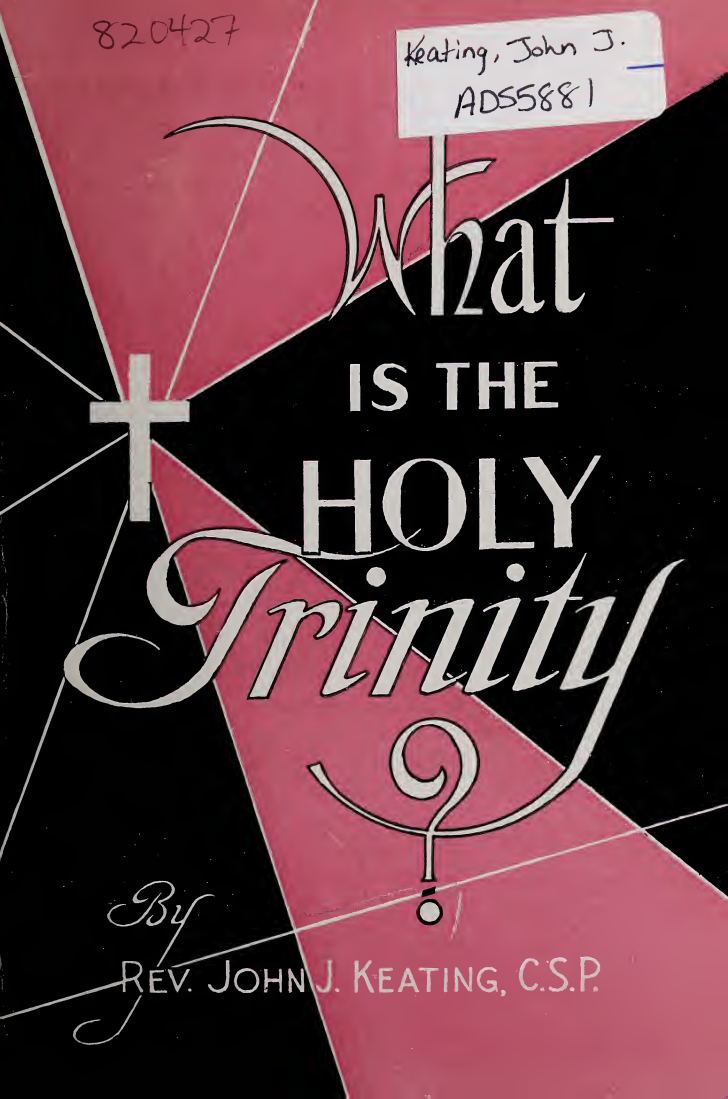


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IS THE
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By

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WHAT IS THE HOLY TRINITY?

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PART ONE

THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY TRINITY

Introduction

A. GOD'S INNER LIFE

IF we were to come across a painting, it would never occur to us that it had painted itself. We would know that there was an artist responsible for it. Furthermore, if we were to examine the painting closely, we might make some conjectures about the artist himself. For it would contain clues to his character. The most competent critic, however, would readily concede that he could not know everything about an artist even by a careful consideration of all of his works. Therefore, if we wanted to know more about a painter than we could perceive from his painting, we would have to gather our information from some personal contact or from some revelation by himself or others.

Now this is a way of illustrating our knowledge of God. God is the Supreme Artist and space is His canvas. With master strokes He has filled it with reflections of His own beauty, truth and goodness. From the very existence of His work, we know of His existence; just as we know from a painting that there must be a painter. Furthermore, the masterpiece of creation tells us something about its Divine Creator; just as a painting tells us something about its human creator. As St. Paul has written: "Since the creation of the world his invisible attributes are clearly seen—his everlasting power also and divinity—being understood through the things that are made" (Rom. i. 20).

As a painting, however, does not tell us everything about the one who painted it, neither does creation yield full knowledge of God. If we would know more than earth and sky can tell, then either we must see the unveiled glory of God or in some fashion He must speak to us. And though it is not given to mortal eyes to see Him face to face, it has been given to mortal ears to hear His words. God has spoken to us through His Church, the custodian of the inspired Scriptures and Tradition. He has revealed things about Himself that we could never learn with our unaided reason. He has given us a glimpse of that mysteriously Divine and Divinely mysterious activity which constitutes His inner life. He has disclosed to us the mystery of the Holy Trinity, so that we might know that in the one God there are three Divine Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

B. RELIGIOUS MYSTERIES

The word, "mystery," was originally applied to a rite to which only privileged worshippers were admitted after initiation and under obligation of strict secrecy. It has come to mean, however, anything which is a secret, something unknown or even unknowable. So we speak of the mysteries of nature. There are many things in the world which have not yet yielded to the probings of science. Words which are very familiar to us are often simply names for things which no one understands, and much that we take for granted is deeply mysterious to laymen and scientists alike.

Natural mysteries, however, are not the only mysteries. There are also many religious mysteries. In the strictest sense a religious mystery is a supernatural truth which is above the finite, natural intelligence of man. We can know about it simply because it has

been revealed to us, but even so, we cannot know all about it. Of course, there have been some things revealed to us which are not strictly mysteries, things which could be arrived at by man's own reason. For example, the immortality of the soul has been revealed by God, but this is something which could be and has been discerned by human reason independently of revelation.

Revelation, however, does contain strict mysteries. The Vatican Council declared with infallible authority in 1870: "If anyone says that mysteries properly so called are not contained in Divine revelation, but that through reason rightly developed all the dogmas of faith can be understood and demonstrated from natural principles, let him be anathema" (Denziger 1086:2). Now among such mysteries, indeed foremost of all, is that of the Holy Trinity.

The Holy Trinity

A. THE ATHANASIAN CREED

At the beginning of the fourth century Catholic belief in the Trinity was formulated most explicitly and carefully because of the heresy and errors of the day. This formulation is found in the Athanasian Creed which says in part:

This is the Catholic Faith: That we worship one God in the Trinity and the Trinity in a unity.

Neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance (i.e., the Divine Nature).

For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost.

But the Divinity of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is one, the glory is equal, the majesty is co-eternal. . . .

So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God. Yet there are not three Gods, but one.

There are, then, three Divine Persons, but there is only one Divine Nature. Accordingly, there are two terms in this mystery which need explanation if we are to understand something about the Trinity. Those terms are "Person" and "Nature." Their explanation will not enable us to fully understand the incomprehensible, but it will allow us to see how this mystery, while it is above reason, is not contrary to it. For when we know, at least in general, what is meant by these words, then we can see that there is no contradiction in the idea of one Divine Nature and three Divine Persons.

B. PERSON AND NATURE

In order to understand something about Divine Nature and Divine Personality, it will help to start with something similar but closer to us, with human nature and human personality. The dictionary gives as the first definition of nature: "Essential character or constitution; distinguishing quality or qualities; essence; as, the nature of steel" (Webster's Collegiate, 5th ed.). From this it should be clear that the nature of anything is what makes it to be what it is. A man is a man and not a mountain because he has the nature of a man, not the nature of a mountain. Furthermore, because a thing acts according to what it is, that is, according to its nature, then the nature of a thing may be considered as the source of its proper activities. A man thinks because he has a human nature which permits him to think. It is his nature which is the source of this activity. Nature, therefore, designates what a thing is and, consequently, what it can do.

There are many natures in the world. Some of them are essentially distinct. For example, the nature of a man is quite different from the nature of a mountain. Some natures, however, are not essentially distinct.

They are only numerically distinct. One man is not another man, but both men have essentially the same nature.

Now let us turn to person or personality. In this discussion the word "personality" does not mean the qualities in one which make him impressive, admirable or likeable to others. These meanings are frequently attached to the word and in this sense many are said to have no personality at all. Here, however, personality simply means that one is a person. In this understanding even an individual who is completely colorless and quite unnoticeable still must be said to have personality.

Personality or the quality of being a person is not so widespread as the idea of nature. For, whereas everything has a nature by which it is what it is and does what it does, not everything is a person. In fact, in the visible world the only creatures that are rightly called persons are human beings. No one would suggest that a mountain is a person. So it appears that while everything has a nature, there is something in man which is over and above his nature. There is the perfection of personality. This perfection is said to possess the nature.

The nature of man is an animal body animated by a rational soul. There are as many numerical expressions of this nature as there are living human beings. Each expression, however, is possessed by a different person. For example, John and Mary possess the same essential nature, although there is an accidental difference of sex. It is because they both possess essentially the same nature that they are both human beings. John, the person, however, possesses his individual expression of human nature and Mary, the person, possesses hers.

To carry this same example further, whatever, the

human nature of John does in a conscious way, John, the person, is said to be responsible for it; and whatever the human nature of Mary does, Mary, the person, is said to be responsible. We are all held personally responsible for conscious acts for the simple reason that the relationship of person and nature is similar to the relationship of a driver and his car. The driver uses the car and is responsible for what it does. A person uses his nature and is responsible for what it does. Human nature is, therefore, the instrument of a person's activity.

There is a further similarity between a driver and his car and a person and his nature. Just as a driver is distinct from his car, so a person is distinct from his nature. There is also, however, a dissimilarity between a driver and his car and a person and his nature. A person cannot step out of his nature as a driver can step out of his car. In other words, while the nature and person of man are distinct, they are not separate. Because of this lack of separation we might never have realized the real distinction between the two and their relationship if it had not been for the revelation of the Incarnation in which we have two natures and one Person and the revelation of the Trinity in which we have three Persons and one Nature.

C. PERSON AND NATURE IN GOD

Now we come to the ideas of Person and Nature in God. It should be immediately clear that God has a Divine Nature which makes Him to be God, just as man has a human nature which makes him to be man. The Divine Nature, of course, is infinitely superior to any human nature, or any created nature, or the sum of them all. We read in the Scriptures: "Peradventure thou wilt comprehend the steps of God, and wilt find out the Almighty perfectly? He is higher

than heaven. . . . He is deeper than hell. . . . The measure of Him is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea" (Job xi. 7 ff.). In other words, God is so supremely perfect that we cannot even begin to adequately express the riches of His Nature. Furthermore, He is so supremely perfect that He is necessarily one. There could not be numerically more than one Divine Nature as there is numerically more than one human nature. In the Book of Isaias God speaks and says: "I am the first, and I am the last, and besides Me there is no God" (Is. xlv. 6).

It should also be clear that as well as Divine Nature there is Divine Personality in God. St. Thomas Aquinas has written: "Since every perfection must be ascribed to God, because His essence contains in itself all perfection, it is fitting that personality be ascribed to Him, not, however, in the same manner that creatures are said to have it, but in a more excellent manner" (S. Th. I, 29, 3). As the Divine Nature is immeasurably beyond human nature, so Divine Personality is eminently superior to human personality. This much we could know without revelation, granted that we were aware of the idea of personality. Without revelation, however, we could not know that the "more excellent manner" mentioned by St. Thomas implies not one Person but three Persons who, though distinct from each other, equally possess the one Divine Nature.

This is, indeed, something which we cannot fully comprehend. It is a strict mystery which baffles human intelligence. Yet, from what we have seen of person and nature, we can understand that here is not something which contradicts reason. It is something which is above reason. We live on a level of one-dimensional personality, so to speak. In our world there is one human nature possessed by one human

person. We could not logically hold, however, that when we ascend to the level of Divinity there could not be three-dimensional personality. Since person and nature are distinct, there is no reason why the infinite Nature of God would not demand that it be possessed by three Persons rather than by one, just as the human nature of man demands that it be possessed by one person and not by none as is the case with lower natures.

PART TWO: REVELATION

The Old Testament

In the Old Testament there are several passages which suggest not only a plurality in God, but also a certain threeness. For example, in the Book of Genesis we read of an apparition to Abraham. He was sitting at the door of his tent and he looked up and saw three young men approaching him. As soon as he saw them, he seems to have recognized Divinity. For the Scriptures tell us that he ran to meet them and "adored down to the ground." He adored them not as three, but as one, addressing them by the single name, "Lord." And the three answered him with but one voice (Gen. xviii. 1 ff.).

Furthermore, apart from the many passages in the Old Testament which must be applied to God the Father, there are others which refer to the Second and Third Persons of the Trinity. Among those which concern the Second Person are the frequent references to Him as the Messiah, the Saviour Who is to come. Isaias emphasizes His Divinity. He calls Him: "God the Mighty" and "Immanuel," that is, "God with us" (Is. ix. 6; vii. 14). The Messianic Psalms carry us further. They indicate that the relationship between the Divine Messiah and God, that is, between the

First and Second Person, is a relationship of Father to Son. The Psalmist puts these words in the mouth of the Messiah: "The Lord said to me: You are my Son; this day I have begotten you" (Ps. ii. 7). And David writes: "The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool. . . . Before the daystar, like the dew, I have begotten you" (Ps. cix. 1 ff.).

The texts referring to the Third Person, the Holy Spirit, are numerous, but not so definite. For the most part they might be interpreted as impersonal usage. Some, however, strike a more personal note. Isaias speaks of the Spirit as the distributor of the seven gifts which shall fill the Messiah. "The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of fortitude, the Spirit of knowledge and of godliness. And he shall be filled with the Spirit of the fear of the Lord" (Is. xi. 2 ff.). Furthermore, it is the Spirit Who illuminates prophets (2 Kings xxiii. 2). It is the Spirit Who sanctifies souls (Ezech. xxxvi. 27). It is the Spirit Who shall come upon the servants and the handmaidens of God after the days of the Messiah (Joel ii. 28).

Many other passages filled with indications of the Trinity and of each of the Persons of the Trinity could be presented. It would be rash, however, to insist that even all of them together put the doctrine beyond question. They surely imply it, but we are undoubtedly inclined to see more in the texts from our vantage point of the New Testament than they themselves would afford. It is generally considered that only a few highly favored souls in Old Testament times had any real knowledge of the great mystery of God's threefold personality.

The New Testament

A. THE TRINITY OF PERSONS

In the New Testament there are some outstanding texts that present the three Persons in God together. When the plan of redemption began to unfold, God sent the Angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary to acquaint her with His designs. The angel said to her: "Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus." Mary was puzzled by this announcement and she inquired how she could become a mother and yet remain a virgin according to a vow she had presumably made. Gabriel answered: "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee; and therefore the Holy One to be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke i. 26 ff.). Here the Father (the Most High), the Son and the Holy Spirit are all clearly mentioned and distinguished. It is true that their single Divine Nature is not declared in so many words, but it is at least suggested.

Passages of similar force are found in the Gospel records of the baptism of Christ by John the Baptist. In the Gospel according to St. Luke we read: "Now it came to pass when all the people had been baptized, Jesus also having been baptized and being in prayer, that heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form as a dove, and a voice came from heaven, 'Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased.'" (Luke iii. 21 ff.)

A more significant text in the Gospels which not only distinguishes the Persons but declares their unity is that which tells us of the Divine commission that Christ gave to His Apostles. As they were gathered about Him before He ascended into Heaven, He said to them: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all na-

tions, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. xxviii. 19 ff.). The conjunction "and" affords ample proof that the three are distinct. The nature of Baptism, which gives a mysterious participation in Divine Life, indicates the Divinity of each; for Baptism is conferred in the name of each. And the singular use of "name" amounts almost to a definite statement of the unity of nature. St. Augustine pointed this out centuries ago. "There is one God, for it is not in the names of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, but in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Where thou hearest one name, there is one God" (Tract. in Joa., VI, n. 9).

The Epistles as well as the Gospels contain texts which mention the three Persons together. For example, St. Peter gives us a Trinitarian form of benediction. He presents the sanctifying Spirit, the omniscient Father and the redeeming Son. "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the sojourners of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, chosen unto the sanctification of the Spirit according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, unto obedience to Jesus Christ and the sprinkling of his blood: grace and peace be multiplied to you" (1 Peter i. 1 ff.).

The most prominent passage in the Epistles, however, is in the First Epistle of St. John. The authenticity of this passage has sometimes been called into question, particularly by those who deny the Trinity, but the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office has decreed as the result of much investigation by learned scholars that the authenticity cannot be safely denied or even doubted. St. John states: "For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word (the Son), and the Holy Spirit; and these three are

one" (1 John v. 7). Here is a most explicit statement of both a trinity and a unity, three Persons who are one by the possession of one Nature.

B. GOD THE FATHER

We might also profitably consider some of those places in the Scriptures which treat of the three Divine Persons separately and manifest the Divinity of each. Since there can be only one Divine Nature, it must follow that if we find three who are Divine, they must be Divine in virtue of an equal possession of the one Divine Nature. Now the plain fact is that the Scriptures do present three Divine Persons.

We do not have to look very far to find references to the Father, the First Person of the Trinity. It is true that the word, "Father," is sometimes used metaphorically. God is the Father of all His creatures by the fact of creation and because of the Providence He exercises over all the works of His hands. The word, however, is also used literally, and this sets the stage for the Second Person, the Son. For, if there is literally a Father, there is literally a Son of the same substance. This is as true in Divinity as it is in humanity.

Our Lord presents both the figurative and the literal Fatherhood of God in many places. He says to His disciples: "Your Father." He also speaks of Him, however, in His own relationship as "My Father." For example, we find Him saying: "All things are delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and him to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matt. xi. 25). What are we to understand from this except that the Father is truly a Father who has delivered the entirety of His Divine

Nature to the Son from all eternity and, consequently, each possesses equal knowledge of the other.

The sacred writers frequently emphasize this singular paternity of the Father. For example, St. Paul says: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. i. 3). In another place he speaks of it as the exemplar of all paternity. "For this reason I bend my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth receives its name" (Eph. iii. 14). These and other texts are the firm ground for asserting that in God there is truly a Father because of an eternal Sonship of which He is the Principle. In other words, there are at least two distinct Persons possessing the one Divine Nature who stand in the relationship of Father and Son.

C. GOD THE SON

The passages in the New Testament relative to the eternal Son are even more plentiful than those which speak of the Father. For the New Testament is the drama of the Son of God becoming man. There are some who fail to understand this and they regard the Sonship so frequently expressed as a metaphor. However highly they may think of Christ, they refuse to believe that He is truly the Son of God possessing the same Divine Nature as the Father. Yet, this claim was certainly made by Christ and understood by both His enemies and His friends.

It would occupy too much space to go into a detailed account of the many places in the Scriptures in which Christ implicitly asserts His Divinity by speaking and acting as only a Divine Person might speak and act. An example of an explicit assertion should make His position obvious enough. Such an example is found in one of the most solemn moments of His life. On Holy

Thursday night before the highest Jewish court He was asked by the High Priest whether He was indeed the Son of God. With His life hanging in the balance He answered without hesitation: "I am" (Matt. xxvi. 63 ff.).

This event manifests not only the claim of Christ to Divinity, but also the knowledge of His enemies concerning that claim. Every Jew present believed himself to be a son of God in a metaphorical sense, but every Jew present knew that Christ claimed to be the Son of God by an identity of Nature. That is why the High Priest could accuse Him of blasphemy when he heard His answer; and that is why the whole court said that He was worthy of death.

A similar incident setting forth both the claim of Christ to Divinity and the understanding of it by His enemies is found earlier in His life. He said to a group of the Jews: "I and the Father are one." When the Jews heard this they took up stones to stone Him, for they knew that He meant He was one with the Father by a unity of Nature. This is put beyond question by their own words. He asked them for which of His good works they wished to stone Him and they answered: "Not for a good work do we stone thee, but for blasphemy, and because thou, being a man, makest thyself God" (John x. 30 ff.).

His enemies certainly did not misunderstand Him, for His friends also, whom He instructed most carefully, were quite convinced of His Divinity. Whatever doubts they experienced concerning His claims when He was put to death vanished when He rose on the third day. This is aptly illustrated by Thomas. He doubted the fact of the resurrection till Christ appeared to him and told him to put his finger in the marks of the nails and his hand in the wound in His side. The faith of Thomas was reawakened and he

made a terse profession of it by falling down on his knees and saying: "My Lord and my God." Christ said to him: "Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed. Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed" (John xx. 24 ff.).

Furthermore, St. John wrote the Fourth Gospel "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (John xx. 31). He opens it by departing from the notion of Sonship for a while to present Christ as the Word of God and true God Himself who becomes man in time. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God; and the Word was God. . . . And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." Almost immediately he returns to the idea of Sonship by saying that the Word is "the only-begotten of the Father." And a few lines later he declares: "No one has at any time seen God. The only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has revealed him" (John i. 1 ff.).

The Epistles as well as the Gospels assert this Divinity of Christ. In his Epistle to Titus, St. Paul writes: "Looking for the blessed hope and coming of the glory of the great God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ. The order of the Greek text makes it clear that the "great God" and the "Saviour" are one and the same Person (Tit. ii. 13). In another passage he writes of the Israelites and says: "From whom is Christ according to the flesh, who is over all things, God blessed forever." If grammar means anything, Christ and God are identified (Rom. ix. 5).

D. GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

The most important passage in the Gospels concerning the Holy Spirit is found in the discourse that

Christ delivered to His Apostles after the Last Supper. By His words He both distinguishes the Spirit as a Person and indicates His Divinity. "But when the Advocate has come, whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness concerning me" (John xv. 26). The Advocate is obviously neither the Father from whom He proceeds, nor the Son of whom He will give testimony. Furthermore, He appears as the substantial Spirit of truth and substantial truth is Divinity itself.

In the Epistles the Divinity of the Holy Spirit is further emphasized by frequent texts attributing to Him what can belong only to God. St. Paul presents Him as the author of supernatural goods. "To one through the Spirit is given the utterance of wisdom; and to another the utterance of knowledge, according to the same Spirit; to another faith, in the same Spirit; to another the gift of healing, in the one Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecies; to another the distinguishing of spirits; to another various kinds of tongues; to another interpretation of tongues. But all these things are the work of one and the same Spirit, who divides to everyone according as He will" (1 Cor. xii. 8 ff.).

He is also presented as the principle of sanctification. St. Paul writes that "the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom. v. 5). To this end He dwells within us, for the indwelling of God is appropriated to Him in a special manner. "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Cor. iii. 16.) "Or do you not know that your members are the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought at

a great price. Glorify God and bear Him in your body" (1 Cor. vi. 19 ff.).

He is also the inspiration of the prophets. St. Peter writes: "For not by the will of man was prophecy brought at any time; but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter i. 21). Peter likewise says that He is the inspiration of the Scriptures. "Brethren, the Scripture must be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit declared before by the mouth of David concerning Judas" (Acts i. 16). Now such inspiration is obviously a Divine activity. In fact, St. Paul writes that "all Scripture is inspired by God" (2 Tim. iii. 16).

Furthermore, we have an obvious equation between God and the Holy Spirit in the story of Ananias and Saphira which is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. "A man named Ananias, with Saphira his wife, sold a piece of land and by fraud kept back a part of the price of the land, with the connivance of his wife, and bringing a part only, laid it at the feet of the apostles. But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan tempted thy heart, that thou shouldst lie to the Holy Spirit and by fraud keep back part of the price of the land? . . . Thou hast not lied to men, but to God'" (Acts v. 1 ff.). Here it is pointed out to Ananias that in lying to the Holy Spirit, he has lied to God. The only sufficient reason is that the Holy Spirit is God.

Tradition

The early Christians manifested their belief in the Trinity by their practice, their writings and by the ready condemnation of heresy. Their practice finds expression in the Apostles' Creed which is as old as the Church herself. "I believe in God the Father Almighty . . . and in Jesus Christ, His only Son . . .

and in the Holy Ghost." It is also expressed in public and private doxologies. For example, they prayed: "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit."

The writings upholding the traditional doctrine are too voluminous to do more than quote a few examples. It was a disciple of St. John the Apostle, the venerable St. Polycarp, who said before his martyrdom: "I bless thee, Lord, God Almighty, with thy eternal and most beloved Son, through whom be glory to thee, with him and the Holy Ghost, for all the ages that are to come" (Martyr. St. Polycarpi, 14). Later in the second century, St. Justin refuted a charge of atheism against the Christians by writing: "We adore the Father and the Son and the Prophetic Spirit (Apol. I, 6). Against the same charge Athenagoras wrote: "How can you call us atheists, who preach God the Father and God the Son and the Holy Ghost and explain how among them there is union and distinction" (Legat. 10, 12)?

The strength of this belief is made all the more manifest by those who rejected it and were condemned by the orthodox fathers and the teaching Church. One of the earliest and most dangerous of all these groups was Arianism with its offshoot in Macedonianism. Arius claimed that the Son was a creature and not consubstantial with the Father. The Macedonians, following Macedonius, the Bishop of Constantinople, declared that the Holy Ghost was a creature of the Son. The First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea was assembled in the early fourth century to condemn Arianism. Macedonianism was condemned by Pope Donatus at a synod in Rome.

Without any doubt, both Scripture and Tradition proffer as an essential part of revelation the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity. What is foreshadowed in the Old Testament is made clear in the New. And what

is taught in the New Testament is reflected in the practice and writings of earliest Christianity. Furthermore, those who would deny it despite this evidence fall beneath the official sanction of the Church and suffer the penalty of excommunication.

PART THREE: EXPOSITION

Two Divine Processions

A. PROCESSIONS

The revelation we have seen has given us an authoritative glimpse into the marvels of God's inner life. From this we are able to build up a body of theological knowledge that reason without revelation could never attain. For twenty centuries reason has wrestled with revelation and has wrested from it an intriguing if necessarily incomplete picture of God. The picture is that of one Divine Nature having two Divine Processions terminating in three Divine Persons.

We have already alluded to the unity of the Divine Nature. This is not only declared in revelation, but it can be readily demonstrated by reason. The fact, however, that within this one Divine Nature there are two Divine Processions giving us three Divine Persons, is something that could be known only through revelation. Indeed, it is something that cannot be fully grasped by reason even after it has been revealed. Yet, revelation makes it possible for us to take some steps in the direction of a fuller understanding.

The idea of Divine Processions is most important in any exposition of the mystery of the Trinity. Therefore, we must lay the groundwork for a clear understanding of these Processions. The word may bring before us the image of a circus parade, or a line of children wending their way down a Church aisle. Or we may imagine a wedding march or funeral proces-

sion. There are, however, other types of processions besides these, processions which will help us to understand to some extent the two Processions in God.

These processions which are something like God's are not found in streets or churches, but right inside human beings. We are not accustomed to think of processions inside of us, but there are two which are very important. We will see this all the more clearly when we realize that a procession does not necessarily mean moving feet and marching people. It refers to the act of something coming from something else. We might speak of the procession of a bullet from a gun as accurately as we speak of a procession of people, because a bullet comes forth from a gun.

B. PROCESSIONS IN MAN

Likewise, we are being quite exact when we say that there are processions inside of us, in our intellect and in our will. Whenever we know something, we know it in an idea that proceeds from our intellect just as truly as words proceed from our mouth. And whenever we love something, there is a procession in our will; for love proceeds from the will just as the light of love proceeds from sparkling eyes. For example, with his intellect a young man knows that the girl he hopes to marry is good and simple, honest and true, and with his will he loves her. The ideas of her lovable qualities proceed from his intellect and the love he bears her because of these qualities proceeds from his will.

The idea proceeds from the intellect and love proceeds from the will, but neither are separate from these faculties even though they are distinct. We have already pointed out that separation and distinction are different things. So the idea which proceeds

from the intellect is distinct from it, but not separate from it; just as a written word is distinct from the paper but not separate from it. And the love which proceeds from the will is distinct from it, but not separate from it; just as a smile is distinct from a face, but not separate from it. We express this in a formidable way when we say that the idea is immanent in the intellect and love is immanent in the will. This word is chosen because it comes from the Latin "immanere" which means to remain within.

C. PROCESSIONS IN GOD

Now in God there is something which corresponds to these two immanent processions in man. This twofold spiritual activity in us is a shadowy image of God's activity in knowing and loving. In the first place, God has infinite intelligence. Consequently, He is designated in Scripture as the One "who hast the knowledge of all things" (Esth. xiv. 14). It is not the partial, incomplete knowledge that characterizes us. There is no array of ideas tumbling over each other and being forgotten and recalled. In one eternal act God knows all the tremendous truth, beauty and goodness of His Godhead which contains the fullness of being. In a single sweep, as it were, He surveys the panorama of absolute perfection found in the Divine Essence. He generates a single, perfect idea that is the adequate expression of His Divinity, because all of Divinity is included in it. It is a Divine Idea that is distinct, but not separate from Him. Now God knowing Himself is the First Person of the Trinity, and His incomparable thought, His perfect image is the Second Person. In our finite world our ideas are certainly not persons, but God's infinite idea is so exalted that it is a distinct Personality.

Since an idea is so often expressed in a spoken word, the idea itself might be called a mental word, something uttered by the intellect. So we might express the procession of the Divine Idea, the Second Person, by saying that God uttered Himself from all eternity. When we utter ourselves we express certain states of mind or body, but we never express ourselves completely. When God utters Himself in the eternal Word, He expresses interiorly all that He is. This is borne out by St. John who writes: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God; and the Word was God" (John i. 1 ff.).

There is, however, another way of looking at this procession, and that is in terms of generation. We sometimes say that we generate a thought, or even that we father an idea. Now, if I father an idea, that idea is, in a sense, my child. Indeed, it is sometimes called a "brain-child." So in Divinity, in the inscrutable procession of the Divine Idea, there is a generation. The First Person of the Trinity fathers or generates a Divine Idea so perfect that it is a Second Divine Person. Consequently, this Second Person may rightly be called a Son, whereas the First Person who generates Him may rightly be called a Father. And in Sacred Scripture we find God the Father declaring: "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee" (Ps. ii. 7).

There is also in God an activity of love. Just as there is a bond of love between a human father and his son, so there is a bond of love between the Divine Father and His equally Divine Son. The Father looks upon the Son and the Son upon the Father and they are in rapture with each other. They behold the glory of the Godhead which they equally possess and from their mutual Divine will there proceeds an infinite love. All lovers seek to give themselves completely

to each other and this is realized in the highest way in God. The Father and the Son pour the entirety of the Divine Nature into their love. Consequently, it is so expressive and so perfect that it is self-existing Love, a Third Divine Person, the Holy Spirit.

This procession of the Holy Spirit is different from that of the Son. The Son proceeds by way of generation. The Holy Spirit proceeds by way of love. He is the common spiration of the Father and the Son. As a sigh is a sign of the vitality of human love, so the Divine love of the Father and Son is expressed in a Divine Sigh, a Spirit breathed forth from the depths of Divinity.

Three Divine Persons

This notion of the immanent action of the intellect and the will is the strongest analogy we can employ to give some indication of the ineffable Processions in God which must always remain a mystery. For certainly God's immanent acts are far beyond man's understanding. Yet here we have some intelligible idea of how there can be one Divine Nature and three Divine Persons. Never separate from that Nature, yet distinct from each other, there is the Father who begets a Son and the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the mutual love of the Father and Son.

These three Persons are perfectly equal, for each one possesses the entirety of the Divine Nature. It is true that in our expression we seem to imply a temporal sequence. It appears as though first there was the Father, then the Son and finally the Holy Spirit. Actually, the Divine Processions terminating in the three Divine Persons is a single eternal act beyond human comprehension. There is no before and after. By an inner necessity of Divinity the Son is eternally

begotten by the Father and the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the love of the Father and Son.

Because all three possess the one Divine Nature, then whatever is effected in the way of transient activity, whatever God does outside the Godhead may be attributed to all three Persons. For, just as the acts of a human nature are attributed to the person who possesses it, so the acts of the Divine Nature are attributed to the Persons who possess it. So Christ says: "For whatever he (the Father) does, this the Son also does in like manner" (John v. 19). However, because of the Processions, each Person has proper names and appropriated works. These are works which seem fitting to a particular Person because of His position in the Trinity.

The First Person is properly called the First Principle since He is the font, so to say, or the source of the Trinity. We say that He is a Principle and not a cause because a cause implies an effect with some dependence on the thing that caused it. This brings in an element of inequality. A principle, on the other hand, implies nothing more than something from which a thing proceeds. For example, we say that a point is the principle of a line, but not its cause. And as well as being the First Principle, the First Person is truly the Father, for He generates a Son. Among the works appropriated to Him are all works of power and particularly the work of creation. Therefore, we say in the Creed: "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth."

The Second Person is properly called the Son because He proceeds from the Father by generation. He is also the Word since He proceeds from the immanent act of the Divine Intellect. Wisdom and all the works of wisdom are appropriated to Him. Among the works of wisdom is that of the Redemp-

tion. God the Son played a unique part in it in the human nature He assumed. Insofar, however, as Redemption is a Divine work it belongs to all three Divine Persons, but it is appropriated to the Son.

The Third Person is the Spirit because He proceeds from the common spiration of the Father and the Son and the word, "spirit," means something breathed forth. He is also called Love and the Spirit of Love because He is the substantial, immanent expression of the love of the Father and the Son. Charity and the works of charity are appropriated to Him. Among the works of charity is the work of sanctification. This is the process of bringing men into closer and closer union with God, making them over into saints.

Divine Missions

Just as proper names are given to the Three Persons and activities are appropriated to particular Persons in virtue of the Processions in God, so Divine Missions, with their goals outside the Godhead, presuppose these Processions. Mission comes from a Latin word which means "to send"; and it includes two things: First, that the person sent should in some way proceed from the person sending; secondly, that the person sent should in some way become present in the place to which he is sent.

The procession from the sender can be by command, counsel or simple going forth as from an origin. A king sends an ambassador by command. An adviser to a king might send the king to visit his subjects by counsel. A mere going forth from a source or origin is exemplified in a plant sending forth a flower. Now, in a Divine Mission there can be no sending by command, for all Persons have equal authority. Nor can there be a sending by counsel, for all have equal knowledge and wisdom. It is only in

the sense of procession from a source that we can speak of a Divine Person being sent.

Again, one who is sent can become present in the place to which he is sent in more than one way. Normally a person, for example, an ambassador, leaves one country and proceeds to the place where he is being sent. However, he may already be in the country to which he is appointed. In this case he becomes present there in a new capacity. He is no longer simply a resident foreigner, but an official representative of his country. Now, since God is everywhere, it is only in this latter way that a Divine Person becomes present in a place in some special way for the sake of a special Mission. And so St. John says that the Word was in the world, but He entered it in a new fashion: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (John i. 14).

Only two things, therefore, are implied in a Divine Mission: a procession of origin and a new mode of presence. In other words, the Person sent proceeds from the Person sending and He becomes present in a new way at the goal of His Mission. Since the Father proceeds from no one, He cannot be sent. He can, however, send both the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Son also is able to send the Holy Spirit who proceeds from both Him and the Father. The Holy Spirit alone is sent but sends no one. For there is no procession from Him as from an origin.

There are two important Missions, one visible and one invisible. The visible Mission is that of the Son who took upon Himself a human nature and came among men as Jesus Christ that He might redeem us. The Son of God became the Son of Man in order that the sons of men might become the sons of God. "When the fullness of time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman . . . that we might receive the adop-

tion of sons" (Gal. iv. 4). By His life, passion and death Christ made atonement for all sin and merited superabundant Grace for all men, more than enough to make every single soul holy and pleasing to God. Yet, every soul does not become automatically holy. This work of sanctification forms the invisible Mission of the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier.

"The purpose of His Mission, the great work He comes to perform, and which He will succeed in performing if we are docile to His inspirations and do not refuse Him our co-operation without which nothing can be done, is to wrest us from the empire of darkness and translate us into the kingdom of light; to create a new being within us and transform our entire soul by clothing it with justice and holiness; to infuse into us together with His grace, a life infinitely superior to the natural life; to render us partakers of the Divine Nature; children of God and heirs of His kingdom; to strengthen our native powers by endowing us with new energies; to bestow upon us His gifts; and to render us capable of performing acts that will be meritorious of eternal life. In a word, His mission consists in laboring efficaciously, incessantly and lovingly, in the work of our sanctification" (*The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit*, Barthélemy Froget, O.P., p. 125).

Conclusion

"There are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one" (1 John v. 7). And what a wondrous pattern is woven by this mysterious Divinity! In the silence of eternity God freely decreed to manifest His glory externally. The Father with omnipotent action drew the vast universe out of nothingness and upon a tiny planet He created a king fashioned to His own

image and likeness. He formed from the dust of the earth a man into whom He breathed a living soul. Upon this creature He lavished every gift including a participation in His own Divine Life through the priceless treasure of Sanctifying Grace. Despite this munificence, however, man abused his freedom and rejected his dignity. Sins and crimes multiplied upon the earth. Then God the Son "emptied himself, taking the nature of a slave and being made like unto men" (Phil. ii. 7). He declared: "The Father works even until now, and I work" (John v. 17). His work was to mediate between offended Divinity and offending humanity. This mediation He accomplished as He hung upon a cross between heaven and earth, between God and man, and cried out in a dying breath: "It is finished" (John xix. 30). In that moment redemption became a universal fact, but it had still to become an individual fact. Therefore, the Holy Spirit comes into our souls that we might become children of God and grow strong in the life of Grace till it blossoms into the glory of heaven. "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Cor. iii. 16.)

All of this heart-warming theology is contained in a common practice of Catholicism. It is implicit in the sign of the cross. And we acknowledge it every time we trace the cross upon ourselves and say: "In the name of the Father (who created me), and of the Son (who redeemed me), and of the Holy Spirit (who sanctifies me). Amen."

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Father John J. Keating of the Paulist Fathers has spent most of his time in the priesthood in the apostolate to non-Catholics through Information Centers, lectures and radio work.