ONE NATURE OF GOD, THREE DIVINE PERSONS

* The Blessed Trinity

What do we mean by this? Our claim that Jesus Christ is the Son of God depends on the existence of the Trinity. Yet it’s easier to examine first the divinity of Christ, one divine Person with two natures, making Him both God and man. He was God from all eternity and took on a human nature in addition to His divine nature when He was conceived and born into our world with Mary as his mother and no earthly father; God the Father was His father.

**Nature and Person**

For all this we need an understanding of what is meant by the words, ‘nature’ and ‘person’. Nature is what a thing is, the sum of all the features that describe its characteristics and are the source of its powers. Person is who a being is, the agent that is the doer of its actions. A person could not exist without his nature; the person possesses the nature. Yet the two do not always go together; only rational beings, beings with intellect and free will, possess personhood; animals do not. For beings with personhood, for any decision or action it is the person who decides and acts, all of this making use of the powers contained in the nature.

Our understanding of things depends in large part upon our experience of those things. For nature and person we have both understanding and experience, but our human experience of them is such that one human nature must have one and only one person associated with it. But the nature of God is altogether different from ours and can involve associations that are vastly different from our experience. In the Blessed Trinity three distinct persons are associated in the one nature of God, not by each person having a share in the divine nature but by each person totally possessing the divine nature with all its features and powers. This is something completely beyond our experience and therefore beyond our understanding other than the simple meaning of the words. We can catch on to the fact of what it means, but we cannot understand how or why.

**Scriptural Evidence**

A belief that is so far beyond our understanding could never be arrived at by human reasoning. It depends entirely on God’s revelation, which in this case we find in Sacred Scripture. How do we find it there when the word ‘Trinity’ never occurs in the Bible? Although the word ‘Trinity’ is not there the concept is implicit in Christ’s instruction to His Apostles that they baptize people, “in the name [singular] of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:20). The God already known in Judaism was the Father, Christ had often referred to Himself as the Son, and He had promised to send the Holy Spirit to refresh the Apostles’ memories about all that He had told them. Speaking of baptism in the name (which is singular) and then of three distinct and equal persons conveys the concept of what we know as the Trinity.

**God in Himself**

Each of the three Persons is God; each possesses all the powers possessed by each of the other two and has the same relation to us as do the other two, with the exception that only the Second Person, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, took on a human nature, suffered and died for us. Each of them carries out His own actions, not by using a separate nature distinct from the natures of the other two, but by possessing and acting through one single nature. They all know with the same intellect and love with the same will, the nature of God.

God is infinite and eternal, not by possessing these as qualities added onto Himself, but all as part of Himself since His nature is Infinite Existence, possessing all that He is in one single act of being both infinite knowledge and infinite love, and living this life without beginning or end. His knowledge and love are infinite and are simply Himself.

**Father and Son**

All this is true regarding each of the three Persons. But they each have unique relations to one another, as indicated by their names, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Father generates the Son, not bringing Him into existence from nothing or from some external matter, but generates the Son from within Himself as Father. This does not imply an inequality between them; just as the Father is infinite, eternal, and necessary, so likewise is the Son. Just as the Father exists necessarily as God, He also exists necessarily as the Father. Nor is there any time dependency for the
action of generating; both Father and Son are eternal and the generating action between them is an eternally occurring ongoing action.

Theological speculation gives some insight as to the manner in which the Father’s generation of the Son takes place. The intellect of the Father, thinking about Himself, produces a copy of the Father that is so complete and accurate in every way that it is another divine nature, another Person that is also God.

Another name frequently applied to the Second Person of the Trinity is ‘The Word of God’, a name which is a metaphorical description of the Father’s generation of the Son. Just as in human language the term ‘word’ connotes the complete representation of an idea, so also the Father’s reflection on His own being brings about the existence of another divine Person who is the complete representation of Himself and is the Son.

The Holy Spirit

More theological speculation. In the case of the Holy Spirit, this third Person is brought into being by the action of both Father and Son together, not an intellectual action like an idea, but an act of mutual love by the two of them for each other. Father and Son, in loving one another, are loving the very nature of God, and by so doing they produce another divine Person like themselves. Their action is not one of producing an image of themselves, but of each putting all of Himself into what becomes another Person, one who is known as the Spirit of Love. The Church terms this action spiration, breathing, and the resultant breath contains the full nature of God coming from Father and Son in an eternally generating action. This is reflected in Christ’s action and words to His disciples on the evening of Easter Sunday, “…he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” (John 21:22)

God’s Life Within the Trinity and His Actions Toward Us

In our human way of thinking we ascribe different actions of God toward us as if they were the work of different Persons – creation to the Father, redemption to the Son, sanctification to the Holy Spirit. Yet every act of God is participated in by each of the three Persons except for the Incarnation, human life and sacrificial death of the Son.

The interior life of the three persons in God is one of infinite Truth, communicated and received, and of infinite Love, also given and received. This is the nature of God, which we encounter when we achieve salvation.

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