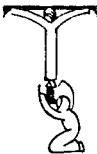


that rests upon the Christian, and which St Paul wishes to the Christian (2 Cor. 13): 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the imparting of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen'. (The love of God—i.e. of the Father. For the Fatherhood of God holds the same pride of place as the sign of our admission to the divine life, in the New Testament. that the unity of God has in the Old. Hence the name God is usually attributed specially to the First Person in the New Testament—but attributed only—there is no ground for saying that he alone is God. or that the Persons are not in every way co-equal.) That, too, is how we say our prayers, as from within the divine friendship to which we have been admitted: *Per Dominum nostrum Jesum Christum, qui tecum vivit et regnat, in unitate Spiritus Sancti, Deus per omnia saecula saeculorum. Amen.*

THE BLESSED TRINITY AND OUR ADOPTED SONSHIP ¹

BY

F. M. CATHERINET, O.P.

 HE mystery of the blessed Trinity is the most unfathomable of the articles of our faith; but it is likewise the most fruitful for our spiritual life. Many souls, nevertheless, even really interior ones, are more inclined to adore it than to strive to know it well. Doubtless they understand that God is within them, that he lives in them and bestows his grace on them; many even willingly recall that this God living in them is the one God in three persons; and they are overcome by a sweet emotion, a humble reverence when they realise that at every instant the great mystery of the generation of the Word by the Father, the procession of the Holy Ghost from the breathing forth of the mutual love of Father and Son, is accomplished in their heart. But generally their thoughts stop there.

This presence of the holy Trinity in us has, however, a much more profound signification. This God who dwells in me, *in making me to enter into the society of the three divine persons*, calls me to live with his own intimate life. He does not wish that my soul should remain simply a spellbound spectator of the splendours and riches of his life; he desires that it should 'enter into the joy of its Lord' (Matt. 25, 21), that it should be associated with the ineffable relations which the

¹ Translated from *La Vie Spirituelle*, May, 1934, by S. M. Rose, O.P.

three divine persons have to one another, and that it should penetrate and dwell in their unity.

May we attempt to speak more in detail of this great mystery? May we dare to tell how the sanctified soul is able to cross the barrier behind which the intimate life of the invisible and inaccessible God unfolds itself? Why not, since Revelation has made us understand something of it, and since we shall say nothing of importance which has not already been proclaimed by those two most sublime heralds, St John and St Paul? And if to scale the heights to which they call us, we must first climb a few elevated peaks, and overcome some passing difficulties, the splendour and extent of the horizons which shall be unveiled for our contemplation, will soon make us forget the fatigue of the ascent.

THE INACCESSIBLE TRINITY

To enter into companionship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit has seemed, still seems an impossibility to our reason, even when it is enlightened by faith. Let us understand well why this is so.

When we say that the three divine persons are only one God, we do not merely enunciate a vain formula. These three persons are distinguished from each other only by the different relations of origin which they have towards one another. Thus the Father is only distinguished from the Word in that he engenders him as the Word; all the rest, nature, perfections, operations, he has in common with the Son. There is truly but one God. Without doubt they are three who possess this unique divine nature; but if any one of them wished to produce an act which would not be the same relation which distinguishes him from the other two persons, his action puts in motion, if I may so express it, the unique divine nature common to the three. Outside of what constitutes their mutual relationship, the three divine persons are not only equal, but strictly identical; their actions converge, they become, and still more they are one unique act. When, for example, one of them pronounces the creative word which launches the spheres into existence, he utters it by an act of his divine nature which is at the same time that of the other two persons: the creative word is unique, and common to the three. When one of them leans towards his reasonable creature to bestow some grace or benefit on him, this goodness which bends down is that of God, and the act of condescension is common to the three. Each time that God makes contact with his creatures to manifest his justice, his power, his mercy or any of his attributes, the three persons blend their action in one, the three persons re-absorb themselves, if I may dare so to express it, into the unique deity. *In regard to all that which is not*

God, there is but one God. And with regard to what is God, three Persons!

Such is the impenetrable barrier behind which the intimate life of God, his triune life, entrenches itself. Whoever, outside this cycle, would have the presumption to desire to penetrate therein, would find before him only the limitless unity, behind the veil of which the inaccessible Trinity unfolds itself in the mystery of its absolute transcendence.

JESUS, ONE OF THE THREE

Yes, this limit was insuperable for the creature; but it was not so for God. One of the three divine persons has taken a human nature and has made it to participate in his own divine personality. A created being has thus entered into the intimate life of God, into his triune life. A created being possesses the personality of the Son, or rather, is possessed by it; it has towards the Father relations which are those of the Son; it is united to the Father in the same relation by which the Father and Son produce the holy Ghost.

Let us understand well how the obstacle which the impenetrable unity of God constituted for us has been overcome; remark that I say *overcome* and not *suppressed*.

The act by which the Word has assumed a human nature to unite it to himself is an act directed towards the creature, towards that which is exterior to God: it is then an act common to the three divine persons. But the result of this act affects only the Person of the Son; the human nature of Jesus belongs neither to the Father, nor to the Holy Spirit; only the Word became incarnate.

Let us study this truth more closely: God himself, in revealing this mystery to us, invites us thereto, and our reverent attention is neither blamable presumption nor vain curiosity.

It is not precisely the *divine nature* as such which unites itself directly to the humanity of Jesus in the Incarnation. Here we are confronted with some theological difficulties; we shall, however, content ourselves with remarking that if it were the divine nature as such which was united to the humanity of Jesus, the Incarnation would have put this humanity into strict relationship *with God, with the one God*; it would not have made it enter into the intimate, hidden, *personal* life of God: the barrier which the divine unity creates would not have been passed. But the humanity of Jesus has been united to a *divine person*: the union is hypostatic, that is to say, *personal*: the divine life in its most mysterious depths is reached; the humanity of Jesus is directly admitted into the society of the three persons behind the barrier of the unity of the divine nature. . . .

GRACE IN THE SOUL OF JESUS

Jesus, nevertheless, does not cease to be man. But his human nature itself has been ennobled, lifted up, being made worthy of belonging to a divine person; a reflection of God, or more correctly, a participation in the divine nature, has prepared it for this union with the Word. His acts are truly human, but they are at the same time divine, not only because they belong to a divine person, but also because the human nature from which they proceed has been invaded, transfigured, by the divinity, and rendered capable of acts formally divine. So does the iron bar, heated in a lighted brazier, and entirely penetrated by the fire, still remain iron, though by its incandescence it becomes capable of producing effects identical to those of the fire itself.

This participation of the human soul of Jesus in his divine nature constitutes his *grace*.

It is immense. We understand the *measure* of this grace by the title by which Jesus obtains it: this title is the dignity of his divine Person. The soul of Jesus then possesses the plenitude of grace.

But the quality of this grace is also in harmony with the dignity of his person. He who is the Son of God ought to receive grace befitting the Son, even in his human nature. Having entered into the divine Trinity under the protection of the personality of the Son, the human nature of Jesus has received a plenitude of grace which defies it in assimilating it to the Son who unites it to himself. Thus in human unions, the wife of the son enters into her husband's family as the daughter, in the same way as the wife of the father becomes the mother of the household. All theologians admit that grace assimilates the soul to God in giving it a participation in the divine nature. But many do not readily admit what we affirm here, that the soul in the state of grace becomes specially conformed to one of the divine persons, namely to the Son. . . . The hypostatic union bestowed grace on the soul of Jesus during his earthly life, and in heaven 'a glory which becometh the only begotten Son'. (John 1, 14).

THE GRACE OF JESUS IN US: OUR DESTINY

It is 'of his fulness that we have all received' our individual grace of sanctification. (John 1, 16.) The divine life which we possess is a participation, a derivation of the divine life which filled the soul of Jesus. In this sense 'Christ lives in us' (Gal. 12, 20), in much the same manner as parents survive in their children, or more aptly, as the mother imparts life to the child of her womb. Our union with Christ is so close that that which exists between husband and wife is but a faint image of it; he is amongst us as 'the firstborn amongst many brethren' (Rom. 8, 29); he assimilates us to himself; he desires

that we also should possess 'the power to be made the sons of God' (John I, 2), 'to be born of God' like himself; he sends us the holy Spirit to create in us a filial heart which will be able to say 'Father!' when we turn to his Father. Briefly, that which he is in his deified human nature, he enables us to become by *participation in his grace* which transforms us and renders us like to him so that we may one day share his glory, enjoy his inheritance, take our place beside him, for he wishes that we should be with him, there where he himself will be.

But where is he if not in the bosom of the Father, living the very life of the adorable Trinity into which he has entered in his position of Son? It is there then that he calls us; it is there that he desires us to be with him; as adopted sons united to the only begotten Son, as the Bride who will not be separated from her Spouse, as the younger and weaker brethren, led and presented by their elder Brother. Such is our hope, resting on the word and benefits of Jesus. In heaven we shall be in 'the society of the Father and of his Son Jesus Christ' (1 John 1, 13). For us the Trinity is no longer inaccessible: a way leads to it which is Jesus Christ: *Ego sum via* (John 14, 6), a door opens to it which is also Jesus Christ; *Ego sum ostium* (John 10, 7, 9), we shall be welcomed as sons; we shall there enjoy the intimate life of God; his hidden life; his very triune life; because 'by the Son we shall have access to the Father in the unity of the holy Spirit'. *Per Ipsum habemus accessum in uno Spiritu ad Patrem* (Eph. 2, 18).

OUR ADOPTED SONSHIP HERE BELOW

But what do I say: we *shall* be? We *are* already here and now the sons of God: *Nunc filii Dei sumus*. This union of our souls with Christ, this assimilation to the deified life of his human nature, this grace of the Son, which is in him in its plenitude and which overflows on us, this transformation by which he makes us sons of God, brethren like unto himself; all that is already realised here below. Already we are the sons of God though capable of still greater perfection. Already the divine life which makes us sons of God, 'born of God', is in us. By this title we are already possessed by the Trinity, we are borne into its powerful and eternal movement. I am not conscious of all that happens within me; but I have more than awareness. I have the certitude which revelation imparts and which my faith accepts. I have not the immediate enjoyment which would beatify me; but I have the right to that bliss and I possess the pledge of it; it is enough to enlighten my earthly way, to give me the security and even all the happiness of which I am now capable.

Divine Persons, you do not live in me jealously enclosed in your

mutual society. You are not content with honouring me with your presence; you are not like earthly kings who shut themselves up in their apartments, and isolate themselves beneath the safeguard of an implacable etiquette. You call me to enter into the intimacy of your mutual relations, you admit me by adoption into your family. Closely united by grace to your Son Jesus, I am introduced by him and in him, into your blessed company. O Trinity! It is to render me less unworthy of you that Jesus has multiplied his counsels, his teachings, his precepts, his invitations to address myself to his Father as to my father; it is to raise me above myself that, conjointly with his Father, he may send me the Spirit of Love.

O Jesus! Now I begin to understand why you are not content with making me say through your apostle St Peter that by grace my soul receives participation in the divine *nature*: that only reveals you to me as the one God, the God of the Old Testament. I begin to appreciate why you have willed, in those sublime discourses narrated by your apostle St John, to initiate me here below into the mystery of your triune life and make me know that the one God is Father, Son and holy Spirit! This teaching was necessary to me, not only that I should know him who deigns to be the Guest of my soul a little better, but above all that I may comprehend the whole extent of your designs on me, the entire summit to which you deign to elevate me, the complete depth of the transformation that you hope to realise in me, all the exigencies of this education divinely appointed to form the child of God. For how could I be aware of my potential sonship if you had not revealed your only Son through whom I can claim this dignity? This is the whole purpose of revelation, to make me understand the meaning of this filial adoption with which you have willed to honour me! It is because you have called me to live your triune life in the quality of son, that you have revealed to me that in you there is one Son and one Trinity!

WITH EACH OF THE THREE PERSONS

Is it possible to progress still more and to know *in what consists that triune life* which the justified soul is called to share in its capacity of son? Yes, theology leaning on revelation permits us to do so.

In the blessed Trinity, *life* is precisely the ensemble of mutual relations of origin which unite the divine persons to each other.

To participate in the life of the Son is then to participate in his relations with the other two persons. It is to become, with the Son, because of him and in him, the term by extension of the act of knowledge by which the Father engenders his Son; the object of the act of love by which he loves his Son and gives himself to

him. It is also to be drawn by the Son into that ineffable impulse of love which impels him towards his Father. It is then to be united by and in the Son to that mysterious act which, from the meeting and fusion of the love of the Son for his Father, and of the love of the Father for his Son, proceeds the holy Spirit.

Let us pause to consider a little more attentively the nature of these relations which unite us to each of the three divine persons.

God the Father engenders his Son, who is his perfect Image. But his Son, by his Incarnation, has become the God-man, sheltering under his divine personality not only his own human nature, which is united to him in a physical and personal union, but also all souls who, participating in his grace are united to him by a vital union and constitute his mystical body. Even as Mary has become the Mother of God, because she is the mother of a person who is God, so the Father has become the Father of Jesus because he is the Father of the Word, who is the God-man. Likewise since Mary is our mother because we belong to the mystical body of her Son, so also the Father is our Father because we belong to the same mystical body of his Son.

We see now why the relations which are established between God the Father and us are analogous to those which exist between him and his only begotten Son. To the well beloved Son he communicates his own nature; he bestows on us a participation in this same divine nature. He engenders his Son who is his perfect Image; he desires that we also, by supernatural predestination, should be his images, conformed to the likeness of his Son: *Praedestinavit nos conformes fieri imaginis Filii sui* (Rom. 8, 29). He loves us, and with the same love wherewith he loves his Son: *Ut dilectio qua dilexisti me in ipsis sit* (John 17, 26). By his love he draws us to him to gather us into his bosom, as he draws his Son and cherishes him eternally in his bosom.

Let us love to deliver ourselves to the omnipotence of the Father who operates these wonders in us; let us enter into his designs, abandon ourselves to his action with entire confidence, even at those times when his action towards us will seem most mysterious and most contrary to our welfare; 'Father, not my will, but thine be done' (Luke 22, 42).

As to the Son, he unites us to himself in making the grace which fills his sacred humanity overflow on us, in nourishing this divine life which we have in common with him, by the gift of himself in his mysterious Eucharist. This union transforms us and renders us like to him. It is so close that it permits him to draw us with himself into the eternal *élan* of love by which he casts himself completely

into the bosom of his Father, in making us utter with him the one word which expresses the absolute gift of filial love, 'Abba, Father!' (Rom. 8, 15).

Let us attach ourselves to the Incarnate Word: let us unite our souls to his so that we may draw life therefrom; let us conform our sentiments to his, above all in regard to his Father. Let us become so *one with him* that he will be able to give us to his Father at the same time as he gives himself. Let us ourselves to be seized by this whirlwind of fire which will lift us up and bear us on, more marvellously than the prophet Elias, towards God the Father in whom we shall find the place of our repose.

What shall we say of our relations with the Holy Spirit? . . . To be able even to stammer anything, we must remember that the Person of the holy Spirit is constituted by the mutual love of the Father and the Son, joining and uniting and giving themselves to one another in a total donation which is eternally renewed. The holy Spirit is this Love; he is this Gift; he is the Seal of the union of the other two persons, the Knot which consummates them in unity. But we, who are closely united to the Son, we are, by a kind of prolongation, the object of the love of the Father for the Son; we are equally penetrated by the love of the Son for the Father. And it is thus that, in a real though analogous manner, we *participate through the Son, in the movement of love towards the Father by which he concurs in producing the holy Spirit.*

Lost before so sublime an elevation, before so unforeseen an intimacy with the holy Trinity, who lives in us and draws us to itself, let us not exclaim, impossible! Instead let us lovingly ponder these lines of St John of the Cross, Doctor of the Church:

God raises the soul most sublimely with his divine breath, and informs and habilitates her, that she may breathe in God in the same breath of love that the Father breathes in the Son and the Son in the Father, which is the same holy Spirit that God breathes into the soul in the Father and the Son, in the said transformation, in order to unite her with himself. . . . And how this comes to pass it cannot be known, nor is it possible to express it, save by describing how the Son of God obtained for us this high estate and granted us to merit this sublime office, of being able to become sons of God, as says St John. And thus he prayed to the Father, as says the same St John, saying: Father I will that they whom thou hast given me be also with me where I am, that they may see the brightness which thou hast given me. That is to say, that they may work in us by participation the same work which I do by nature, namely may breathe the holy Spirit. . . . (*Spiritual Canticle*. Stanza 39. A. Peers translation.)