

G L O S S A

God's Economy and the Prepositions

In the previous issue of *Affirmation & Critique*, the proposition that the writers of the New Testament used a number of different prepositions to describe the relationships among the persons of the Trinity was examined. In this issue we will look at the use of prepositions in the biblical revelation of the economy of the Triune God.

The Earthly Stage of God's Economy

The first stage of God's New Testament economy revealed in the four Gospels can be considered the journey of the Triune God into time, coming as the Son *from with* the Father *by* the Spirit in the person of Jesus Christ, passing through incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection to complete His journey back *to* the Father in His ascension. This is the manifestation in time of the eternal distinction and interrelationship that exist in the Triune God in Himself with the added dimension of the involvement of humanity. The Son's constant proceeding from (*para*) the Father, and His constant motion, fellowship, and communion to (*pros*) the Father and into (*eis*) the Father's bosom are also revealed in God's New Testament economy. Through the incarnation of Christ, humanity has been brought into a relationship with the Triune God; through the death and resurrection of Christ, humanity has even been knit into the Godhead.

Three prepositions are used to describe the coming forth of the Son from the Father, *ek* (out of, from within), *apo* (from), and *para* (from beside, from with). All three prepositions are followed by nouns in the genitive case. *Ek* is first used in reference to the incarnation with the verb *to be born*, *gennaō*. It indicates the source or origin of the Son's birth. He was born *ek* Mary (Matt. 1:16), referring to the source of His human nature. Paul also refers to His human source when he calls Him the Son of God who came out of (*ek*) the seed of David according to the flesh (Rom. 1:3, cf. John 7:42), and the Christ, who is God over all, who came out of (*ek*) Israel according to the flesh (Rom. 9:5). *Ek* is also used to indicate His origin. Although He was born in Bethlehem (cf. John 7:42), He was raised in Nazareth and was considered to have come both *ek* and *apo* Galilee and Nazareth (John 7:41; 1:45-46; Acts 10:38) and as a result was called Jesus the Nazarene or Jesus of Nazareth (Matt. 2:23). Humanly speaking, He was considered a typical person from Nazareth of Galilee.

Mary was also found to be with child of (*ek*) the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18), and what was begotten in her was of (*ek*) the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:20), referring to the source of His divine nature and essence.

The writers of the Gospels also referred to the divine origin and source of Jesus in His coming forth. They used the three prepositions *ek*, *apo*, and *para* with verbs of motion. The most frequently used verb is *exerchomai* (to come forth). The prefix *ex-* (*ek-*) in front of *erchomai* (to come) implies origin or source. When *exerchomai* is followed by the preposition *ek*, the idea of source is emphasized; when it is followed by *apo* or *para*, the idea of source is combined with the nuances of these prepositions. Vincent points out the difference between the use of this verb with these prepositions in a note on John 8:42:

The phrase [*ek tou theou exēlthon*] occurs only here and in xvi. 28. *Exelthein apo* is found in xiii. 3; xvi. 30, and emphasizes the idea of separation; a going *from God* to whom He was to return (*and goeth unto God*). *Exelthein para* (xvi. 27; xvii. 8), is going *from beside*, implying *personal fellowship* with God. *Exelthein ek*, here, emphasizes the idea of *essential community of being*: "I came forth *out of*." (175)

When *ek* occurs, it stresses the origin or source of the Son's coming. In terms of His divinity the source of His coming was God, the Father. In John 8:42 the Lord Jesus said, "I came forth out from [*ek*] God and have come *from Him*; for I have not come of [*apo*] Myself, but He sent Me." Alford, quoting Meyer, indicates that this refers to "the proceeding forth of the Eternal Son from the essence of the Father" (797). C. H. Dodd in his book *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* points out the distinction between *ek* and *apo* in this verse: "Christ's coming was not initiated by Himself—He came, not *ap' emautou* but *apo tou theou*, since the Father sent Him; but not only so—He had His origin in the being of the Father" (259). So also in John 16:28: "I came forth out from [*ek*] the Father and have come into [*eis*] the world; again, I am leaving the world and am going to the Father." The Lord also referred to Himself as being from above (*ek tōn anō*) which, as Vincent points out, "means more than to *come* out of: rather to come out of as that *which is of*; to be identified with something so as to come forth bearing its impress, moral or otherwise" to partake of its quality (74). Jesus also referred to Himself as the

bread of God who comes down out of (*ek*) heaven and gives life to the world (John 6:33; 38 (*apo*), 41, 50). Godet points out that in the mouth of the people, “the expression ‘from heaven’ [v. 31] denotes...only the miraculous *origin* of the divine gift, while Jesus, in His answer, thinks above all of its *essence*” (21). As the bread of heaven He bears the nature of heaven and conveys to us the life of heaven.

Apo is used to indicate the general starting point. Nicodemus, the apostle John, and the disciples use *apo* rather than *ek* when they refer to the Lord’s coming forth. Nicodemus said to Him, “We know that You have come from [*apo*] God as a teacher, for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him” (John 3:2). John in his narrative states, “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all into His hands and that He had come forth from [*apo*] God and was going to [*pros*] God” (13:3). The disciples also said, “Now we know that You know all things and have no need that anyone ask You; by this we believe that You came forth from [*apo*] God” (16:30). E. A. Abbott in *Johannine Grammar* points out that the disciples alter the words of their Master in this verse. They replace the prepositions used by the Lord, *ek* (in v. 28) and *para* (in v. 27), substituting them with *apo*, and they replace “Father” (in v. 28) with “God.” He gives as a possible reason for this: “It is not for them to lay stress on the domesticity of the relation between the Father and the Son” (252).

Para is used by the Lord Jesus when referring to Himself in John 16:27: “For the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from [*para*] God”; and in John 17:8 when He is addressing the Father: “For the words which You gave Me I have given to them, and they received them and knew truly that I came forth from [*para*] You, and they have believed that You sent Me.” As we pointed out in the previous issue, with the genitive case *para* carries the force of “from beside” or “from with.” In the New Testament, particularly in the writings of John, it is used to indicate the distinction, not separation, of the Father and the Son (see Vincent, on John 6:46: “*from*, with an idea of association with: *from with* God,” 152). In 7:29 Jesus says, “I know Him, because I am from [*para*] Him.” As a result, when the Son came forth in the process of time, He came *from with* the Father (16:28). In His coming He brought the Father *with* Him. The two were inseparable. Three times He mentioned that He was not alone (John 8:16, 29; 16:32), and twice He mentioned that the Father (who sent Him) was *with* (*meta*) Him (8:29; 16:32). *Meta* here refers to the accompaniment of the Father with the Son. Therefore, He could say that whoever has seen Him has seen the Father (14:9).

To indicate the unity and inseparability of the Trinity, John states that Jesus also came in (*en*) the name of the Father (5:43) and did His works in the Father’s name (10:25). Jesus testified that He and the Father were one (v. 30;

17:11, 21-22). This oneness is accomplished through the coinherence or mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son in which the Father is in (*en*) the Son and the Son is in (*en*) the Father (10:38; 14:10-11; 17:21).

The prepositions also shed some light on the human living of the Lord Jesus. He lived because of (*dia*) the Father (John 6:57). *Dia* followed by a noun in the accusative case has a twofold sense of causation in this verse. “Firstly, the life of the Son is bound up with that of the Father (it is 5:26 in another form): the Son has no life apart from the Father. And secondly, the Son lives for the Father. To do the Father’s will is His very meat (4:34)” (Morris 380). So also Abbott: “The first is (motive) ‘I live *because I desire to serve the Father*’; the second is (action) ‘I live *because the Father gives me life*’” (234). The use of *dia* and the “accusative accentuates the sense of dependence far more than would have been the case by the use of instrumental *dia* with the genitive, had that been appropriate on other grounds” (Atkinson 25).

For the preposition *dia* with the accusative signifies, not *with a view to* (the purpose), but *because of* (the cause). Jesus means to say that, as sent by the Father, He unceasingly has from God the moral cause of His activity. It is in the Father that He finds the source and norm of each one of His movements, from Him that He gets the vital principle of His being. The Father, in sending the Son, has secured to Him this unique relation, and the Son continues sedulously faithful to it (v. 17). Thus it happens that the life of the Father is perfectly reproduced on earth: Jesus is God lived in a human life. (Godet 38)

The Son did not live His own life, but the Father’s life. He lived a human life *by* the divine life and *because of* the divine life. The use of *dia* and the accusative implies that if the Father was not His life, if the Father was not His living, He *would not*, even *could not*, live. Such is His dependence on the Father and the inclination of His being.

In addition, He worked with the Father (John 5:17, 19), and the Father who abode in Him did His works (14:10b). The Son spoke the things which He had seen *with* (*para* + dative case) His Father (8:38). The sense of *para* with the dative is: in the presence of, or by the side of, the Father. He told people the truth which He had heard *from with* (*para* + genitive case) God (8:40), He showed the people many good works *from* (*ek*) the Father (10:32), and He made known to the disciples all the things which He had heard *from with* (*para* + genitive case) His Father (15:15).

His life was also *by* and *in* the Spirit. He was anointed by the Father with the Spirit at His baptism (Matt. 3:16-17; Luke 3:22; Acts 10:38), and the Spirit of God was upon Him (Luke 4:18). The Gospels testify that He was led *by* the Spirit to be tempted by the devil (Matt. 4:1 (*hupo*);

Luke 4:1 (*en*)); and after His temptation He returned *in* the power of the Spirit into Galilee (Luke 4:14); He, by (*en*) the Spirit of God, cast out the demons (Matt. 12:28); He exulted *in* (*en*) the Holy Spirit (Luke 10:21); and at the end of His human life He reached the goal of His human life when He was designated the Son of God in power, which was accomplished *according to* (*kata*) the Spirit of holiness, the essence of Christ's divinity, out of the resurrection of the dead (Rom. 1:4). "The sonship, which was declared by the resurrection, answered to (*kata*) the spirit of holiness which was the inmost and deepest reality in the person and life of Jesus" (Denney 586). This was accomplished through His death and resurrection and resulted in His humanity becoming divine. His humanity was begotten as the Son of God through His resurrection as was prophesied in Psalm 2: "Thou art My Son, / Today I have begotten Thee" (v. 7; see Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5).

The goal of the human life of Jesus was to complete His journey to the Father. The preposition *pros* is used to indicate this journey. It occurs with a number of verbs of motion, the most common of which are *poreuomai* and *hupagō*. His journey was one of departing out of the world unto (*pros*) the Father (John 13:1) who sent Him (16:5). As a result of His going to the Father we shall do greater works (14:12); the disciples should rejoice because His going away would result in His coming to them as the Spirit (v. 28), who would convict the world concerning righteousness (particularly because of the Son's going to the Father) (16:10); and the disciples would see Him again in a little while with His resurrected body (v. 17). His going to the Father was completed by His ascension. Through His journey through death and resurrection, the Father also regenerated us, the believers, so that we can now be considered as His brothers having the same Father (20:17; 1 Pet. 1:3). John 16:28 summarizes His human life's journey—a journey coming forth (*exēlthōn*) out from (*ek*) the Father and coming into (*eis*) the world, followed by His leaving (*aphiēmi*) the world and journeying back to (*pros*) the Father. Godet states:

The symmetry of the four clauses of this verse throws an unexpected light on the history of Jesus and on each of the four great phases in which it is summed up: self-renunciation, incarnation, death, ascension. The expression *come forth from* God indicates the renouncing of the divine state, the divesting Himself of the *morphē theou* (*the form of God*) according to the language of Paul (Phil. ii. 6); the: *come into the world*, the entrance into the human state and into the earthly existence, the: *being made flesh* (i. 14), or the: *taking the form of a servant* (Phil. ii. 7). The *leaving the world* does not indicate the abandoning of the human nature, but the rupture of the *earthly* form of human existence. For Stephen also beholds Jesus glorified in the form of the Son of man (Acts vii. 56), and it is as Son of man that Jesus reigns and comes again (Matt. xxvi. 64, Luke xviii. 8).—Finally,

the *going to the Father* designates the exaltation of Jesus, in His human nature, to the divine state which He enjoyed as Logos before the incarnation. (320)

While Godet says that "*come forth from God* indicates the renouncing of the divine state, the divesting Himself of the *morphē theou*," we must understand that it does not refer to the divesting Himself of the divine nature and essence of the Father. Writing on John 6:46 Godet says:

If the preposition *para*, *from*, were not connected with the words *o ōn*, *who is*, it might be applied solely to *the mission* of Jesus. But that participle obliges us to think of origin and essence; comp. vii. 29. This *para* is the counterpart of the *pros* of i. 1; united, they sum up the entire relation of the Son to the Father. Everything in the Son is *from* (*para*) the Father and tends to (*pros*) the Father. (32)

The eternal dispensing of the Triune God in Himself is now carried out in time.

In summary we could say that the human life of the Lord Jesus was *out of*, *from*, *with*, and *to* the Father where He was living in the Father's presence, depending on the Father as His source and the supply of His human life, and *by* and *in* the Spirit as the means and essence of His human life, with a view to bringing His humanity to the Father. His life was an example of the human life lived by the divine life. He lived the human life by the divine life. Just as His incarnation brought divinity into humanity, God into man; so His resurrection, His journey to the Father, brought humanity into divinity, man into God.

by Roger Good

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