

Session 13: God: Unity and Trinity

HYMN: Holy, Holy, Holy!



Holy, holy, holy!
 Lord God almighty!
 Early in the morning
 our song shall rise to Thee.
 Holy, holy, holy!
 Merciful and mighty!
 God in three Persons,
 blessed Trinity!

Holy, holy, holy!
 All the saints adore Thee,
 casting down their golden crowns
 around the glassy sea;
 cherubim and seraphim
 falling down before Thee,
 Who wert, and art,
 and evermore shalt be!

Holy, holy, holy!
 Though the darkness hide Thee,
 though the eye of sinful man
 Thy glory may not see,
 only Thou art holy,
 there is none besides Thee,
 perfect in pow'r,
 in love and purity.

Holy, holy, holy!
 Lord God almighty!
 All Thy works shall praise Thy name
 in earth and sky and sea.
 Holy, holy, holy!
 Merciful and mighty:
 God in three Persons,
 blessed Trinity!

PRAYER: See Eph 1:17-19.
 Let us pray: O God,
 grant us a spirit
 of wisdom and insight
 to know You clearly.
 Enlighten our innermost vision,
 that we may know the great hope
 to which You have called us,
 the wealth of Your glorious heritage
 to be distributed among the members
 of the Church,

and the immeasurable scope
 of Your power
 in us who believe.
 Through our Lord Jesus Christ,
 Your Son,
 Who lives and reigns with You
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
 God, for ever and ever.
 — Amen

READING: Jn 14:6-10, 15-17, 24-26
 The Lord be with you.

— *And with your spirit*
 A Reading from the holy Gospel
 according to John
 — *Glory to You, O Lord*
 Jesus said, "I am the way,
 and the truth, and the life.
 No one comes to the Father
 but through Me.
 If you really knew Me,
 you would know My Father also.
 From this point on you know Him;
 you have seen Him."

"Lord," Philip said to Him,
 "show us the Father,
 and that will be enough for us."

"Philip," Jesus replied,
 "after I have been with you
 all this time,
 you still do not know Me?
 Whoever has seen Me
 has seen the Father.
 How can you say,
 'Show us the Father'?
 Do you not believe
 that I am in the Father
 and the Father is in Me?
 The words that I speak
 are not spoken of Myself;
 it is the Father Who lives in Me
 accomplishing His works.

"If you love Me,
 and obey the commands I give you,
 I will ask the Father,
 and He will give you
 another Paraclete
 to be with you always:
 the Spirit of truth,
 Whom the world cannot accept,
 since it neither sees Him
 nor recognizes Him;
 but you can recognize Him
 because He remains with you
 and will be with you. —

Session 13

"He who does not love Me
does not keep My words.
Yet the word you hear
is not Mine;
it comes from the Father
Who sent Me.

"This much I have told you
while I was still with you;
the Paraclete,
the Holy Spirit,
Whom the Father will send
in My name,
will instruct you in everything,
and remind you
of all that I told you."
The Gospel of the Lord
— Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ

IN BRIEF: WHAT THE CHURCH TEACHES

In the Apostles' Creed, we say,
"I believe in God,
the Father Almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth";
"in Jesus Christ,
His only Son, our Lord";
and "in the Holy Spirit."

God is the supreme Spirit,
Who alone exists of Himself,
and is infinite in all perfections.

He is called "almighty"
because He can do all things:
"With God all things are possible."

He is called
"Creator of heaven and earth"
because He made heaven and earth —
in fact, everything —
out of nothing,
simply by His word.

God has no body;
He is a spirit.
He had no beginning:
He always was,
He is,
and He always will be.
He is everywhere.
He knows and sees all things,
even our most secret thoughts.

There is only one God,
but there are three Persons in God:
God the Father,
God the Son,
and God the Holy Spirit.

These three Persons
are not three Gods:

the Father,
the Son,
and the Holy Spirit
are all one and the same God.

This mystery —
three Persons in one God —
is called the mystery
of the *Blessed Trinity*
or the *Holy Trinity*.

The First Person of the Trinity
is the One
Whom Jesus called "Father."

The Second Person of the Trinity
is the One Who became Man
for our salvation.

The Third Person of the Trinity
is the Holy Spirit,
Who "proceeds"
from the Father and the Son.
He is equal to the Father
and to the Son,
for He is the same Lord and God
as they are.

BIBLE READING

Ps 75-107

Again this week
you will be reading the Psalms
as we prepare to study
"Supernatural Life"
next week.

Again we find in the Psalms
just what we want to say:
"I lie prostrate in the dust;
give me life
according to Your word...."

"My comfort in my affliction
is that Your promise
gives me life...."

"In Your kindness give me life....
"You will show me
the path of life:
fullness of joys in Your presence,
the delights at Your right hand
forever."

God: Unity and Trinity

Introduction

God provides us "with constant evidence of Himself in created realities":¹ the universe and the human person.²

Both the universe and the human person bear witness that they do not contain within themselves "their first principle" — they did not make themselves out of nothing — or "their final end" — they do not, of themselves, show us what they were made for.³

Rather, they participate in the being of Someone else: "the first cause" and the "final end" of all things, Who has no beginning and no end.⁴ Thus they bear witness that there exists a Reality outside the universe "Who watches over and controls the world by His providence"⁵ and is the Author of the laws we find "written in our hearts":⁶ a Reality that we call "God."⁷

Since Adam and Eve's fall, we find it difficult to get to know God by human reason alone.⁸ We need Him to reveal spiritual truths — even those we can understand, let alone those we cannot.⁹

Last week, we saw *how* God has revealed Himself. This week, we will see *what* He has revealed about His own nature.

Can we know God?

God is infinite,¹⁰ and we are finite. To us, then, He is incomprehensible. Moreover, anything we do know of Him is inexpressible in our imperfect, image-bound language. We cannot even compare Him with something without admitting that He is incomparable, or say that He is similar to something without admitting that He is even more dissimilar.¹¹

Notice these words: *infinite*, *inexpressible*, *incomparable*. God is *not* finite, *not* bounded; we *cannot* use human language to express what or Who He is; He *cannot* be compared to anything He has created. It is all *negative*. "It gives no true idea of His essence to say that He is unbegotten, and without beginning, changeless and imperishable,... for these do not indicate what He is, but what He is not."¹²

But if God is truly incomprehensible, inexpressible, and incomparable, is there any point in trying to get to know Him?

Yes. In fact, it is God Who takes the initiative. He made us for Himself, and He never stops calling us to seek Him. He wrote the desire for Him into our hearts,¹³ and our hearts remain restless until they rest in Him.¹⁴

Humans, therefore, have always sought God, through prayers, sacrifices, rituals, meditations, *etc.*¹⁵ Getting to know Him requires intellectual effort, a sound will, an upright heart, and the teaching of others.¹⁶

1 CCC 54

2 See CCC 31.

3 See the "Introduction" to this course.

4 See CCC 34.

5 See the talk on "A Place for Science in the Catholic Faith."

6 See the talk on "The Contradictions of Atheism."

7 See CCC 31-34.

8 See Pope Pius XII: *Humani Generis*, 2.

9 See CCC 38.

10 "Boundless," "limitless," "innumerable"; from the Latin *finitus* ("finished").

11 See CCC 43. Humans can be compared and contrasted because we are all the same *kind* of being. For example, one person can be heavier and another wiser. But God is our Creator — He made us out of nothing (see Gn 1:1) — so He is different from us in a way that utterly transcends any difference that can exist between created things (see CCC 43).

12 John of Damascus: *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Book 1, Chapter IV

13 If we forget, overlook, or reject God, it is through fear, ignorance, or indifference; in revolt against the world's evil; because we are distracted by cares, riches, or irreligious thought; or because we are repelled by believers' bad example (see CCC 29).

14 See CCC 30.

15 See CCC 28, 285. Also see C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*: Book II, 1.

God is one

"I believe in one God," we say in the Nicene Creed.¹⁷ Belief in God's oneness is inseparable from belief in His existence.¹⁸

The pagan "gods" are not "God" in our sense, for they are limited and confined by laws and circumstances outside themselves (including the existence of their fellow-gods). "Those who believed in many gods very seldom, in fact, regarded their gods as creators of the universe and as self-existent."¹⁹

God revealed His *oneness* to the Israelites in the Old Testament: "I am God; there is no other!"²⁰ Jesus repeated it: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone!"²¹ The psalmist exulted in it: "Who is like the Lord our God, Who is enthroned on high, and looks upon the heavens and the earth below?"²²

God's name

God is not an anonymous force. He has a name, and He has revealed it. Now to disclose one's name is to make oneself accessible, to allow oneself to be addressed as a person and known intimately.²³ God revealed Himself to the Israelites progressively, under various names. However, the most fundamental was the one He used when He called Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt.²⁴

"I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob,"²⁵ God said to Moses out of the burning bush.²⁶ But Moses replied, "When I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' if they ask me, 'What is His name?' what am I to tell them?"²⁷

And God said, "*I Am Who Am.*" "This is My name forever; this is My title for all generations."²⁸ Written *YHWH* in Hebrew, it means "I Am He Who Is," "I Am Who Am," "I Am Who I Am." In English we say *Yahweh* or, mistakenly, *Jehovah*.²⁹

Out of respect, the Jews, in reading Scripture, always replace it with the title "Lord," and, traditionally, Christians have done the same. In fact, two recent Vatican documents have ruled that this tradition must be upheld: *Yahweh* must not be used anywhere in the Church's liturgy, but be replaced with "Lord."³⁰

God used the same name at Mount Sinai. "Let me see Your glory!" Moses asked, and God replied, "I will make all My beauty pass before you, and in your presence I will pronounce My name, 'YHWH.'"³¹ Then God passed before Moses and cried out, "YHWH, YHWH, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity, continuing His kindness for a thousand generations, and

16 See CCC 30.

17 See CCC 202.

18 See CCC 200.

19 C.S. Lewis: *Miracles*, II

20 Is 45:22. See also Dt 4:39,6:4; Is 43:10.

21 See Mk 12:29-30; Jn 17:3.

22 Ps 113:5-6

23 See CCC 203.

24 See CCC 204.

25 Ex 3:6

26 About 1446 BC.

27 Ex 3:13

28 Ex 3:14-15

29 In Hebrew, *Adonai*, and in Greek, *Kyrios*, were substituted for YHWH. In such cases, the vowels of the word to be read were ordinarily written with the consonants of the word not to be read, and the consonants of the substitute were written in the margin. However, since "Adonay" was always read instead of JHVH, it was deemed unnecessary always to note the consonants of the substitute. When Christian scholars did not know this rule or regarded the substitution as Jewish superstition, they read the Hebrew text as it was. "Jehovah," therefore, is a misreading of Yahweh derived by combining the consonants of JHVH with the vowels of ADONAI (see the 1911 *Encyclopedia Britannica*).

30 "By directive" of Pope Benedict XVI, the Vatican ruled that 1) "in liturgical celebrations, in songs and prayers, the name of God in the form YHWH is to be neither used nor pronounced"; and 2) in translations of the Bible, ADONAI YHWH is to be replaced with "Lord God" (Letter to Bishops' Conferences on the Name of God June 29 2008, reiterating the ruling in *Liturgiam Authenticam* March 28 2001). There are two reasons, the letter said. One is "philological." For example, when Paul wrote about Jesus that "God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name" (Phil 2:9), he meant the name "Lord"; the attribution of this title was equivalent to a proclamation of His divinity. The other reason is a desire "to remain faithful to the Church's tradition."

forgiving wickedness and crime and sin."^{3 2}

God is

The unutterable name "*I Am Who Am*" contains the truth that God alone *is*. Only He is the fullness of being and of every perfection, without beginning or end. His creation receives all it is and all it has from Him, but He is everything that He is *of Himself*. He alone *is* His very being.^{3 3}

"*I Am*" is both the revelation and the refusal of a name. It is "mysterious, just as God is mystery," and so it "better expresses God as what He is — infinitely above everything that we can understand or say."^{3 4}

God is holy

When God called Moses from the burning bush, Moses went over — amazed and trembling, not daring to look^{3 5} — to see why the bush was not being consumed. But God said, "Come no nearer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground."^{3 6}

"Holy"^{3 7} means "consecrated" or "sacred": "separated from the affairs of this world." But this does not give the word's *flavour*.

C.S. Lewis says that if you knew there was a tiger next door, you would know you were in danger and you would feel fear. If you knew there was a ghost next door, you would feel a different kind of fear: not fear of what it might do to you, but of what it is. A ghost is "uncanny" or "eerie" rather than dangerous, and the fear of it can be called "dread."^{3 8} A similar fear arises "when a child has to walk through the woods in the dark," or if "someone has to keep watch alone in a room with a dead person": "not fear of anything in particular, but simply fear in itself."^{3 9}

Now suppose you knew there was a mighty spirit next door. You would feel neither fear nor dread, but still a profound disturbance.^{4 0} We call it "awe," and an object that excites awe is described as "numinous."^{4 1}

Many ancient religions recognized the numinous presence that haunted^{4 2} thunderclouds and black mountain-tops, but only the Jews identified it with the righteous Lord. *Numinous plus righteous equals holy*, says Lewis.^{4 3}

Our reaction to the holy is called *fear of the Lord*.^{4 4} It is not pure terror, alarm, or fright, but experience and knowledge of God as utterly holy, totally other, incomprehensible, absolute, almighty,^{4 5} all-knowing, and absolutely majestic.^{4 6}

For example, before the glory of God, Whom the Seraphim^{4 7} call "holy! holy!

31 Ex 33:18

32 Ex 34:6-7

33 See CCC 213.

34 See CCC 206.

35 See Acts 7:31-32.

36 Ex 3:5

37 From the Hebrew *kadosch*.

38 See C.S. Lewis: *The Problem of Pain*, I.

39 Joseph Ratzinger: *Introduction to Christianity*, Part Two, II, 3

40 Angels appearing to humans say, "Do not be afraid" (see Dn 10:7-12,19; Lk 1:30, 2:10; Mt 28:5; Acts 27:24). Lewis says, about the appearance of an angel (an "eldil"), "Here at last was a bit of that world from beyond the world, which I had always supposed that I loved and desired, breaking through and appearing to my senses, and I didn't like it. I wanted it to go away. I wanted every possible distance, gulf, curtain, blanket, and barrier to be placed between it and me" (C.S. Lewis: *Perelandra*, 1).

41 For examples, see Agatha Christie: *The Tuesday Club Murders*, "The Idol House of Astarte," and C.S. Lewis: *Till We Have Faces*.

42 "'Haunted'... 'haunting'... what a quality there is in that first syllable! Would not a child who had never heard the word before and did not know its meaning shudder at the mere sound if, as the day was closing in, it heard one of its elders say to another, 'This house is haunted?'" (C.S. Lewis: *Perelandra*, 1).

43 See C.S. Lewis: *The Problem of Pain*, I.

44 One of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit (see CCC 1831, 1845).

45 See CCC 271.

46 "Perfect love casts out all fear" (1 Jn 4:18), but so do ignorance, alcohol, passion, presumption, and stupidity. It is very desirable that we should all advance to the perfection of love in which we shall fear no longer; but it is very undesirable, until we have reached that stage, that we should allow any inferior agent" to do so (C.S. Lewis: *The World's Last Night*, "The World's Last Night").

47 The angels closest to God's throne (see Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite: *De Coelesti Hierarchia*).

holy!" Isaiah cried: "Woe is me! I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean lips."⁴⁸ Before Jesus transfigured, the apostles "fell forward on the ground."⁴⁹ After the miraculous catch of fish, Peter exclaimed: "Leave me, Lord. I am a sinful man."⁵⁰

God is Truth

Gradually, the Israelites came to understand the riches of the divine name. For example, "*I Am*" means that God is permanent and constant, transcending the changeable world and all its history.⁵¹

Even an atheist friend of mine realized that. When the media were criticizing the newly elected Pope Benedict XVI for not "relaxing" Church law, he asked indignantly, "How can the Pope change the moral law? *Can God change?*"

No; God is permanent. And what is permanent must be the truth.⁵² God is Truth Itself. When He reveals Himself, He reveals Truth.⁵³ His truth is His wisdom, which governs creation and commands its order.⁵⁴

God is gracious and merciful

"*I Am*" also expresses God's fidelity. About 2091 BC, God called Abraham, promising to make him "the father of a host of nations."⁵⁵ 650 years later, He remembers His promise, and comes to free Abraham's descendants from slavery. Despite our faithlessness, He forgives us⁵⁶ and continues His kindness to us.⁵⁷

Both Old and New Testaments present God as just and loving.⁵⁸ However, "it is Christ's cross that ultimately reveals how two qualities that appear to be in tension can actually be reconciled: namely how a holy God can make sinners right with Himself without leaving sin unjustly unpunished."⁵⁹

By giving us His Son, God reveals that He is "rich in mercy."⁶⁰ By His death, Jesus reveals that He Himself bears God's name. "When you lift up the Son of Man [on the cross], then you will come to realize that '*I Am*,'"⁶¹ He said.⁶²

God is Love

What made God reveal Himself to Israel and choose her for His own people was "His sheer gratuitous love."⁶³ The Bible compares it to a father's love for his son,⁶⁴ a mother's for her children,⁶⁵ and a bridegroom's for his bride.⁶⁶

God's love is "enduring."⁶⁷ "My love shall never leave you nor My covenant of peace be shaken," He says.⁶⁸ "With age-old love I have loved you."⁶⁹

Out of love God created us.⁷⁰ Out of love He keeps us in existence.⁷¹ Out of

48 See Is 6:3-5.

49 See Mt 17:6.

50 See Lk 5:8. "Suddenly it came over him that he was a very ordinary sinful man faced with something so beautiful as to be quite unbearable." Peter himself says, "I'll never quite get over that first moment — the sun on the sea, and the fish leaping and shining, and the shock of knowing that He wasn't — that He wasn't ordinary" (Dorothy Sayers: *The Man Born to be King*, The Fourth Play).

51 See CCC 212.

52 See Ps 119:160; 2 Sm 7:28.

53 See Mal 2:6; Jn 18:37; 1 Jn 5:20.

54 See CCC 216.

55 Gn 17:5

56 See Hos 12:9.

57 Ex 34:7

58 See Ex 34:6; Ps 85:10, 86:15; Jn 1:14.

59 Paul Coulter: *Mass Killing in the Old Testament*

60 Eph 2:4

61 Jn 8:28

62 See CCC 211.

63 CCC 218

64 For example, see Hos 11:1.

65 For example, see Is 49:14-15.

66 For example, see Is 62:4-5; Ez 16.

67 Is 54:8

68 Is 54:10

69 Jer 11:3

70 See CCC 295.

71 See CCC 301.

love He redeemed us:⁷² "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son."⁷³

"It's hard to be loved so much," as a man Father Vince knew said about his wife. We readily "accept the love we think we deserve,"⁷⁴ but, with respect to God, none of us can deserve anything.

"Love, then, consists in this; not that we have loved God, but that He has loved us and has sent His Son as an offering for our sins," St. John says.⁷⁵

But John goes further: he says that God *is* love.⁷⁶ Now love is something that one person has for another. If God is a single Person, how can He *be* love?

The answer is that "God is one, but not solitary."⁷⁷ There is only one God, but God is three Persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. They are not three Gods: they are one and the same God.⁷⁸ But in His inmost Being, God is a Trinity of Persons, among Whom there is an eternal exchange of love.⁷⁹

The *Holy Trinity* is a mystery of faith in the strict sense: something we could never know from reason alone. It is the central mystery of Christian faith and life because it is the mystery of God in Himself. It is the most fundamental and essential of all spiritual truths, the source of all the others and the light that enlightens them.⁸⁰

Jesus revealed God the Father

Many religions have called God "Father."⁸¹ Israel called Him "Father" because He created the world⁸² and because His authority transcends all other authority,⁸³ but even more because of His gift of the Law and His covenant with Israel as His "first-born son."⁸⁴ However, God's parental tenderness is also expressed⁸⁵ by the image of motherhood,⁸⁶ which emphasizes His intimacy with His creation.⁸⁷

Religious language thus draws on our experience of human parents. It is they who first represent God to us, even though they are fallible and sinful, "and can disfigure the face of fatherhood and motherhood."⁸⁸

God is the origin and standard of human fatherhood and motherhood, but He transcends both. In fact, "He is neither man nor woman: He is God."⁸⁹

The Jews, then, referred to God as Father, but Jesus revealed that He is "Father" in a sense never before heard of: by His eternal relationship to God the Son.⁹⁰

Unlike any other Jew,⁹¹ Jesus *addressed* God as "Father."⁹² When He said, "The

72 See CCC 410.

73 Jn 3:16

74 Stephen Chbosky: *Perks of Being a Wallflower*

75 1 Jn 4:10

76 1 Jn 4:8,16

77 See CCC 254. *Fides Damasi* is a creed once attributed to Pope Damasus (Pope 366-384), but now thought to have originated in Gaul toward the end of the fifth century.

78 *The Penny Catechism*, 24-26

79 See CCC 221.

80 See CCC 234.

81 See CCC 238.

82 Dt 32:6

83 See CCC 239.

84 Ex 4:22

85 See CCC 239.

86 See Is 49:15, 66:13.

87 "The proximity of God is not a threat to a creature but, on the contrary, that which allows the creature to be most fully itself. If a fellow-creature were to enter into the very constitution of my being, I would be the victim of an aggression, and my freedom and integrity would be undermined. But the true God can enter into the most intimate ontological unity with a creature, and the result is not diminution but enhancement of creaturely being. God and the worldly are therefore capable of an ontological coinherence, a being-in-the-other, so that each can let the other be even as they enter into the closest contact" (Robert Barron: *The Priority of Christ*, 3).

88 See CCC 239.

89 See CCC 239.

90 We are not talking here about the fact that Jesus was the son of a virgin. We are talking about a relationship that existed from all eternity.

91 See Joachim Jeremias: *The Prayers of Jesus*, 11, 138. Also see the talk on "Who is Jesus Christ?"

92 See Mt 6:9, 26:39,42; Mk 14:36; Lk 10:21, 11:2, 22:42, 23:34,46; Jn 11:41, 12:27, 17:1,5,11,21,24,25. The only exception is Jesus' cry from the cross — "My God, why have You forsaken Me? — when He was praying

Father and I are one," therefore, His hearers realized that He meant something quite new. Accordingly, they exclaimed, "You Who are only a Man are making Yourself God,"⁹³ and they picked up rocks to stone Him. When they denounced Him to the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, they said, "We have our law, and according to that law He must die,"⁹⁴ because He made Himself God's Son."⁹⁵

As God's Son, Jesus images His Father so perfectly that He *could* say, "The Father and I are One."⁹⁶ As He said to Philip, "Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me?"⁹⁷

St. Paul calls Him "the image of the invisible God."⁹⁸ The Letter to the Hebrews calls Him "the reflection of the Father's glory, the exact representation of the Father's Being."⁹⁹

Jesus revealed God the Holy Spirit

Thus Jesus revealed God as His Father and Himself as God the Son.

But He also revealed the Holy Spirit as a third divine Person. "The Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My name, will instruct you in everything, and remind you of all that I told you,"¹⁰⁰ He said. "I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. When He comes, however, being the Spirit of truth, He will guide you to all truth.

"He will not speak on His own, but will speak only what He hears, and will announce to you the things to come," Jesus continued. "In doing this He will give glory to Me, because He will have received from Me what He will announce to you. All that the Father has belongs to Me. That is why I said that what He will announce to you, He will have from Me."¹⁰¹

Then, "when the day of Pentecost"¹⁰² had come, it found them gathered in one place. Suddenly, from up in the sky, there came a noise like a strong, driving wind, which was heard all through the house where they were seated. Tongues of fire appeared, which parted and came to rest on each of them. All were filled with the Holy Spirit. They began to express themselves in foreign tongues and make bold proclamations as the Spirit prompted them."¹⁰³

Jesus' sending of the Holy Spirit after His own Ascension and glorification at the Father's right hand completed His revelation of the mystery of the Holy Trinity.¹⁰⁴

The Church believes in the Trinity

The truth of the Holy Trinity has been at the root of the Church's belief from the beginning.¹⁰⁵

For example, Jesus told His apostles to baptize "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"¹⁰⁶ — "in the name," not "in the names," for there is only one God. St. Paul finished one of his letters with a salutation which is now used in the Mass: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all!"¹⁰⁷ We begin and end our

in the words of Psalm 22:2.

93 Jn 10:30-33

94 See Lv 24:16.

95 Jn 19:7

96 Jn 10:30

97 Jn 14:9-10

98 Col 1:15

99 Heb 1:3

100 Jn 14:26

101 Jn 16:12-15

102 From the Greek *pentekoste* ("the fiftieth day") after the Resurrection.

103 Acts 2:1-4

104 See CCC 244.

105 See CCC 249.

106 Mt 28:19

107 2 Cor 13:13

prayers "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

During the first few centuries, the Church clarified and deepened her understanding of the Holy Trinity.¹⁰⁸ To do this, she had to develop her own terminology, using notions from philosophy, but giving them "a new and unprecedented meaning."¹⁰⁹ For example, she uses

- "substance" (also "essence" and "nature") to designate the divine Being in Its unity.
- "person" or "hypostasis" to designate the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in Their real distinctness.
- "relation" to designate the fact that the distinctions among the Persons lie in the relationship of Each to the Others.¹¹⁰

The Church also had to defend the dogma of the Holy Trinity "against the errors that were deforming it."¹¹¹ For example, at the First Council of Nicaea in 325, she maintained that the Son is "consubstantial"¹¹² with the Father — that He has the same nature. At the First Council of Constantinople in 381, she explained that He is "born of the Father before all ages: God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made."

At that same Council, she stated, "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, Who proceeds from the Father." Later, she made it clear that "the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, is God, one and equal with the Father and the Son, of the same substance and also of the same nature."¹¹³ In the Nicene Creed, we state that "with the Father and the Son," He is "adored and glorified."

The Church thus recognized the Father as "the source and origin"¹¹⁴ of the whole divinity,¹¹⁵ but she explained that the origin¹¹⁶ of the Holy Spirit is also connected with the Son: "The Holy Spirit ... is not called the Spirit of the Father alone, ... but the Spirit of both the Father and the Son."¹¹⁷ In the Creed, therefore, we say that the Spirit "proceeds from the Father and the Son."¹¹⁸

* * * * *

The dogma of the Holy Trinity

Let us summarize:¹¹⁹

- *The Trinity is One.* There are not three Gods, but one God in three Persons. "The Father is that which the Son is, the Son that which the Father is, the Father and the Son that which the Holy Spirit is: *i.e.*, by nature one God."¹²⁰ They do not share the divinity: "each of the Persons is that supreme reality, *viz.*, the divine substance, essence, or nature."¹²¹
- *The Unity is Three.* "Father," "Son," and "Holy Spirit" are not different modes of divinity: they are three distinct Persons. "He is not the Father Who is the Son, nor is the Son He Who is the Father, nor is the Holy Spirit He Who is the Father or the Son."¹²²
- *The divine Persons are distinct in their relations of origin:*¹²³ "It is the Father Who generates [or begets, the Son], the Son Who is begotten [by the Father], and the Holy Spirit Who proceeds [from Father and Son]."¹²⁴ Thus, in their names, "the Father is related to the Son, the Son to the Father, and the Holy Spirit to both."¹²⁵

108 See CCC 250.

109 See CCC 251.

110 See CCC 252.

111 CCC 250

112 "Of the same substance," from the Latin *consubstantialis*, a translation of the Greek *homoousios*.

113 Eleventh Council of Toledo, 675

114 Here, the word does not mean "beginning"; see below.

115 Sixth Council of Toledo, 638

116 Again, the word does not mean "beginning"; see below.

117 Eleventh Council of Toledo, 675

118 See Appendix 2.

119 See CCC 253-256.

120 Eleventh Council of Toledo, 675

121 Fourth Lateran Council, 1215

122 Eleventh Council of Toledo, 675

123 CCC 254

Trying to understand

The Trinity is a mystery. However, "mystery" means a truth of which we cannot know everything, not a truth of which we cannot know anything.¹²⁶

There is a legend that St. Augustine once saw a child with a seashell trying to empty the sea into a hole in the sand. "That is impossible!" the saint exclaimed, and the child replied, "No more than for a finite mind to contain the Infinite."¹²⁷ Often represented in art,¹²⁸ it has deterred many people from thinking about the Trinity.

Let us, rather, like Augustine,¹²⁹ try to understand more deeply. Indeed, "one of the primary duties of a believer is — through prayer, study, and experience — to grow in faith; i.e., to develop an understanding of what God has revealed."¹³⁰

The following analogy¹³¹ might help. Humans can distinguish three dimensions. In one dimension, we can draw straight lines. In two dimensions, we can draw squares, which are made of four straight lines. In three dimensions, we can build solid figures like cubes, which are made of six squares.

As we advance from one dimension to three, we do not leave the concepts of the earlier stages behind, but they are combined in new ways: ways we could not possibly imagine if we were restricted to the earlier stages.

In four dimensions, presumably, we could build "super-solid" figures, made out of cubes as cubes are made of squares and squares made of lines. We cannot know everything about these figures — we cannot imagine them or build them — but we can see that their existence is not opposed to reason.¹³²

Now on the human level, one person is one being, and two persons are two separate beings — just as in two dimensions, one square is one figure, and two squares are two separate figures. On the divine level, there are still persons, but they are combined in new ways: ways that we, confined to the human level, cannot imagine. On the divine level, we find a Being Who is three Persons while remaining one Being, just as a cube is six squares while remaining one cube.

This is only an analogy. We will never be able to comprehend the Holy Trinity, for it contains depths beyond depths — heights beyond heights — of truth; it is an inexhaustible well, or an unlimited mountain, or an endless gallery, of truth.¹³³

Is there any point in thinking about It, then? The answer is a resounding Yes! Anyone who loves *wants* to be known by the beloved. God wants us to know Him in His deepest and most secret life, and so even now He gives us a glimpse of that truth which we will spend eternity enjoying and communicating to one another.¹³⁴

So let us meditate on what the Church knows of the Holy Trinity.

One nature¹³⁵

The three divine Persons — God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy

124 Fourth Lateran Council, 1215

125 Eleventh Council of Toledo, 675

126 From the Greek *mysterion* ("something closed" or "a secret"). A "mystery" is "a divinely revealed truth whose very possibility cannot be rationally conceived before it is revealed and, after revelation, whose inner essence cannot be fully understood by the finite mind." Though "incomprehensible," a mystery is "intelligible" (John Hardon: *Modern Catholic Dictionary*).

127 Between 1259 and 1266, Archbishop Jacobus de Voragine of Genoa Italy put together the *Golden Legend*, a series of stories about saints. The anecdote about Augustine was added to it when it was first printed in English translation by William Caxton in 1483. The translator said that he had seen it depicted above St. Austin's altar at the Dominican Friary in Antwerp Holland, but added that he had not found it in the English, French, or Latin versions of the *Golden Legend*.

128 Benozzo Gozzoli (1420-1497), a pupil of Fra Angelico (1387-1455), painted one of the earliest versions for St. Augustine's Church in San Gimignano, in Tuscany Italy. In 1656, Miguel de Santiago painted it on the outside of the Augustinian monastery in Quito Ecuador. Pope Benedict XVI represented it in his coat of arms by a seashell (see Joseph Ratzinger: *God and the World*, Part II, 11, "The Trinity").

129 See Augustine: *De Trinitate*.

130 John Hardon: *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, "Mystery"

131 C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, Book IV, 2

132 That is, they are not fully comprehensible, but they are intelligible. In fact, mathematicians can and do describe n-dimensional figures mathematically.

133 See Frank Sheed: *A Map of Life*, VIII.

134 See the talk on "Prayer."

135 See Frank Sheed: *A Map of Life*, VIII.

Spirit — do not share the one divine nature: they each possess it in its totality.

They are not like us. We say that we all have human nature, but no one has the *whole* of human nature: we each have some of the human characteristics, but we lack others.

However, the Father, Who is God, and therefore infinite, cannot lack anything. Neither can the Son or the Holy Spirit. Each, then, has the divine nature in its entirety.¹³⁶ In fact, the Church teaches that among the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, there is only one Mind and one Will. They all know with the same Mind and love with the same Will.¹³⁷

In fact, the whole of God's work — creation, salvation, the Church — is the common work of the three divine Persons. Just as the Trinity has only one and the same nature, so It has only one and the same operation outside the Godhead.¹³⁸

Accordingly, the Church prays at Mass to the "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, Who, by the will of the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit, through [His] death gave life to the world."

The three Persons, then, are not separate. There is only one God.

Three Persons¹³⁹

However, the three Persons are distinct. And the only distinction there can be among three Persons Who each possess the whole of one and the same nature is a distinction in the *relations* among them.

The Bible uses two terms for the relation between the First Person and the Second: it calls the Second Person both the *Son* and the *Word*.

A son proceeds from his father not by being made, but by being begotten.¹⁴⁰ Now begetting produces something of a similar nature. What a human *begets* is another human; what he *makes* is a chair, or a painting, or a story, which does not possess human nature, even though it reflects something of the maker.

God the Father *begets*¹⁴¹ God the Son. Because of the likeness in nature, and because the nature is infinite, they are equal.

Now consider the Son as the Word. When we humans speak, our words reflect the objects we are thinking about — more or less. But when God speaks, His Word reflects the object He is thinking about perfectly. When He speaks of Himself, His Word is the perfect Image of Himself: a living and eternal Person, equal to Himself in all perfections. Accordingly, St. John says that "in the beginning was the Word; the Word was in God's presence, and the Word was God."¹⁴²

Now between Father and Son, there is Love. And just as the Father's Word is a Person, equal to Himself in all perfections, so the Love between the Father and the Son is a Person, equal to the Father and the Son in all perfections. He is the Third Person of the Holy Trinity: the Holy Spirit.

Following St. Luke, who says that at Pentecost, "there came a noise like a strong, driving wind,"¹⁴³ and St. John, who says that Jesus "breathed" on His apostles and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit,"¹⁴⁴ the Church says that the Holy Spirit is "breathed

136 "We believe that each individual Person in the Trinity is the one, true, complete, and perfect God" (Second Council of Lyons, 1274: *Profession of Faith of Michael Palaeologus*).

137 "We believe in the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in one omnipotent God, and in the whole Godhead in the Trinity: co-essential, consubstantial, co-eternal, and co-omnipotent; of one will, power, and majesty" (Second Council of Lyons, 1274: *Profession of Faith of Michael Palaeologus*). "These three Persons are one God, not three Gods; for the three Persons have one substance, one essence, one nature, one divinity, one immensity, one eternity. And everything is one where there is no distinction by relative opposition"; that is, no distinction in relation to the other Persons (Council of Florence, Session 11, February 4 1442).

138 See CCC 258.

139 See Frank Sheed: *A Map of Life*, 8.

140 The word is most often used of men, but it can also be used of women. In the act of begetting, both the man and the woman contribute a gamete (sperm or ovum) which contains half the chromosomes necessary for a new human being. However, the woman, besides begetting, also bears the new human being.

141 We say "begets" — in the "eternal present" — instead of "has begotten" because with God there is no time: no past, present, future, beginning, or end. See Appendix 1.

142 Jn 1:1. In French, "the Word" is given by both "la Parole" and "le Verbe."

143 Acts 2:2

forth," or "spirated,"¹⁴⁵ by the Father and the Son.

The difference between the generation of the Son and the spiration of the Holy Spirit lies in the difference between intellect and will: it is by an act of His intellect that God speaks His Word and by an act of His will that He breathes forth the Holy Spirit, for the will is the faculty with which one loves.¹⁴⁶

Appropriation

As we have said, the Trinity has only one and the same operation outside the Godhead.¹⁴⁷ However, because the three divine Persons are distinct, each performs the common work according to His unique Personal characteristic.¹⁴⁸

In Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, therefore, God's actions are often attributed to, or associated with, or (in technical language) *appropriated* to, one or other of the Three Persons.

For example, the Church recognizes "one God and Father *from Whom* all things are, and one Lord Jesus Christ *through Whom* all things are, and one Holy Spirit *in Whom* all things are."¹⁴⁹ We often say that the Father creates, the Son redeems, and the Holy Spirit sanctifies.

Nevertheless, everything is the work of the one God — the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Co-equal

The Church calls God the Father "the source and origin of the whole divinity,"¹⁵⁰ for God the Son is begotten by Him and the Holy Spirit spirated by Him and the Son.

Now this sounds as though the Father existed before the Son and the Son before the Holy Spirit, making the Holy Spirit inferior to the Son and the Son inferior to the Father. But the Church says that "none of the Persons precedes any of the others in eternity, nor does any have greater immensity or greater power."¹⁵¹

In fact, a *source* or *origin* or *cause* does not have to exist before its *effect* or *result*. For example, force causes acceleration, but it does not exist before the acceleration; as soon as the force exists, so does the acceleration. If three books are one on top of another, the position of the upper *results from* the position of the lower, but the lower did not have to be in position *before* the upper; they could have been arranged this way simultaneously. If you imagine a sunset, the result is an image, but the imagining does not precede the image; the image is there as soon as you imagine.¹⁵²

Similarly, God the Father is the origin of God the Son, but He did not exist before Him. God the Father and God the Son are the origin of God the Holy Spirit, but they did not exist before Him.

God is

In fact, God is not subject to time at all: He is outside time.¹⁵³ This is difficult to imagine, but let us try.

An author writes, "A knock came at the door and Mary jumped up." For Mary, living in the story's imaginary time, there is no delay between hearing the knock and jumping up. But for the author, living outside that imaginary time, there may be a delay of three hours between writing the first half of that sentence and writing

144 Jn 20:22

145 The word is related to our words "respiration," "expire," "spirit," etc.

146 See Thomas Aquinas: *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, 27.

147 See CCC 258.

148 See CCC 258–259.

149 Second Council of Constantinople, 553

150 Sixth Council of Toledo, 638

151 Council of Florence, Session 11, February 4 1442

152 See C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, Book IV, 3.

153 See Appendix 1.

the second. In fact, the second half could be written even before the first. Time for the creator is not the same as time for the people he creates.

Of course, a human author is still subject to time, but the divine Author¹⁵⁴ is not. We live our own lives moment by moment, so we have a past, a present, and a future. The past we have already lost; the future we do not yet have. But God, in His own nature, is infinite. There cannot be anything He has lost or does not yet have.¹⁵⁵

Consequently, we talk of God's "eternal present." Anything God does or is, He does or is eternally, without beginning or end. God the Father eternally begets the Son and utters the Word. The Father and the Son eternally breathe forth the Holy Spirit.

God is love

St. John said that God is love.¹⁵⁶ His very Being is love.¹⁵⁷ He loves all His creation, but He did not have to create in order to have something to love.

St. Augustine describes God as Lover, Beloved, and Love: One Who loves, One Who is loved, and Love Itself.¹⁵⁸ In St. John's Gospel, Jesus uses the Greek word *agape*¹⁵⁹ for this love.¹⁶⁰ *Agape* is a totally selfless love; it seeks to benefit not the lover, but only the beloved.¹⁶¹

We may think of God, then, as a Lover, the One Who gives God's Self away; the Beloved, the One Who receives that love and rejoices in it; and the Gift of that love Itself. God is thus an endless, infinite explosion of love.

God is incomprehensible

All this may sound very complicated. But we are talking about God. Even when He reveals Himself, God remains a mystery beyond words: "If you understood Him, it would not be God."¹⁶²

Traces in creation

We call God "Creator of heaven and earth" because He made all things out of nothing, by His Word.¹⁶³ He made them "by Himself; that is, by His Word and by His Wisdom," or "by the Son and the Spirit," Who, so to speak, are "His hands."¹⁶⁴

Just as a human craftsman leaves traces of himself in his work, so God has left traces of His Trinitarian Being in His.¹⁶⁵ When He created humans, He said, "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness."¹⁶⁶ The plural word "Our," St. Augustine says, implies that "the image of the Trinity was made in man, that in this way man should be the image of the one true God."¹⁶⁷

154 See Wis 13:15; Acts 3:15.

155 See C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, Book IV, 3.

156 Jn 1:1

157 See CCC 221.

158 See Augustine: *De Trinitate*, Book XV, 5, 10. We must beware of re-naming the Persons of the Trinity. "The New Testament picture of a Father and a Son turns out to be much more accurate than anything we try to substitute for it. That is what always happens when you go away from the words of the Bible. It is quite right to go away from them for a moment in order to make some special point clear. But you must always go back. Naturally God knows how to describe Himself much better than we know how to describe Him" (C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, Book IV, 4). For example, the formula "Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier" is not satisfactory, for it does not describe Who God is in His very being, but only what He has done for us (Scott Hahn: *First Comes Love*, Chapter 4).

159 Greek has different words for different kinds of love; besides *agape* there is *storge* ("affection"), *philia* ("friendship"), and *eros* ("love" in the sense we mean when we speak of "being in love.")

160 See Jn 14:31, 15:9-10.

161 See John Hardon: *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, "Agape."

162 Augustine: Sermon 52, 6, 16; Sermon 117, 3, 5. See CCC 230.

163 *The Penny Catechism*, 19

164 CCC 292

165 See CCC 236-237. In C.S. Lewis' analogy of dimensions (*Mere Christianity*, Book IV, 2), solid figures leave traces of what they are in their two-dimensional shadows.

166 Gn 1:26

167 Augustine: *De Trinitate*, Book XII, 7. The word for "God," *Elohim*, used in the Hebrew of Gn 1:26-27, is plural in form (like *Cherubim*, singular *Cherub*, and *Seraphim*, singular *Seraph*), but the word for

If we read the Bible from the beginning, we learn that God created light, water, land, plants, and animals. Then we read that He created humans "in His own image."¹⁶⁸ At this point, we glance back at what we have read about God in order to see how humans image Him — and all we find is that He is a Creator.¹⁶⁹

Humans image God most closely, perhaps, when they create. It should not surprise us, then, that we can discern a "trinity" in our own acts of creation.

For example, in the writing of a book, there is first the book as *conceived*; second, the book as *written*; and third, the book as *read*.¹⁷⁰

Or imagine putting on a dinner. First, there is the idea of the meal, the menu as planned; second, there is the work of buying, preparing, and serving the food; and third, there is its consumption by the guests.¹⁷¹

Each can be called "the dinner." The dinner could not be said to have "come off" if any one of them were missing. Nevertheless, there is only one dinner.

"He hath made man in His own image, a maker and craftsman like Himself, a little mirror of His triune majesty."¹⁷²

Conclusion

Does all this really matter? *Yes*; more than anything in the world. For God — an eternal exchange of love¹⁷³ among the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit — destines us to share in that exchange.¹⁷⁴

"At the heart of the divine act of creation is the divine desire to make room for created persons in the communion of the uncreated Persons" of the Holy Trinity.¹⁷⁵ "The ultimate end of the whole divine economy" — the process by which God dispenses divine life to us — "is the entry of God's creatures into the perfect unity of the Blessed Trinity."¹⁷⁶ This is "the happiness for which we were made."¹⁷⁷

But even here and now, we are called to be dwelling places for the Holy Trinity. "Anyone who loves Me will be true to My word, and My Father will love him; We will come to him and make our dwelling place with him,"¹⁷⁸ Jesus promised.

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"created" in Gn 1:27, *bara*, is singular: "He created."

168 See Gn:1.

169 See Dorothy L. Sayers: *The Mind of the Maker*, II.

170 See Dorothy Sayers: *The Mind of the Maker*, III. Also see J.R.R. Tolkien: *Tree and Leaf*, "Subcreation." Sayers shows how faults in literature are analogous to the heresies caused by ignoring one or more Persons of the Blessed Trinity. In Chapter VII ("Maker of All Things — Maker of Ill Things), readers must heed her "warning" that for her purposes, "evil must not be considered as being *moral* evil." "With infinite wisdom and goodness, God freely willed to create a world in a state of journeying toward its ultimate perfection" and therefore containing *physical* evil as well as *physical* good (CCC 310; see the talk on "The Question of Suffering"), but "God is in no way, directly or indirectly, the cause of moral evil" (CCC 311).

171 See Joseph Ratzinger: *God and the World*, Part I, 3, "The Crown of Creation"

172 Dorothy Sayers: *Zeal of Thy House*, final speech by the Archangel Michael

173 See CCC 221.

174 CCC 221

175 International Theological Commission: *Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God*, 65; see 68 (see the talk on "A Place for Science in the Catholic Faith, Appendix 2).

176 CCC 260

177 C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, Book IV, 4

178 Jn 14:23

Appendix 1: Time and Eternity

C.S. Lewis says that our consciousness of time suggests that our soul, though it experiences time, is not completely "timeful." In order to experience past, present, and future, our soul cannot be merely a succession of states, but rather "a permanent bed along which these different portions of the stream of sensation roll, and which recognizes itself as the same beneath them all."¹ Even in this world, he says, humans are "so far above time" that we can "perceive time flowing past."²

Sheldon Vanauken says, "We live in time as we live in the air we breathe. And we love the air — who has not taken deep breaths of pure, country fresh air, just for the pleasure of it? How strange that we cannot love time. It spoils our loveliest moments. Nothing quite comes up to expectations because of it.... animals, so far as we can see, are unaware of time, untroubled. Time is their natural environment. Why do we sense that it is not ours?"

He quotes C.S. Lewis, who had asked him in a letter, "Do fish complain of the sea for being wet? Or, if they did, would that fact itself not strongly suggest that they had not always been or would not always be purely aquatic creatures?"

Vanauken continues: "Then, if we complain of time and take such joy in the seemingly timeless moment, what does that suggest? It suggests that we have not always been or will not always be purely temporal creatures. It suggests that we were created for eternity.

"Not only are we harried by time, [but] we seem unable, despite a thousand generations, even to get used to it. We are always amazed at it — how fast it goes, how slowly it goes, how much of it has gone. Where, we cry, has the time gone? We aren't adapted to it, not at home in it.

"If that is so, it may appear as a proof, or at least a powerful suggestion, that eternity exists and is our home."³

Pope Benedict says that "eternal life is not an endless sequence of moments, in which we would have to try to overcome boredom and anxiety in the face of what cannot be ended. Eternal life is a new quality of existence, in which everything flows together into the 'now' of love, into that new quality of being that is freed from the fragmentation of existence in the accelerating flight of moments.

"In our mortal life, on one hand, every moment is too short, because life itself seems to pass away with the moment before we can catch hold of it; at the same time, each moment is too long for us, because the great number of moments, each always the same as the others, becomes too laborious for us. Thus it becomes clear that eternal life is not simply what comes afterward, something about which we can form no notion at all. Because it is a new quality of existence, it can be already present in the midst of this earthly life and its fleeting temporality as something new and different and greater, albeit in an imperfect and fragmentary fashion.

"The dividing line between eternal and temporal life is by no means simply of a chronological order: so that the years before death would be temporal life and the endless time afterward, eternal life — as we generally think. Because eternity is not just endless time but another level of being, such a merely chronological distinction cannot be right.

"Eternal life is there, in the midst of time, wherever we come face to face with God; through the contemplation of the living God, it can become something like the firm base of our soul. Like a great love, it can no longer be taken from us by any change or chance; rather, it is an indestructible heart from which spring the courage and the joy to go on, even when exterior things are painful and hard."⁴

1 C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, Chapter IX

2 C.S. Lewis: *The Problem of Pain*, Chapter V

3 Sheldon Vanauken, *A Severe Mercy*, Chapter 9

4 Pope Benedict XVI: *God is Near Us*, My Joy Is to Be in Thy Presence, 2

Appendix 2: *Filioque*

In the Nicene Creed, we say that the Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Father and the Son." The Latin for "and the Son" is *Filioque*. At the Council of Florence (1439-1445) the Church explained that "the Holy Spirit is eternally from Father and Son"; He has "His nature and subsistence" from both "the Father and the Son." He "proceeds eternally from both, as from one principle and through one spiration."¹

If the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, the Church said, then He must also proceed from the Son, for, through generation, the Father gives everything He has to the Son (except His being Father), including the procession of the Holy Spirit.²

Filioque does not appear in the Creed stated in 381 at Constantinople, but Pope Leo I, following an ancient Latin and Alexandrian tradition, had already stated it dogmatically in 447, even before it was stated by Rome at the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

Filioque was gradually admitted into the Latin liturgy between the eighth and eleventh centuries, but it was not admitted to the Eastern liturgy, and it constituted, right up to recent times, a point of disagreement with the Eastern Orthodox, who say that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *through* the Son.³ However, "this legitimate complementarity, provided it does not become rigid, does not affect the identity of faith in the reality of the same mystery confessed."⁴

In May 1995, Eastern Orthodox Bishop Kallistos Ware, who had once adamantly opposed the *Filioque* doctrine, stated that the controversy, which has separated Eastern Orthodox and Catholics for many centuries, "is more than a mere technicality, but it is not insoluble. Qualifying the firm position taken when I wrote *The Orthodox Church* twenty years ago, I now believe, after further study, that the problem is more in the area of semantics and different emphases than in any basic doctrinal differences."⁵

In June 1995, when Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople visited Rome, Pope John Paul II urged that the *Filioque* doctrine be clarified to show its full harmony with the Creed of the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381.⁶

The result, prepared by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in September 1995 and approved by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith,⁷ was a document entitled *The Father as the Source of the Whole Trinity: The Procession of the Holy Spirit in Greek and Latin Traditions*.

This document shows that "the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone" and "the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son" may both have orthodox [*i.e.* true, correct] meanings if the words translated "proceeds" actually have different meanings.⁸

1 Council of Florence, Session 6, July 6 1439

2 See the Council of Florence, Session 11, February 4 1442.

3 See the talk on "Divisions Among Christians."

4 CCC 248

5 Bishop Kallistos Ware of Diokleia: Speech to a Symposium on the Trinity, Rose Hill College, Aiken SC USA, May 28 1995

6 Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity: *The Father as the Source of the Whole Trinity: The Procession of the Holy Spirit in Greek and Latin Traditions*, Introduction

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