

THE TRINITY
GOD THE FATHER - GOD THE SON - GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

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THE TRINITY

The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God in Himself. It is therefore the source of the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them. It is the most fundamental and essential teaching in the hierarchy of the truth of faith.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, para.234

By the grace of Baptism, “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” we are called to share in the life of the Blessed Trinity, here on earth in obscurity of faith, and after death in eternal light.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, para.265

INTRODUCTION

1. Throughout all of creation, mankind has struggled with the concept of God. There has been an acknowledgement of a supreme higher power, acting as some cosmic unseen power, an unseen force yet existing, an independent controlling might with no limitation. And others have no belief whatsoever in the Divine, believing that all life exists only by chance. But those who have some idea of the existence of the Divinity, have struggled and will continue to struggle with the mysterious – an Eternal Spirit with no beginning or end, an essence unknown and not explainable by human reasoning, unfamiliar with the various elements of His Nature.
2. Even great theologians and Doctors of the Church as St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, or the Fathers of the early Church as St. John Chrysostom, St. Athanasius can only admit to the depths of the mystery of God.
3. It is by the power of Scripture that God has been able to present Himself to His creation. Through this medium we begin to learn of the complexity of God in the Trinity.
4. The understanding of God as seen in the Old Testament is of a God named by the realities of daily life; God is our life,¹ God is our shepherd,² God is the vinedresser.³ He was also identified to His own people as Holy One of Israel, God of Abraham.
5. Although God chose to enter dialogue with His people through the patriarchs, prophets, judges and kings, God offered a covenant to the people, but this involvement still veiled an understanding of His Essence.
6. As God continues to pursue man, He names Himself in many encounters with man. Moses asks God by what name should He be called. God responds, “*I AM WHO AM*,”⁴ a name signifying His Eternal existence. In the First Book of Samuel we hear “*THE LIVING GOD*.”⁵ Repeatedly we read in Scripture, both in the Old as well as in the New Testament, God speaks of Himself or is referred to as the “*God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob*.”⁶

THE TRINITY

7. “**Trinity**” is the assigned term to signify the central doctrine of the Christian religion – in truth, we admit, of the unity of the Godhead, three Persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). The Three are truly distinct one from the other. The Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God, and yet there are not three Gods but One God. In the Trinity of Persons, the Son is BEGOTTEN of the Father by an Eternal Generation; the Holy Spirit proceeds by an Eternal Procession from the Father and the Son. Notwithstanding this difference as to origin, the Persons are

¹ Gen. 49:24

² Mi. 7:14

³ Is. 5:1-7

⁴ Ex. 3:13-16

⁵ 1 Sam. 17: 26, 36

⁶ Ex. 4:5

Co-eternal and Co-equal, all are **Uncreated** and **Omnipotent**.

8. This is a MYSTERY of the Holy Trinity and the central mystery of Christian faith and life. Mystery, as used in theology, is meant as a “truth which we are not merely incapable of discovery apart from Divine Revelation, but which, even revealed, remains hidden by the veil of faith and enveloped, so to speak, by a kind of darkness.”⁷
9. “In order to articulate the dogma of the Trinity, the Church had to develop its own terminology with the help of certain notions of philosophical origin: “substance,” “person,” “relation” and so on. In doing this, the Church did not submit the faith to human wisdom, but gave a new and unprecedented meaning to these terms, which from then on would be used to signify an ineffable mystery, infinitely beyond all that we can humanly understand.”⁸
10. “The Church uses the term “substance” (rendered also at times by “nature” or “essence”) to determine the divine being in its unity; the term “person” to designate the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit in the real distinction among them; the term “relation” to designate the fact that their distinction lies in the relationship of each to the others.”⁹
11. Our understanding of the Trinity remains only partial even after we have accepted it as part of the Divine message. Through analogies we can form a representative concept of what is revealed but we cannot attain a fuller knowledge which supposes we have accepted the concept as clearly grasped.
12. In regards to the vindication of a mystery, natural reason can grasp the concept that such can be viewed as being intrinsically possible and yet be inexplicable. Of all revealed truths, this truth is the most impenetrable to reason.
13. The Trinity is commonly regarded among Christians as derived exclusively from the inspiration of the New Testament especially in the passages in John’s Gospel and more sparingly In Paul’s letters. But these passages, though suggestive, cannot yield anything like systematic theology of the inner life of God. The early apologists needed to rely on more elaborate philosophical scheme in order to begin to make coherent sense of the hints they found in the New Testament.

HINTS FROM SCRIPTURE

14. Before Revelation from the Scriptures, how did man come to know of God? Man formed an image of God through the observance of creatures, all of creation and of the immensity of nature to have come into existence at some point in time. In order for anything to begin, there need to be an agent who has the ability or power to give it existence. Neither can man deny the perfect order in nature nor deny its immeasurable beauty. The cycle of life in all types of human, animal or plant life is

⁷ Constitution, “De Fide”, iv

⁸ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (para.251).

⁹ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (para.252).

so orchestrated that it presupposes a dynamic, creative intelligence.

15. Through the narrative of the gospels, Jesus manifested the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity step by step. First He taught the Apostles to recognize Himself as the Eternal Son of God. After His Resurrection, He revealed the doctrine in more explicit terms, bidding them *“go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”*¹⁰ The phrase “in the name of” affirms alike the Persons of the Godhead and their unity of essence. The use of the singular “name” and not the plural, shows that all the Persons mentioned are equally Divine and are One.
16. In the Gospel of John, Jesus not only affirms His Divine nature with His human nature, but admonishes His disciple Philip for lack of understanding of the unity of the Father with Himself, saying *“whoever sees me has seen the Father....do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?the Father who dwells in me is doing His works.”*¹¹ Further in John, Jesus identifies the Divine Unity with His promise to send the Holy Spirit, *“and I will ask the Father and He will send you another Advocate, the Holy Spirit, to be with you always.”*¹²

GOD, THE FATHER

17. As viewed in the Old Testament, God was understood by the Israelites as “Father” but in an entirely different mode. As Father, He was acknowledged as Creator of all things, a Protector in the Exodus experience, a punisher of wrongs yet a rewarder of good, and as a strict “parent” demanding obedience, unquestioning submissiveness, and above all have reverence of His name.
18. In the New Testament, Jesus shows us the Father in a more benevolent manner by which we are loved as His children, heirs of His Kingdom; urging mankind to develop and maintain a personal relationship with Him. In the New Testament, among the Gospels and the letters of the apostles, reference to the Father is noted 263 times. St. Paul in his epistle to the Galatians writes, *“God sent His Son. . .so that we might receive adoption. As proof that you are children, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying out “Abba, Father”. So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if as a child then also an heir, through God.”*¹³
19. God is also our Father thru Baptism when we are reborn according to faith, being made one with Christ, and becoming an adopted child.¹⁴

GOD, THE SON

20. John introduces his Gospel as, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be*

¹⁰ Matt. 28:18

¹¹ Jn. 14:8-12

¹² Jn. 14:15

¹³ Gal. 4:4-7

¹⁴ Gal. 3:26, 4:5; Rom. 8:14-17; Eph. 1:5

through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race.”¹⁵ Further, John continues, “And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only son, full of grace and truth.”¹⁶

21. God so loved His creation that ‘in the fullness of time’¹⁷ He decided to reveal Himself FULLY to His creatures. He sent His Divine Word, God made flesh to be one like us, yet true God, second person of the Trinity, conceived by the Spirit, true human, born of Mary, to take a place in time and history. Jesus, the Word of God, reveals God’s self to His creation, acting as Mediator between the Eternal God and the world of creation.
22. Jesus, the Word in the flesh and the Christ of our faith, is one person, both God and Man, possessing the two natures in the one person. He is chosen by the Father and sent by the Father to be the Messiah, the Redeemer of mankind.
23. As man, Jesus experienced stages of human growth and development, lived an obscure life as a carpenter in his hometown of Nazareth for 30 years before the start of His public ministry of three years. His works and acts demonstrated His authority and earned Him the reputation of Master. Through His suffering, death on the cross, and resurrection from the dead He attained the fulfillment of God’s promise of a Redeemer who would regain for mankind the relationship with God that had been lost by the disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve.

There is no Jesus of history without the Christ of faith; and no Christ of faith without the Jesus of history.

GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

24. Our understanding of God as Sustainer – one who makes all things new, sanctifies and unifies – is God the Holy Spirit. It is through the grace of God that we come to understand God as such.

Scripture is the sole source of understanding the Holy Spirit. The Spirit hovers over the universe, despite its chaos,¹⁸ with Breath of Life, just as the Spirit, in the form of a dove indicated a new beginning for Noah after the flood, there is a new beginning at Jesus’ baptism, when, “*The heavens were opened and he (John, the Baptizer) saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove coming upon Him.*”¹⁹

25. On Pentecost, the “dispirited” disciples were “spirited” and sent, thus the Spirit gives birth to the Church.²⁰ The Church will baptize in the Spirit and boldly witness in the Spirit. Church unity is in the Spirit –one body, one Spirit with many members. All people are drawn to God through the Spirit.
26. Being baptized into the life of God’s Holy Spirit the human person becomes a

¹⁵ Jn. 1:1-4

¹⁶ Jn. 1:14

¹⁷ Gal. 4:4

¹⁸ Gen. 1:1-2

¹⁹ Matt. 3:16

²⁰ Acts 2:1-4

dwelling place of the Triune God. God is part of us and we are a part of God. God's Spirit sustains and guides the Church, it prepares our hearts to receive God's message, inspires and strengthens us in our choices for God's ways, makes us holy, renews our hope, calls us to conversion, and bestows gifts of character and spirit.

KEY PHRASES

- ❖ The mystery of the Holy Trinity is the central mystery of the Christian faith and life.
- ❖ In the Trinity, we speak of only one God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit; not different modes of God but three distinct persons who are the same Divine Being.
- ❖ The Word of God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, was sent by the Father to take our human form in order to redeem mankind and bring us back into friendship with God.
- ❖ The Spirit, promised by Jesus, restores and maintains in man a life of holiness and hope for eternal life.