

θειότης, θεότης.

NEITHER of these words occurs more than once in the N. T.; θειότης only at Rom. 1:20 (and once in the Apocrypha, Wisd. 18:9); θεότης at Col. 2:9. We have rendered both by ‘Godhead;’ yet they must not be regarded as identical in meaning, nor even as two different forms of the same word, which in process of time have separated off from one another, and acquired different shades of significance. On the contrary, there is a real distinction between them, and one which grounds itself on their different derivations; θεότης being from Θεός, and θειότης, not from τὸ θεῖον, which is nearly though not quite equivalent to Θεός, but from the adjective θεῖος.

Comparing the two passages where they severally occur, we shall at once perceive the fitness of the employment of one word in one, of the other in the other. In the first (Rom. 1:20) St. Paul is declaring how much of God may be known from the revelation of Himself which He has made in nature, from those vestiges of Himself which men may everywhere trace in the world around them. Yet it is not the personal God whom any man may learn to know by these aids: He can be known only by the revelation of Himself in his Son; but only his divine attributes, his majesty and glory. This Theophylact feels, who on Romans 1:20 gives μεγαλειότης as equivalent to θειότης; and it is not to be doubted that St. Paul uses this vaguer, more abstract, and less personal word, just because he would affirm that men may know God’s power and majesty, his θεῖα δύναμις (2 Pet. 1:3), from his works; but would *not* imply that they may know Himself from these, or from anything short of the revelation of his Eternal Word.¹ Motives not dissimilar induce him to use τὸ θεῖον rather than ὁ θεός in addressing the Athenians on Mars’ Hill (Acts 17:29).

But in the second passage (Col. 2:9) St. Paul is declaring that in the Son there dwells all the fulness of absolute Godhead; they were no mere rays of divine glory which gilded Him, lighting up his person for a season and with a splendour not his own; but He was, and is, absolute and perfect God; and the Apostle uses θεότης to express this essential and personal Godhead of the Son; in the words of Augustine (*De Civ. Dei*, vii. 1): ‘Status ejus qui sit Deus.’ Thus Beza rightly: ‘Non dicit: τὴν θειότητα, i.e. divinitatem, sed τὴν θεότητα, i.e. deitatem, ut magis etiam expresse loquatur; . . . ἡ θειότης attributa videtur potius quam naturam ipsam declarare.’ And Bengel: ‘Non modo divinae virtutes, sed ipsa divina natura.’ De Wette has sought to express the distinction in his German translation, rendering θειότης by ‘Göttlichkeit,’ and θεότης by ‘Gottheit.’

There have not been wanting those who have denied that any such distinction was intended by St. Paul; and they rest this denial on the assumption that no such difference between the forces of the two words can be satisfactorily made out. But, even supposing that such a difference could not be shown in classical Greek, this of itself would be in no way decisive on the matter. The Gospel of Christ might for all this put into words, and again draw out from them, new forces, evolve latent distinctions, which those who hitherto employed the words may not have required, but which had become necessary now. And that this distinction between ‘deity’ and ‘divinity,’ if I may use these words to represent severally θεότης and θειότης, is one which would be strongly felt, and which therefore would seek its utterance in Christian theology, of this we have signal proof in the fact that the Latin Christian writers were not satisfied with ‘divinitas,’ which they found ready to their hand in the writings of Cicero and others; and which they sometimes were content to use (see Piper, *Theol. Stud. u. Krit.* 1875, p. 79 sqq.); but themselves coined ‘deitas’ as the only adequate Latin representative of the Greek θεότης. We have Augustine’s express testimony to the fact (*De Civ. Dei*, vii. 1). ‘Hanc divinitatem, vel ut sic dixerim

deitatem; nam et hoc verbo uti jam nostros non piget, ut de Graeco expressius transferant id quod illi θεότητα appellant, &c.; cf. x. 1, 2. But not to urge this, nor yet the different etymologies of the words, that one is τὸ εἰναὶ τινα θεόν, the other τὸ εἰναὶ τινα [or τι] θεῖον, which so clearly point to this difference in their meanings, examples, so far as they can be adduced, go to support the same. Both θεότης and θειότης, as in general the abstract words in every language, are of late introduction; and one of them, θεότης, is extremely rare. Indeed, only two examples of it from classical Greek have hitherto been brought, forward, one from Lucian (*Icarom.* 9); the other from Plutarch (*De Def. Orac.* 10): οὗτως ἐκ μὲν ἀνθρώπων εἰς ἥρωας, ἐκ δὲ ἥρωών εἰς δαίμονας, αἱ βελτίονες ψυχαὶ τὴν μεταβολὴν λαμβάνουσιν. ἐκ δὲ δαιμόνων ὄλιγαι μὲν ἔτι χρόνῳ πολλῷ δι’ ἀρετῆς καθαρθεῖσαι παντάπασι θεότητος μετέσχον: but to these a third, that also from Plutarch (*De Isid. et Osir.* 22), may be added. In all of these it expresses, in agreement with the view here asserted, Godhead in the absolute sense, or at all events in as absolute a sense as the heathen could conceive it. Θειότης is a very much commoner word; and its employment everywhere bears out the distinction here drawn. There is ever a manifestation of the divine, of some divine attributes, in that to which θειότης is attributed, but never absolute essential Deity. Thus Lucian (*De Cal.* 17) attributes θειότης to Hephaestion, when after his death Alexander would have raised him to the rank of a god; and Plutarch speaks of the θειότης τῆς ψυχῆς, *De Plac. Phil.* v. 1; cf. *De Is. et Os.* 2; *Sull.* 6; with various other passages to the like effect.

It may be observed, in conclusion, that whether this distinction was intended, as I am fully persuaded it was, by St. Paul or not, it established itself firmly in the later theological language of the Church—the Greek Fathers using never θειότης, but always θεότης, as alone adequately expressing the essential Godhead of the Three several Persons in the Holy Trinity.

R. C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, pp. 7-10, London, 1894.