John xiii. 21, it is said, Jesus was troubled in *spirit*; so in chap. xi. 33, "He groaned in spirit and was troubled." Similarly in Mark viii. 12, it is said, "He sighed deeply in His *spirit*." So that the deep inward trouble of the Lord Jesus can be predicated alike of soul and spirit; they are both the seat of that trouble, and the inference is plain that the two are one.

In John x. 15 and 17, Jesus declares that, as the good Shepherd, He will lay down His soul for the sheep, and that is fulfilled when, as recorded in Matt. xxvii. 50, "He cried with a loud voice and gave up His *spirit*." In Luke xii. 20, the rich man's death is indicated in the words, "This night thy *soul* shall be required of thee"; Stephen's death is recorded in the words, "Lord Jesus receive my *spirit*."

Paul declares in Rom. i. 9 that he serves God with the *spirit* in Eph. vi. 6, he exhorts the believers to do the will of God "from the *soul*." In 1 Cor. xvi. 18, we read "they have refreshed my *spirit*"; conversely, in Heb. xii. 3, "Lest ye be wearied

[p.127]

and faint in your souls." For Philemon, Paul prays (25), "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with thy *spirit*"; John prays for Gaius (iii. 2) that he may prosper and be in health, "even as thy *soul* prospereth." In Heb. xii. 23, the departed saints are spoken of as "the *spirits* of just men made perfect." In Rev. i. 9, John describes them as "the *souls* under the altar." In Phil. i. 27, we have the parallelism, "That ye stand fast in one *spirit*, striving together with one *soul*." Luke reports Jesus as saying at his death, "Father into thy hands I commend my *spirit*." Acts ii. 27, affirms that "His *soul* was not left in Hades."

Other passages might be mentioned, but these are at present sufficient and I am sure that no one could, in the majority of these passages, maintain the Tripartite difference between the soul and spirit, without introducing the greatest confusion. The more the passages are examined, the more clearly it will appear that it is the same entity, the higher nature of man that is described by both terms; and when there is any seeming difference it simply is that the one entity is considered under different aspects.

It is worth remembering too that the advocates of the view we are opposing admit that the true trichotomy, i.e., their view of it, cannot be found in the Old Testament. And I think the passages cited show that the New Testament in its *general* usage runs exactly on the lines of the Old Testament. I say the general usage, for I am not unmindful of the fact that the Trichotomists can point to a few passages in the New Testament which seem to support their theory. Whether they do in reality give that support, we shall by and by consider : the general usage confessedly opposes it.

III

ALL THE DISTINCTIONS WHICH ARE MADE BY THE VARIOUS TRICHOTOMIST ADVOCATES FAIL TO MAINTAIN THEMSELVES IN THE LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE

Note some of these:

I. *That soul and spirit are different substances, or natures, or entities.* The passages quoted are sufficient at least to negative this. It seems unnecessary to waste any words upon it. Heard's illustration is not only crude and coarse, but very faulty. The soul, he says, is resultant of the union between body and spirit as oxygen and hydrogen unite to form water. But in the

[p.128]

chemical union you have and must have two *material* substances and the resultant is still *material*. The two gases unite to form a liquid, but whether contemplated in the liquid or gaseous form, it is still matter. The union which he says is similar, is as dissimilar as well can be for it supposes the material and the immaterial uniting and the product is immaterial, or perhaps partakes of both. The illustration is ridiculously faulty in another way. When the two gases unite the product is water, but the gases are no longer separate entities, their identity is, so to speak, lost in the resultant. You have a product that has properties distinct from the two substances which compose it, and while you have the third you cease to have the other two. According to the analogy, the union supposed by Heard, between spirit and body would not result in an additional soul, but the body and spirit would alike lose their identity in the one resultant substance. You could no longer have body and spirit, but simply and solely, this indeterminate soul. So that the Trichotomy for which Heard pleads, cuts the ground from under itself and falls by its own weight.

The Scripture is clear as to the two natures or substances, the material, body, the immaterial, soul or spirit: it says nothing of a third which would differ from either or share in the qualities of both.

2. *The Biblical usage shows that the soul and spirit are not confined to different departments.* This, as I have noted, was practically the view of Liddon, Ellicott and others. The spirit is the region of intellectual forces, the soul that of the feelings, affections and impulses. But the passages show that the soul desires and the spirit desires. "My soul is troubled": He "was troubled in spirit." The soul rejoiceth; the spirit rejoiceth. The soul is in bitterness; bitter in spirit. We have to serve God from the soul. "We have to serve Him with the spirit" and so on. There is no faculty ascribed to the soul which is not also ascribed to the spirit.

3. *The spirit has to do with God, the soul with the world and men.* This is another position of the Trichotomists which Biblical usage shows to be untenable. The *soul* thirsteth *for God*. It is with the *soul*, we are to love God. The soul magnifies the Lord. We have to do the will of God from the *soul*. Conversely a number of passages show that the spirit has to do with the world and men. Paul was refreshed in *spirit* by the coming of

[p.129]

Stephanas; and specifically Paul affirms that the spirit has to do with the things of men, when he asks, "What man knoweth the things of man save the spirit of man which is in him?" Surely if with the soul we love God, delight in God, rest in God, it is utterly wrong to say that we cannot with the soul come into relations with God. Surely the soul that loves God, rejoices and rests in God, is in glad and true relation with Him, and can we conceive of anything higher, more godlike than love? God is love, and He that loveth God, God dwelleth in, him and he in God and it is the soul that loves.

4. *The Spirit is peculiar to the regenerate.* This is an assertion of the cruder Trichotomy, but it is very frequently and confidently made; and, in some respects, it is a more logical and consistent position than that taken by more moderate theorists. The very fact, however, that these others do not hold it, suggests that they find the way barred by Scripture and undoubtedly the Scripture does show that the position is unfounded.

Heard insists strongly that the spirit is non-existent in the unregenerate; that it was lost at the fall and is restored at regeneration; and on that ground he supports Edward White's theory of Life in Christ. But he also speaks, perhaps more frequently, about the spirit being dead, or dormant or rudimentary. The one passage which seems to favour the theory is Jude 19, "These be they which separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit and it is claimed that the $\piνεϋμα$ here is the human spirit. They are soulish without a spirit. But the whole context favours the Authorised reading that it is the Holy Spirit that is meant. If it were to be applied to the human spirit, then it must be taken absolutely, and those who so apply it ought not to speak of a dead or dormant or rudimentary spirit. Alford who leans to the tripartite view, says on this passage, "Not directly the spirit of God (though he admits that the absence of the article would be no objection to taking it as referring to the Holy Spirit) but the higher spiritual life of man's spirit in communion with the Holy Spirit." That is practically saying that they have not spiritual life, and with that we should agree, though it is a roundabout way of getting at it. The Revised Version also gives Spirit.

Alford goes on to say: "These men have not indeed ceased to have $\piνεϋμα$ as a part of their own tripartite nature, but they have ceased to possess it in any worthy sense." So that it would

[p.130]

need a very thorough-going Trichotomist to maintain that the passage teaches that the unregenerate are without spirit, and Alford would be more consistent if he either maintained that or interpreted this passage as meaning the Holy Spirit.

But now apart from this statement, you find that very frequently the spirit is predicated of men as men. In Genesis vii. 22, "All in whose nostrils was the breath of the *spirit* of life." Numbers xvi. 22; xvii. 26: "The God of the *spirits* of all flesh." Deut. ii. 30, of Sihon it is said, "The Lord thy God hardened his *spirit*." I Chron. v. 26, "And the God of Israel stirred up the *spirit* of Pul king of Assyria and the spirit of Tilgath-pilneser." 2 Chron. xxi. 16, "The Lord stirred up the *spirit* of the Philistines and of the Arabians." Job xxxii. 8, "There is a *spirit* in man." Prov. xviii. 14, "The *spirit* of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear." In Ecclesiastes we have the frequent phrase, "all is vanity and vexation of *spirit*." In chapter vii. 8, 9, there is mention of "the patient in *spirit*," "the proud in *spirit*," "the hasty in *spirit*." There are the classic passages' iii. 21 and xii. 7, "The *spirit* of men goeth

upward," and "the *spirit* shall return unto God that gave it." Many like words might be quoted, but take only these other two: Zech. xii. 1, "The Lord which formeth the *spirit* of man within him" and Mal. ii. 16. To the rebellious and hypocritical people, the prophet says, "Take heed to your *spirit*." From the New Testament, take in conclusion only the statement of James, "The body without the *spirit* is dead."

5. *The spirit does not sin, does not need salvation.* Now it is a fact that sin is attributed 'to the soul, "The soul that sinneth it shall die"; and salvation is predicated of the soul, "The salvation of your souls," though in some cases perhaps the whole man is meant by the term soul. But it is going beyond the book to deny that such statements have any application to the spirit. You have some passages which expressly assert what our friends deny. When David in describing the blessedness of the man to whom the Lord imputeth righteousness without works, as Paul puts it, says "in whose *spirit* there is no guile," surely implies that there is guile in the spirit of the unsaved man. So when he, prays "Renew a right spirit within me," there is a confession of the need and the possibility of the salvation of the spirit. In Proverbs, we read of a hasty spirit as well as a *humble spirit*. We have already quoted from Ecclesiastes

[p.131]

the reference to the patient in spirit and the proud in spirit. So in Isaiah we read of "a *perverse spirit*"; of those "who *erred* in spirit." In Ezekiel once and again there is the promise of a "new spirit." And in the, last of the prophets there is the exhortation to "take heed to your spirit." Now all these and similar expressions would be meaningless and misleading if the spirit were not capable of sinning and being saved.

Passing over the many statements in the New Testament about unclean spirits and evil spirits, which at least show that spirits can sin, and so the presumption is raised that human spirits may, I note these passages. James iv. 5, "The spirit that dwelleth in us *lusteth* to envy"; there surely is the spirit sinning. (I know some take the spirit there as meaning the Holy Spirit.) 2 Cor. vii. 11, "Cleanse yourselves from all filthiness of flesh and *spirit*": there unquestionably is sin ascribed to the *spirit* as well as the likelihood of salvation. Eph. iv. 23, "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind," suggests the same thing; while even the famous tripartite passage in 1 Thess. v. 23, refers of the *salvation* of the spirit, its need of it as well as the hope of it. That "your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless." And in 1 Cor. v. 5, we have the assertion that the discipline of the offender is to lead to the destruction of the flesh and that "the *spirit* may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." While Heb. xii. 23 points to "the spirits of just men made perfect."

Now I claim that these five contentions of the Trichotomists are overthrown by the Scripture statements and these being disallowed, I see not how any part of the theory can stand.

IV

Another point in the argument I only mention without elaborating it, viz., that THE TESTIMONY OF OUR CONSCIOUSNESS IS NOT IN FAVOUR OF THE TRIPARTITE VIEW. We are distinctly conscious of the existence of two constituent elements. We know that we have body, but we know that we are other than body. No matter how materialistic a man's views may be, his consciousness refuses to say "I *am* body alone." There is always given in the very verdict about the existence of body the further fact of the distinction of the *personality*, the

ego, from the bodily organism. But it does not seem that consciousness goes further and affirms the existence of two distinct elements

[p.132]

in the immaterial personality. Of course the tripartites contend that it does, but I fancy before one can persuade himself that the findings of consciousness witness to two natures or two distinct departments of the spiritual nature, he must already have committed himself to the belief of the existence of soul and spirit. The feeling that has been expressed by heathen poets, as if in anticipation of the Apostle Paul's experience that within the man there are two tendencies one to evil and the other to good, that these tendencies have been described in strong poetical language as two men within the one body, only gives point to the stern fact that sin is unnatural, that man sins against the dictates of conscience, that in man there is a power which witnesses for God and holiness. The case of the apostle Paul is just an exhibition of the same feeling carried to a higher plane and manifested under the greater light of the Gospel, and the evil nature of sin is seen struggling against the new disposition implanted in regeneration.

All through Whether in the pagan or the Christian experience, consciousness witnesses that it is the same personality that sins, that struggles, that aspires after holiness or yields to the lower claims, that loves and hates, that fears and hopes, that sorrows and rejoices.

In metaphysics we can speak of the various faculties of the soul, but the wise metaphysician holds fast to the truth that the soul is one despite the diversity of faculties and it is a very material view that would confine these faculties to particular parts of the soul and say that this part loves, that part thinks, that other part wills. The whole soul loves, the whole soul thinks, the whole soul wills: this is the conclusion of the best philosophy and it is in harmony with the verdict of consciousness.

V

I want to say that THERE IS A REAL BASIS IN THE NATURE OF THE SOUL FOR THE TWOFOLD ASPECT WHICH THE SCRIPTURE PRESENTS OF THE IMMATERIAL NATURE. There is no kind of doubt that this double aspect is set before us in many of the passages cited. Were it not so the advocates of the Tripartite theory would not be able to entrench themselves as they do in Scriptural phraseology. I believe it will be found that one basis of distinction may be thus expressed: *Soul is the immaterial nature considered as inhabiting body; the seat of personality; the living*

[p.133]

entity. Spirit is that same immaterial nature conceived of as the Animating Principle.

Many of the passages both in the Old and New Testament bear this out. I do not stop to apply the distinction, but if the passages are examined in the light of it it will be found to hold good.

2. Then *figuratively* and *ethically* the *soul* indicates the *energies* and *exercises* of the immaterial nature: *spirit* indicates the *disposition*, the *bias* of the nature. This is also indicated by such terms as mind, heart, understanding. In the great discussion between the Augustinians

and Pelagians, the latter contended we have only to consider the agent and his *acts* when we judge of sin; but, following the Augustinians, Evangelical Christianity holds that we have to take account of *the disposition* as well. The Word of God predicates sin—not simply of the acts but of the disposition. Now the term soul seems the more usual in Scripture when prominence is given to the acts, but spirit when the disposition is in question. Regeneration is, according to Evangelical theology as based on Scripture, the *changing of the disposition, the implanting of a new principle of action*. Hence the element of truth in the tripartite view which represents the impartation of spirit as Regeneration. It is the spirit which is specifically dealt with; the spirit, the disposition is changed, it is bent in the right direction and henceforward the desires of the regenerated man are Godward, but it is only gradually that the acts and energies of his nature are made to harmonize with the divine will. There is enough of the old disposition left to account for the continuance of sin, the predominant choice of the spirit is right, but it is only through the continual sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit that the right choice becomes habitual.

This leads me to note.

VI

THAT A SPECIAL FORM OF THE TWOFOLD ASPECT OF SOUL AND SPIRIT APPEARS IN THE ANTITHESIS BETWEEN FLESH AND SPIRIT

Flesh may be used, as in some of the passages quoted, of the body alone, or it may be used of the whole man, but it has this special use in the New Testament; the flesh is the sinful nature, the spirit is the higher nature, the new nature as animated by the Holy Spirit; practically the old and the new disposition.

[p.134]

So we read of the “desires of the flesh and of the mind.” “Fleshly lusts that war against the soul.” Sins of the flesh are not to be confined to sensual desires, for the works of the flesh are manifest which are these, “envy, strife, wrath, seditions, heresies.” So that the activities and disposition of the old nature, the unregenerate, the nature in so far as uninfluenced by the Holy Spirit, the movements of soul and spirit are comprised under the term “flesh,” and set over against them you have the new nature called the “spirit” from its association with the Holy Spirit. Indeed in most of the passages the antithesis is between the flesh and the Holy Spirit, but of course, the working of the human spirit in harmony therewith is implied.

VII

Now it remains that I look more closely at the passages relied upon for proof of the Tripartite theory and I make this as my seventh and last statement in the case. THE TRICHOTOMIC ALLUSIONS MUST BE EXPLAINED IN HARMONY WITH THESE SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES WHICH WE HAVE CONSIDERED.

1. The passage, 1 Cor. ii. 14, “The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God for they are foolishness to him, neither can he know them for they are spiritually discerned. But the spiritual judgeth all things yet he himself is judged of no man.” The terms in the original are ψυκικὸς ἄνθρωπος and ὁ πνευματικός. The first rendered natural man is literally “soulish man” or as we might say, “animal man.” The Tripartite contends here that

the unconverted man is ψυκικός because he possesses soul alone, or has a dormant or unvivified spirit (so Alford); whereas the πνευματικός is the regenerate man in full possession of a spirit. But we claim that in view of the passages quoted which attribute "spirit" as well as soul to the unconverted, and those which speak of soul as equivalent to the full exercise of the powers on the inner nature, that this cannot be the meaning. It is not the human πνεῦμα that is predominant here but the *Divine* πνεῦμα. Look at the preceding context and you find Paul is speaking of the hidden wisdom, the Divine mystery which had been unknown to the princes of this world who crucified the Lord of glory. This was in accordance with the Scripture which says: "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man the things which

[p.135]

God hath prepared for them that love him." The heart is elsewhere used as equivalent to spirit, and the heart of man, used here generally, might be taken as implying that unconverted men have spirit. But not to press that, note the assertion, "But God hath revealed them to us by His Spirit." That Divine Spirit comes as the enlightener to man so as to make him understand the things formerly unknown. "For the Spirit, the Divine πνεῦμα searcheth all things, even the deep things of God." Then by analogy to make his meaning clear, he adds, "For what man knoweth the things of a man except the spirit of man which is in him." A direct assertion that man as man possesses spirit—"So also the things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God." The main emphasis is still laid upon the Spirit of God, the human spirit being only mentioned incidentally.

Further says Paul, "But we have not received the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is from God that we may know the things which are freely given to us of God." And having received that Divine Spirit, he can say, "Which things also we speak not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (or interpreting spiritual things to the spiritual. Alf.). Then follows the passage: "but the soulish man, etc." We having received the Spirit can interpret, understand spiritual things, but the soulish man cannot. That is the man who has not received the Spirit of God; and bearing in mind what we have said about the antithesis between the flesh and the spirit as influenced by the Holy Spirit, it is plain that here the thought is that that man is a "spiritual man" who is enlightened by the Holy Spirit and under His influence understands spiritual things. So that it is not a question of a contrast between a man possessing soul only and one possessing also spirit; but between a man uninfluenced by the Spirit of God and one who has received that Spirit.

The passage is often used to enforce the thought that the unconverted have no organ for apprehending spiritual things; that they are like blind men who cannot see, deaf who cannot hear, a vegetable organism which cannot feel, etc. Now while there is an element of truth in such representations, as the apostle's statement shows, we must beware of pressing this too far. If the unconverted were absolutely without the organ by which

[p.136]

spiritual things could be apprehended, then it would be hard to see how they could be held responsible. Their condemnation is that having the natural faculties they have allowed them to be perverted by sin. There is undoubtedly the need for the Spirit of God to enable such men to

see spiritual truth, but if they had no natural faculty how could even the Spirit Himself, short of absolute creation cause them to see? Regeneration would be like causing a stone or a tree to see or hear, which is very far from being the case.

But for the right understanding of the things of the Spirit it is not only the unconverted man who needs the Spirit of God, but even the regenerated man who has become spiritually alive still needs the Spirit Divine to enable him to enter into the right understanding of Divine mysteries.

2. 1 Thess. v. 23, "I pray God that your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless." This is the passage which more than any other the Tripartites rest upon. Their fondness for it is quite phenomenal. It is to them what "*Hoc est corpus meum*" was to Luther, and it is hopeless to move them from it. I do not need to say much specifically about it. If the principles I have advanced are well founded the application of them to this passage sets aside the Tripartite view. To maintain that because the three terms, "spirit, soul and body" occur together they are to be taken as three entities, each distinct from the other, is as unreasonable as it would be to maintain that when we are told to love God with our heart and soul and mind, that καρδιά and διανόια are as distinct entities as ψυχή. The very same exegesis which governs the Tripartite method would necessitate these other divisions. But we all recognise that heart and mind are different aspects of our inner nature: why then not consider soul and spirit in that same way? Consider the soul as representing all the activities of the nature; and the spirit, the disposition, and there is no difficulty in interpreting the passage.

3. Heb. iv. 12, is another Tripartite stronghold. "For the Word of God is quick and powerful... even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Our friends lay great stress upon this dividing of the soul and spirit some thinking it means dividing between the soul and spirit; others dividing the soul and dividing the spirit. But surely it would be strange to think of the Word as separating the soul from

[p.137]

the spirit: it must mean dividing as the soul and spirit (the things of each). The passage is unquestionably highly figurative and rhetorical. We cannot conceive of the Word, in any literal sense, piercing the "joints and marrow." Tripartites say soul is as distinct from spirit as joints from marrow; but the parallel applies in another way; joints and marrow are of the same nature, the same constituent elements, *ergo* soul and spirit are not different natures. But the figurative use of the terms "joints and marrow," simply points to the intensity of the action of the living Word. And we have here another pair; a discerner of the *thoughts* and *intents* of the heart. Yea three. Now if one claims that soul and spirit must be distinct entities, we are equally entitled to claim that *thoughts*, *intents* and *heart* are all separate. If it is asserted that soul and spirit are different departments of the immaterial nature, then heart is another department and thoughts and intents a twofold division of that department, and so you cannot stop at a Trichotomy, you must at least have a Tetrachotomy if not a Hexachotomy. But remembering all that has already been advanced, the meaning seems plain, that the Word of God divides as to the acts and disposition, or remembering the predominance of the Divine Spirit as indicated in 1 Cor. ii., as to what is natural and what is of the Spirit of God. A very important function of the Word is thus indicated, and Jonathan Edwards, in his great work,

applies the searching Word in this way to distinguish between the purely human and the spiritually informed in the religious Affections.

4. The last passage to be briefly noted is 1 Cor. xv. 44, "It is sown a natural (psychical) body it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural (psychical) body and there is a spiritual body. The first man, Adam, was made a living soul, the last Adam a quickening spirit."

Now I maintain here that the thought of the Divine Spirit alone can illumine this passage. Take the Tripartite view in any of its phases, and you fail to make it agree with the apostle's thought. The body sown, is the body of the Christian, that is called a "psychical body"; but even on the crudest theory, the Christian here possesses spirit, *a fortiori* on the milder view. So it cannot mean that the future body is to be inhabited by a spirit in contrast to the present body inhabited by a soul. The apostle suggests the same line of thought as in the second chapter. The first Adam became a *living soul*; but even the Tripartites

[p.138]

agree that he had *spirit*. The last Adam was a quickening spirit and that life-giving Lord endows His people with the Holy Spirit and in the Resurrection, the new life of the Spirit will be the predominant factor. In the one case the body is thought of as inhabited by the living soul which includes all that is highest in man, in the other the body as under the supreme influence of the Divine Pneuma. The higher life communicated, fostered and glorified by the Spirit of God will be supreme. The present body as adapted for the life natural as it comes from Adam is a *psychical* body; the resurrection body adapted for the full manifestation of the new nature, the spiritual life communicated by Christ, will be a glorified, a *spiritual* body.

This is the prospect in store for redeemed humanity. Originally man was a unity, a unity in duality. Body and soul were in perfect harmony. That harmony was broken by sin and the duality, the distinction between body and soul came into prominence. That original unity is to be restored in Christ; and not only maintained as at first but glorified. Then every part of the *Man* will be dominated by the Spirit of God. The soul through the influence of that Spirit absolutely conformed to the Image of Christ; the body glorified and fashioned like unto the body of His glory becoming a fitting organ for such a soul: soul and body both predominantly spiritual in eternal union with the glorified Son of God.

This article is now Public Domain and may be freely copied and distributed.

Prepared for the Web in October 2007 by Robert I. Bradshaw.

<http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/>
