



# **GOD**

## **FATHER, SON, HOLY SPIRIT**

*'The faith of all Christians rests on the Trinity'*

### **Texts from the Catechism of the Catholic Church**

#### **'IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT'**

##### ***The faith of our Baptism***

Christians are baptised 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'. Before receiving the sacrament, they respond to a three-part question when asked to confess the Father, Son and the Spirit: 'I do.' 'The faith of all Christians rests on the Trinity.' (St Caesarius of Arles) (232)

Christians are baptised in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: not in their names, for there is only one God, the almighty Father, his only Son and the Holy Spirit: the Most Holy Trinity. (233)

##### ***The central mystery of the Christian Faith***

The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of the Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God in himself. It is therefore the source of all other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them.

The whole history of salvation is identical with the history of the way and the means by which the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit reveals himself to men and 'reconciles and unites with himself those who turn away from sin.' (234)

##### ***A mystery inaccessible to reason alone***

The Trinity is a mystery of faith in the strict sense, one of the 'mysteries that are hidden in God, which can never be known unless they are revealed by God'. To be sure, God has left traces of his Trinitarian being in his work of creation and in his Revelation through the Old Testament. But his inmost Being as Holy Trinity is a mystery that is inaccessible to reason alone or even to Israel's faith before the Incarnation of God's Son and the sending of the Holy Spirit. (237)

#### **THE REVELATION OF GOD AS TRINITY**

##### ***The Father revealed by the Son***

Many religions invoke God as 'Father'. The deity is often considered the 'father of gods and of men'. In Israel, God is called 'Father' inasmuch as he is Creator of the world. Even more, God is Father because of the covenant and the gift of the law to Israel, 'his first-born son'. God is also called the Father of the king of Israel. Most especially he is 'the Father of the poor', of the orphaned and the widowed, who are under his loving protection. (238)

Jesus revealed that God is Father in an unheard-of sense: he is Father not only in being Creator; he is eternally Father in relation to his only Son, who is eternally Son only in relation to his Father: 'No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.' (Mt 11:27) (240)

For this reason the apostles confess Jesus to be the Word: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' (Jn 1:1); as 'the image of the invisible God' (Col 1:15); as the 'radiance of the glory of God and the very stamp of his nature.' (Heb 1:3) (241)

Following the apostolic tradition, the Church confessed at the Council of Nicea (325) that the Son 'is consubstantial' with the Father, that is, one only God with him. The Second Council of Constantinople (381) confessed: 'The only-begotten Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father'. (242)

##### ***The Holy Spirit is revealed as another divine person with the Son and the Father***

Before his Passover, Jesus announced the sending of 'another Paraclete' (Advocate), the Holy Spirit. At work, since creation, having been previously 'spoken through the prophets', the Spirit will now be with and in the disciples, to teach them and guide them 'into all truth'. The Holy Spirit is thus revealed as another divine person with Jesus and the Father. (243)

The eternal origin of the Holy Spirit is revealed in his mission in time. The Spirit is sent to the apostles and to the Church both by the Father in the name of the Son, and by the Son in person, once he had returned to the Father. (Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:14) The sending of the person of the Spirit after Jesus' glorification reveals in its fullness the mystery of the Holy Trinity. (244)

The faith of the Church is confessed: 'We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father.' (Nicene Creed). By this confession, the Church recognises the Father as the 'source and origin of the whole divinity'. But [also]: '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.... Yet he is not called the Spirit of the Father alone,... but the Spirit of both the Father and the Son.' (Council of Toledo, 675). 'With the Father and the Son, he is worshipped and glorified.' (Nicene Creed) (245)

#### **THE HOLY TRINITY IN THE TEACHING OF THE FAITH**

##### ***The very root of the Church's baptismal faith***

From the very beginning, the revealed truth of the Holy Trinity has been at the very root of the Church's living faith, principally by means of Baptism. It finds its expression in the rule of baptismal faith, formulated in the preaching, catechesis and prayer of the Church.

Such formulations are already found in the apostolic writings, such as the salutation taken up in the Eucharistic liturgy: 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God [the Father] and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.' (2 Cor 13:14) (249)

### **Key expressions in describing the Trinitarian faith**

During the first centuries the Church sought to clarify her Trinitarian faith. This was the work of the early councils, aided by the Church Fathers and sustained by the Christian people's sense of faith. (250)

The Church uses:

- (I) the term 'substance' (rendered also by 'essence' or 'nature') to designate the divine being in its unity,
- (II) the term 'person' or 'hypostasis' to designate the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the real distinction among them, and
- (III) the term 'relation' to designate the fact that their distinction lies in the relationship of each to the others. (252)

### **The doctrine of the Holy Trinity**

- The Trinity is One. We do not confess three Gods, but one God in three persons, the 'consubstantial Trinity'. The divine persons do not share the one divinity among themselves but each of them is God whole and entire: 'The Father is that which the Son is, the Son that which the Father is, the Father and the Son that which is the Holy Spirit is, i.e. by nature one God.' (Council of Toledo, 675) (253)
- The divine persons are really distinct from one another. 'Father', 'Son', 'Holy Spirit' are not simply names designating modalities of the divine being, for they are really distinct from one another: '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.' (C. of Toledo) They are distinct from one another in their relations of origin: 'It is the Father who generates, the Son who is begotten, and the Holy Spirit who proceeds.' (Lateran Council IV, 1215). The divine Unity is Triune. (254)
- The divine persons are relative to one another. Because it does not divide the divine unity, the real distinction of the persons from one another resides solely in the relationships which relate them to one another: 'In the relational names of the persons the Father is related to the Son, the Son to the Father, and the Holy Spirit to both. While they are called three persons in view of their relations, we believe in one nature or substance.' (C. of Toledo) (255)

### **A summary of Trinitarian faith - Constantinople c. 380 AD**

St Gregory of Nazianzus entrusts this summary of Trinitarian faith to the catechumens [converts] of Constantinople:

"Above all guard for me this great deposit of faith for which I live and fight, which I want to take with me as a companion, and which makes me bear all evils and despise all pleasures: I mean the profession of faith in the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. I entrust it to you today. By it I am soon going to plunge you into water and raise you up from it. I give you but one divinity and power, existing one in three, and containing the three in a distinct way. Divinity without disparity of substance or nature, without superior degree that raises up or inferior degree that casts down... the infinite co-naturality of three infinities. Each person considered in himself is entirely God... the three considered together... I have not even begun to think of Unity when the Trinity bathes me in its splendour. I have not even begun to think of Trinity when Unity grasps me..."

### **A prayer to the Holy Trinity**

'O my God, Trinity whom I adore, help me forget myself entirely so to establish myself in you, unmovable and peaceful as if my soul were already in eternity. May nothing be able to trouble my peace or make me leave you, O my unchanging God, but may each minute bring me more deeply into your mystery! Grant my soul peace. Make it your heaven, your beloved dwelling and the place of your rest. May it never abandon you there, but may I be there, whole and entire, completely vigilant in my faith, entirely adoring, and wholly given over to your creative action.' (Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity, 1880-1906) (260)

## **IN BRIEF**

- **'Now this is the Catholic faith: We worship one God in the Trinity and the Trinity in unity, without either confusing the persons or dividing the substance; for the person of the Father is one, the Son's is another, the Holy Spirit's another; but the Godhead of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is one, their glory equal, their majesty coeternal.'** (Athanasian Creed). (266)

## **THE LIFE OF MAN - TO KNOW AND LOVE GOD**

### *(The first paragraph of the whole Catechism)*

God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life. For this reason, at every time and in every place, God draws close to man. He calls man to seek him, to know him, to love him with all his strength.

He calls together all men, scattered and divided by sin, into the unity of his family, the Church. To accomplish this, when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son as Redeemer and Saviour. In his Son and through him, he invites men to become, in the Holy Spirit, his adopted children and thus heirs of his blessed life. (1)