

Brief on The Holy Trinity¹

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Proof from the Bible and infallible Tradition

“Going therefore, teach ye all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” (Mt. 28:19)

Mt.. 28:19. **In the name of The Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit:** After Jesus’ resurrection, he explicitly taught his disciples the dogma of the Holy Trinity, which states that the one, true God exists in three divine Persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Even though each divine Person is God, there is only one God. The dogma of the Holy Trinity can only be believed by faith because it is above human reason and thus also above human science:

“For many things are shewn to thee above the understanding of men.” (Eccus. 3:25)

Before Jesus rose from the dead and explicitly taught the dogma of the Holy Trinity (as recorded in Matthew 28:19), he hinted at it, as recorded in John 14:26:

“But the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you.”

Before Jesus’ resurrection, the Holy Trinity was manifest at several events:

1) The Holy Trinity was manifest during the Incarnation: “And the angel answering, said to her: The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.” (Lk. 1:35)

2) The Holy Trinity was manifest when Jesus was baptized: “Now it came to pass, when all the people were baptized, that Jesus also being baptized and praying, heaven was opened; and the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily shape, as a dove upon him; and a voice came from heaven: Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.” (Lk. 3:21-22)

3) God the Father and God the Son were manifest during Jesus’ Transfiguration: “And after six days Jesus taketh unto him Peter and James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart: And he was transfigured before them... And...behold a bright cloud overshadowed them. And lo, a voice out of the cloud, saying: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him.” (Mt. 17:1-5)

Before Jesus’ resurrection, he hinted and even explicitly taught that he is God and one with the Father. See commentary on Jn. 1:1.

After Jesus’ resurrection, when belief in the dogma of the Holy Trinity was necessary for salvation, the apostles and other Catholics taught the dogma of the Most Holy Trinity. St. John explicitly teaches this dogma when he says:

¹ RJMI’s Briefs are Long Commentaries contained in the end of *The Catholic Bible*, revised by RJMI.

“There are three who give testimony in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit. And these three are one.” (1 Jn. 5:7)

And St. John teaches that the Word (God the Son) is God and is with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit: “The Word was with God and the Word was God.” (Jn. 1:1) St. Paul speaks of the Holy Trinity when he says: “God hath sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying: Abba, Father.” (Gal. 4:6)

And all the Church Fathers and infallible papal decrees from AD 33 onward teach the dogma of the Holy Trinity. For example, the *Nicene Creed*, composed in 325, says,

“I believe in One God, the Father Almighty... And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God of God, light of light, true God of true God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father... And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who together with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified...”

And the *Athanasian Creed*, also composed in the 4th century, says:

“Now the Catholic faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity, neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the divine nature of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is one, their glory equal, their majesty co-eternal... This is the Catholic faith, which except a man believe faithfully and firmly he cannot be saved.”

During the Old Testament era, God did not explicitly reveal that he existed in a Trinity of persons. But he did give hints, which when reflected upon can be seen very clearly after Jesus revealed the dogma of the Holy Trinity to men during the New Covenant era.

When God created man, he speaks to and of himself in a plurality of persons:

“And he said: Let *us* make man to *our* image and likeness.” (Gen. 1:26)

The “us” is God speaking to himself in the divine three persons of the Holy Trinity. And “image and likeness” is that of God and thus the “our image and likeness” means there is more than one person in the one God. (See Gen. 3:22, Gen. 11:7, Isa. 6:8.)

God also hinted that he exists in a Trinity of persons when some his titles and some events and exaltations are in threes:

Three heavenly spirits appeared to Abraham. It is certain that one was God and the other two may also have been God and thus all three divine persons of the Holy Trinity appeared to Abraham. If one was only God, then the other two were angels and symbolic of the other two divine persons. “And the Lord appeared to him [Abraham] in the vale of Mambre as he was sitting at the door of his tent, in the very heat of the day. And when he had lifted up his eyes, there appeared to him three men standing near him: and as soon as he saw them he ran to meet them from the door of his tent, and adored down to the ground. And he said: Lord, if I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away from thy servant:” (Gen. 18:1-3)

During the Old Covenant era, God was referred to as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob: “The Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared to thee.” (Ex. 4:5)

Aarons’ blessing invokes the Lord’s name three times: “Say to Aaron and his sons: Thus shall you bless the children of Israel, and you shall say to them: The Lord bless thee, and keep thee. The Lord shew his face to thee, and have mercy on thee. The Lord turn his countenance to thee, and give thee peace.” (Num. 6:23-26)

Three Hebrew children were thrown in the fire and were unharmed. And a fourth appeared in the fire, an angel to protect them. This could be symbolic of the three

divine persons in one God. “But the angel of the Lord went down with Azarias and his companions into the furnace: and he drove the flame of the fire out of the furnace, And made the midst of the furnace like the blowing of a wind bringing dew, and the fire touched them not at all, nor troubled them, nor did them any harm. Then these three as with one mouth praised, and glorified, and blessed God in the furnace, saying:” (Dan. 3:49-51)

In Old Testament verses, the word “holy” is mentioned three times hinting at the dogma that there are three holy persons in the one God: For example, “And they cried one to another, and said: Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God of hosts, all the earth is full of his glory.” (Isa. 6:3)—three holies in one Lord God. We read in Luke 1:35 that the Holy Trinity was present during the Incarnation and Jesus is called one of the “holy” persons of the Holy Trinity, along with the Spirit which is called “holy,” and the Father, referred to as the most high, is the other holy: “And the angel answering, said to her: The *Holy* Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the *Holy* which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.” (Lk. 1:35) And the three holy’s in one God is also mentioned in the Book of the Apocalypse: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty.” (Apoc. 4:8)

During the Old Covenant era the Holy Temple represented God’s presence on earth. The Prophet Jeremias says that Israelites invoked the Temple of the Lord three times, hinting at the three persons in the one God, in the one Temple: “Trust not in lying words, saying: The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, it is the temple of the Lord.” (Jer. 7:4)

The holy prophets, at times, invoked God with three Alas’. The Prophet Jeremias “said: Alas, alas, alas, O Lord God, ...” (Jer. 4:10) And “Alas, alas, alas, O Lord God, behold thou hast made heaven and earth by thy great power...” (Jer. 32:17) And the Prophet Ezechiel “said: Alas, alas, alas, O Lord God, wilt thou then destroy all the remnant of Israel...” (Ez. 9:8)

The Prophet Elias laid upon the dead child three times at which point the child rose from the dead. “And he stretched, and measured himself upon the child three times, and cried to the Lord, and said: O Lord my God, let the soul of this child, I beseech thee, return into his body. And the Lord heard the voice of Elias: and the soul of the child returned into him, and he revived.” (3 Ki. 17:21-22)

The three divine persons are united in one nature but are distinct in personhood

Jesus said that the Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father and both are united and one with one another, and this is dogma:

“Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me? (Jn. 14:10) “I and the Father are one.” (Jn. 10:30)

But Jesus also said that the Father was in heaven and thus not on earth with the Son, and this is also dogma:

“So let your light shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” (Mt. 5:16) “Thus therefore shall you pray: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.” (Mt. 6:9)

“Jesus saith to her: Do not touch me, for I am not yet ascended to my Father. But go to my brethren, and say to them: I ascend to my Father and to your Father, to my God and your God.” (Jn. 20:17)

How, then, was the Father in the Son and thus on earth with the Son when the Son said the Father was in heaven and that he was going to ascend to the Father? If the Father was in the Son

before he ascended into heaven, then the Son did not need to ascend to the Father because the Father was already in him.

This riddle, this apparent contradiction, is solved when one knows the following dogmas on the Holy Trinity. In the Holy Trinity there is one God in three divine persons. Hence in the Holy Trinity there is one divine nature (one divine substance, one Godhead) shared by all three persons. Yet each person is distinct from one another. But the three persons are not distinct from one another in the one nature they share in common. Hence while united in nature, they are distinct in personhood. Hence the person of the Father is not the person of the Son nor the person of the Holy Spirit; and the person of the Son is not the person of the Father nor the person of the Holy Spirit; and the person of the Holy Spirit is not the person of the Father nor the person of the Son:

Athanasian Creed, 4th century: “Now the Catholic faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity, neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance. For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the divine nature of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is one, their glory equal, their majesty co-eternal...”

Pope St. Damasus, *Council of Rome*, 382: “(2) We anathematize those also who follow the error of Sabellius, saying that the same one is Father as well as Son.” (D. 60)

Hence the personhoods of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct from one another but united to one another in the one nature they share in common.

Therefore when Jesus says he is in the Father and the Father is in him and they are one with one another, he means by way of the divine nature they share in common but not by way of their personhoods. And when Jesus says the Father is in heaven while he was on earth and thus separate from one another, he means by way of their divine personhoods but not by way of their divine nature which they share in common.

Therefore when the person of the Son was on earth as God and man, the divine nature of the Father was on earth in the Son while the personhood of the Father was not on earth but in heaven. Likewise, when the person of the Father was in heaven and not on earth and the person of the Son was on earth and not in heaven, the divine nature of the Son was in heaven with the person of the Father, as they share the same one divine nature of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This explains the dogma that while Jesus was on earth as God and man, he was also in heaven with the Father:

While on earth Jesus said, “And no man hath ascended into heaven, but he that descended from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven.” (Jn. 3:13)

St. Augustine, *Lectures on the Gospel of John*, Tractate 12 (John 3:16-21), 413: “8. And He goes on: ‘And no man hath ascended into heaven, but He that came down from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven.’ Behold, he was here, and was also in heaven; was here in his flesh, in heaven by his divinity.”

Pope St. Damasus, *Council of Rome*, 382: “(13) If anyone says that because he was established in the flesh when he was on earth, he was not in heaven with the Father, he is a heretic.” (D. 71)

Therefore when the person of the Son was on earth as God and man, he was in heaven with the person of the Father by way of the divine nature they share in common. Yet he was not in heaven by way of his personhood. Hence while the divine nature of Jesus was in heaven with the person of the Father, the person of the Father was not on earth and the person of the Son was not in heaven, or else Jesus’ human nature (which is wholly united to his divine personhood) would also be in heaven with the Father, which is heresy because Jesus did not enter heaven with his human nature until the ascension:

“Jesus saith to her: Do not touch me, for I am not yet ascended to my Father.” (Jn. 20:17)

Apostles' Creed, 1st century: “I believe... in Jesus Christ...who...ascended into heaven...”

Therefore when Jesus was on earth as God and man, his divine nature was in heaven with the Father but not in his personhood which was on earth in his human nature. Jesus' personhood (consisting of God and man, of his divine nature united to his human nature) did not enter heaven until Jesus ascended into heaven.

This also upholds the dogma that the divine person of the Incarnate Jesus Christ, when he is ruling in heaven, literally sits at the right hand of the Father and thus not on the same throne and in the same place as the Father:

“And the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God.” (Mk. 16:19)

Apostles' Creed, 1st century: “I believe in...Jesus Christ...who...ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father almighty...”

Pope St. Damasus, *Council of Rome*, 382: “(15) If anyone does not say that he sits at the right hand of the Father in the flesh, in which he will come to judge the living and the dead, he is a heretic.” (D. 73)

While the throne of the person of Jesus is at the right hand of the throne of the person of the Father and hence in separate places, Jesus is also in the same place as the Father, united to the Father, one with the Father, and in the Father, in the divine nature he shares in common with the Father. They are separate in personhood but united in the divine nature. In their personhoods, they sit on different thrones and thus in different places; but in the divine nature they share in common, they are in the same place and united with one another.

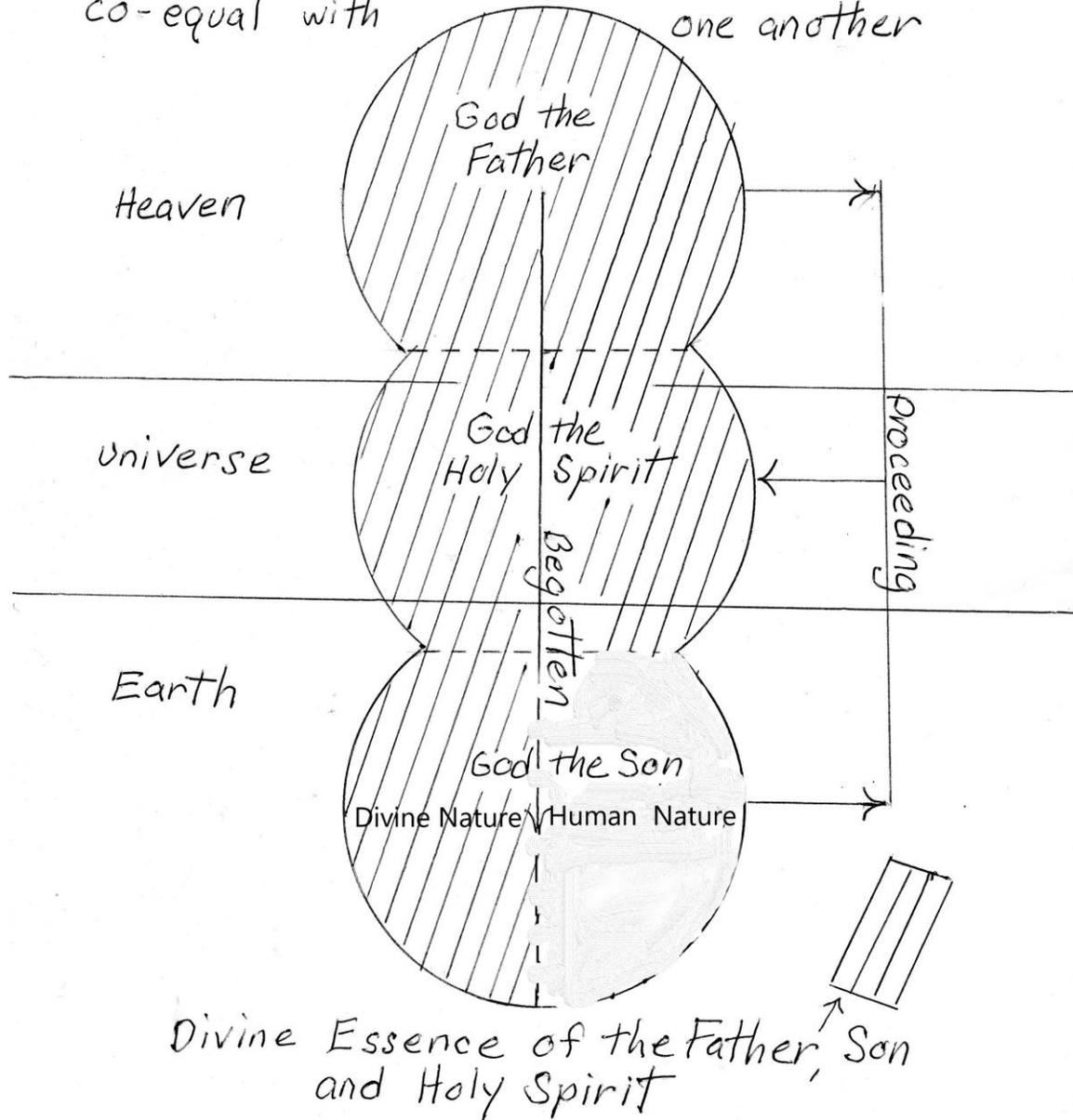
The divine nature, then, of each divine person extends beyond his divine personhood and into the personhood of the other two divine persons. Hence each person consists of the same one nature (substance) of the other two and thus each divine person contains the divine nature of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (which nature is one and undivided). Therefore,

- The divine person of the Father contains the divine nature of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit but not the divine personhoods of the Son and the Holy Spirit
- The divine person of the Son contains the divine nature of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit but not the divine personhoods of the Father and the Holy Spirit
- And the divine person of the Holy Spirit contains the divine nature of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit but not the divine personhoods of the Father and the Son.

Therefore, while the three persons of the Holy Trinity are united to one another by way of the one divine nature of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that they share in common, they are distinct from one another by way of their personhoods. Therefore, the divine nature of each person extends beyond his own personhood into the other two persons.

As the saying goes, “A picture is worth a thousand words”; and in this case, it certainly applies:

The Holy Trinity
 All three Persons are co-eternal and
 co-equal with one another



St. Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 400 to 416: "7. Wherefore, also, the Holy Spirit consists in the same unity of substance and in the same equality. For whether he is the unity of both, or the holiness, or the love, or therefore the unity because the love, and therefore the love because the holiness, it is manifest that he is not one of the two, since it is by him that the two are joined"²

² b. 6, c. 5, par. 7.

The three divine persons have one will and operation but act separately

“And he [Jesus] came and took the book out of the right hand of him [God the Father] that sat on the throne.” (Apoc. 5:7)

The Word of God, then, teaches that the person of God the Son and the person of God the Father were in different places and performed different actions. The person of God the Father was on his throne and was holding the book. While the person of God the Son was next to the person of God the Father and took the book from his right hand.

Beware, then, of the heresy which states that whatever one person of the Holy Trinity does the other two also do. According to this heresy, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit created all things, became man during the Incarnation, died on the cross, and are in the Holy Eucharist. This is the heresy of the Monarchians, Patipassians, Modalists, and Sabellians, which teaches there is only one person in the Holy Trinity and thus the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are only one person pretending to be three persons:

Nominal *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Modalists: “The Monarchians properly so-called (Modalists) exaggerated the oneness of the Father and the Son so as to make them but one Person... God the Father appears on earth as Son; hence...the Monarchians made the Father suffer and die. In the West they were called Patripassians, whereas in the East they are usually called Sabellians. The first to visit Rome was probably Praxeas, who went on to Carthage some time before 206-208”

The History of Heresies, by apostate Alphonsus de Liguori, 18th century: “Praxeas, a native of Phrigia...denied the mystery of the Trinity, saying that in God there was but one person and one nature, which he called the Father. This sole person, he said, descended into the womb of the Virgin, and being born of her by means of the incarnation, was called Jesus Christ. According to this impious doctrine, then, it was the Father who suffered death, and on that account his followers were called Patripassionists. The most remarkable among his disciples were Berillus, Noetus, and Sabellius.”³

And those who profess belief in the three divine persons of the Holy Trinity but teach that they all perform the same acts deny, by implication, the three distinct persons of the Holy Trinity and thus, in effect, present only one person in the Holy Trinity.

This heresy was infallibly condemned on Pentecost Day in AD 33 by the unanimous consensus of the apostles and other Church Fathers and at least by Popes St. Zephyrinus (d. 217), St. Callistus (d. 222), St. Damasus in 382, and Pope John III in 561:

Jesus said to the apostles, “Going therefore, teach ye all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” (Mt. 28:19)

St. John said, “And there are three who give testimony in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit. And these three are one.” (1 Jn. 5:7)

Nominal *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Pope Callistus I (3rd century): “It is certain that Zephyrinus and Callistus condemned various Monarchians and Sabellius himself...”

First Council of Constantinople, 381: “It [the Council of Nicea] tells us how to believe in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the holy Spirit: believing also, of course, that the Father, the Son and the holy Spirit have a single Godhead and power and substance, a dignity deserving the same honour and a co-eternal sovereignty, in three most perfect hypostases, or three perfect persons. So there is no place for Sabellius’ diseased theory in which the hypostases are confused and thus their proper characteristics destroyed.”

³ c. 3, 1.

Pope St. Damasus, *Council of Rome*, 382: “(2) We anathematize those also who follow the error of Sabellius, saying that the same one is Father as well as Son.” (D. 60)

Pope John III, *Second Council of Braga*, 561: “If anyone does not confess that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are three persons of one substance, and virtue, and power, just as the Catholic and apostolic Church teaches, but says there is only one and a solitary person, so that he himself is the Father who is the Son, and also he himself is the Paraclete, the Spirit, just as Sabellius and Priscillian have asserted, let him be anathema.” (D. 231)

St. Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, 6th century: “As persons the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct. It was not the Father who took on flesh, nor the Holy Spirit, but the Son, so that he who was Son of God became the son of a virgin also for the redemption of man. It was not the Father who suffered, nor the Holy Spirit, but the Son, so that he who had taken on flesh in the world, was himself offered for the world... [However,] in these three persons, there is one glory, one eternity, one power.”⁴

Eleventh Council of Toledo, Creed of Faith, 675: “[The Incarnation] Of these three persons we believe that for the liberation of the human race only the person of the Son became true man.” (D. 282)

Even though Innocent III was an apostate antipope, he nevertheless correctly condemned this heresy:

Apostate Antipope Innocent III, *Fitts Exemplo* (Profession of Faith Prescribed for Durand of Osca and His Waldensian Companions), 1208: “By the heart we believe and by the mouth we confess that the Incarnation of the divinity took place neither in the Father, nor in the Holy Spirit, but in the Son only...” (D. 422)

It is also dogma that the divine nature of the three divine persons of the Holy Trinity is one and the same substance (essence) in each and thus each person has the one and same divine will and divine power (operation). Hence the Holy Trinity consists of one substance (one divine nature) and three subsistences (three divine persons)⁵:

Pope St. Damasus, *Council of Rome*, 382: “(20) If anyone does not say that there is one divinity of Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit, one sovereignty, one majesty, one power [operation], one glory, one dominion, one kingdom, and one will and truth, he is a heretic.” (D. 78)

Pope Pelagius, *Second Council of Constantinople*, 553, confirmed by Pope Pelagius in 556: [Anathemas concerning the Three Chapters] Canon 1. If anyone does not confess that there is one nature or substance of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and one power and one might, and that the Trinity is consubstantial, one Godhead being worshipped in three subsistences, or persons, let such a one be anathema...”

Pope St. Martin, *Lateran Council*, 649: “Canon 1. If anyone does not confess properly and truly in accord with the holy Fathers that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are a Trinity in unity and a unity in Trinity; that is, one God in three subsistences, consubstantial and of equal glory, one and the same Godhead, nature, substance, virtue, power, kingdom, authority, will, operation of the three, uncreated, without beginning, incomprehensible, immutable, creator and protector of all things, let him be condemned [see n. 78-82, 213].” (D. 254)

⁴ b. 5, par. 44.

⁵ I am speaking here of the divine nature of God the Son. Since the Incarnation, God the Son also has a human nature, which has its own will and power (operation) separate from his divine nature. (See Long Commentaries: “**Error! Reference source not found.**” p. [1120](#).)

One may ask, “How, then, does each person perform different actions and exist in separate places (which is also dogma) while at the same time each person shares the same one divine nature and thus the same one divine will and one divine power (operation)?” For example, only the person of the Son became man, died on the cross, and exists in the Holy Eucharist. Hence the persons of the Father and Holy Spirit did not become man, die on the Cross, and do not exist in the Holy Eucharist. Therefore, the person of the Son performed a separate action and was in a different place than the persons of the Father and Holy Spirit when he became man, died on the cross, and is in the Holy Eucharist. Yet all three persons have the same one divine nature and thus the same one divine will and the same one divine power (operation).

The one nature (the one substance or essence) of the Holy Trinity is common to all three persons. But the *existence*, the *portion*, of the one nature that makes up each person is unique to that person, as each person is distinct from one another. They are distinct in personhood but united in one nature. For example, this is similar to a county that contains the exact same soil but is divided into three cities (three parts). The one same soil is in all three parts but each part is separated from one another by partition while being united in the one county and one soil. If one part of the county and its soil begot the other and the other part proceeded from the two parts and its soil, then you would have three parts (cities) in the one county sharing the one same soil.

The one will of the Holy Trinity is shared in common with all three persons. Hence whatever the Father wills so does the Son and so does the Holy Spirit. For example, the Father willed that the Son would die to redeem men, the Holy Spirit willed that the Son would die to redeem men, and the Son willed they he would die to redeem men. They all willed the same thing (that the Son would die to redeem men). But it was the Son who would be the only person who would die and redeem men. Hence the person of God the Son willed the same thing as the persons of God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, but he acted separately and was in a different place than from them when he died on the cross to redeem men.

The one power (or operation) of the Holy Trinity is shared in common with all three persons. One may ask, “How did the Son create all physical things and not also the Father and the Holy Spirit if they all have the one same divine power (operation)?” We can compare this to a human creature. A human creature has one nature and one power (one operation). Yet he can be doing one thing with his left hand and another with his right hand even though he has one nature and one power (one operation). His left hand can be holding a glass while his right hand is writing. Even though each hand is in a different place and performing a different action, the man only has one nature and one power (one operation). In the similar way, even though the Holy Trinity has one divine power (one operation), God the Son creates physical life, God the Holy Spirit creates spiritual life, and God the Father oversees creation. While each was performing different actions, it was by the power of the one operation of their one divine nature. Therefore, even though the person of God the Son and the person of God the Father were in different places and performing different actions when the person of God the Son was on earth and died on the cross and the person of God the Father was in heaven overseeing it, they both did so by the same one divine power (operation) that they have in common with one another. Certainly, if the parts of a human creature, who is one person with one nature and one power (operation), can perform different actions and be in different places, so also can the three parts (persons) of the Holy Trinity, who has one divine nature and one divine operation, perform different actions and be in different places.

(See Long Commentaries: “Jesus’ human nature has a distinct will and power than his divine nature.”)

For the glory of God; in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Michael, St. Joseph, Ss. Joachim and Anne, St. John the Baptist, the other angels and saints; and for the salvation of men

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