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„THE PERSON” IN THE HOLY TRINITY

In the history of thought, terms and concepts have their own proper histories. Theological terms and concepts are no exception to this rule and of great importance is the fact that their meanings undergo change. It is for this reason that a theological doctrine on the Holy Trinity is not viable without modernizing the term and concept „person”. The development and expansion of this concept leads to the further progress of trinitology.

The Stages of Development of a Theology of the Person

In reaching towards a theology of the person, Christian thought has passed through five stages of development. We propose to consider these stages in a perspective of the semantic sources of the idea of the person functioning in the various epochs of the history of trinitology.

a) The first source was to be found in classical philosophy flowering in the cultural heritage of Greece and Rome. This philosophy understood the person as a sort of scenic role (cf. the classical dramaturgical mask) and later, for the most part under the influence of Christianity, as a rational individuum distinguished from the more general category of the species *animal rationale*. It was in this spirit that Boethius defined the person as an individual substance of the rational nature (*rationalis naturae individua substantia*).

b) The great trinitological disputes of the early Church were to become one of the most important semasiological sources of the concept „person”. In these disputes the person functioned as a means of individualizing and instantiating the abstract and general category „rational nature”. Thus, emphasis was placed on a „threefold individualization” in God. The aspect of the person's distinctness was emphasized even by St. Thomas Aquinas, who defined the person as *aliquid distinctum subsistens in natura intellectuali*¹. The Persons of the Holy Trinity were above all personifications of the one and the same intelligent Being.

c) Patristic christology was a no less important source of the

¹ *Com. in I Sent.* d. 23, q. I, a. 3; *De Potentia* 9,4.

concept „person”. Here, the concept „person” arose mainly out of a tendency to „rescue” the unity of Christ as God and man. *Hypostasis* above all meant the unity of a common mystical and divine subject of two separate natures and their respective operations (*subsistentia, suppositum*). Yet the christological concept of the person was at odds with the trinitological concept, at least in a certain sense. For christology, the person was the subject which united natures; hence it was the key principle of unity (*unitas in pluritate*). For trinitology the opposite was true; the person was a means of achieving a plurality of subjects (not substances!) in one reality (*pluritas in unitate*).

d) In modern thought dating from Descartes, the person ceased to function as a scenic role or an ontological category and was reduced to consciousness, to an „I-subject” and in time to a center of activity (*conscientia sui, ego, centrum actionis*). This opened the way to a psychological, moralistic and activity-oriented understanding of the person.

e) In the contemporary humanistic disciplines (psychology, pedagogy, morality, anthropology, sociology, etc.) the understanding of the person is very varied, although it plays the role of an anthropological function of one sort or another. Concretely, the term „person” implies many things: a certain group of psychic characteristics, character, psychic structure, the world of the subject, the self, specified models of behaviour or activity, the psychic expression of the group, etc. These understandings of the person sharply diverge from the philosophical-theological tradition and without taking certain corrective measures, their attitude towards contemporary theology can be the source of many misunderstandings. Yet in spite of this, the contemporary sciences are discovering in the person the structure of a certain whole and are now less apt to lock away the ever expanding richness of personhood in their respective narrow corridors of thought, method and subject-matter.

Towards a New Theology of „the Person”

While studying the history of thought about the person we note several revolutions. The first revolution, semantic in nature, occurred at the dawn of Christianity, when the pagan „scenic role” was replaced by a concept of the mystery of being, a divine mission and a particular and unique union of man with God. The next revolution occurred in the early Middle Ages, when man came to be understood as a subject full of mystery, the most noble earthly being existing in itself and for itself, whose personhood was incommunicable and whose being was „auto-teleological”, i.e. in the real sense of the word *compos sui*. Yet another revolution of

human thought about the person took place reaching into modern times; instead of a subject-substance, the person began to be understood as a center of consciousness, a psyche, a world of the subjective. Today, the fourth revolution has begun, a revolution which I hope will be a sort of synthesis, a synthesis of the person as a scenic role determined by history on the one hand and on the other, as a vessel of grace; as a rational substance — objective being and a being of the world of the subjective; as a world of the intellect and as a world of the will and emotions. Thus, in history we see a certain tendency away from *reitas* and the objective towards a more interior and spiritual dimension. The tide of thought has ebbed away from the shores of personification to the depths of personhood.

Presently, the concept of the person is becoming the main problem of human thought in general. The person is commonly considered to be a subsistence of the highest order. The person is a self-subsistent being which in a certain sense implies freedom and creativity. „Personal“ existence is unique because it arises only when the ultimate degree of the „subjectification“ of being is achieved; thus, it possesses in itself the deepest immanence which allows it to transcend the world. The person is understood as a being of the most intimate unity both in the reflexive and active sense of the word, i.e. both as being a unity as well as unifying. The being of the person is characterized by a certain wholeness and indivisibility; it contains within itself inalienable rights and unrepeatable contents; the person's existence is in a perpetual state of development, especially with respect to the interior dimension; the person does not tend to isolate itself from the rest of reality but on the contrary, in a certain sense in the very center of reality, for along with its innermost property of distinctness, it seems to return to a point of union with all other beings, especially intelligent beings. Speaking in terms of a synthesis, the person is the highest form of the realization and auto-realization of being towards „someoneness“, i.e. towards personal identity (*ens personale*). This is most properly and primarily true of the Divine Being and secondarily and analogically true of human being.

In God, the person has a full, proper and absolute meaning, while in man personhood obtains only a partial, analogous and subordinate meaning. The human person is a unique „who“ enjoying an independent subsistence in the formal and substantive sense of the word. This „who“ is spiritual-material, intelligent and free, initially realized and yet in the process of realization both within itself as well as in society with others; it expresses itself in a life of the interior as well as in exteriorly-oriented activities and potentialities. Finally, the human finds its fulfillment and finality with the uncreated Person. In a word, the person is both man as realized

or accomplished and man in the process of realization towards personal identity, towards the formation of a certain „who”.

In connection with the latest semantic revolution going on about the term „person” there are certain theologians who have sought to deactivate and/or replace the term „person” in theological commentary on the mystery of the Holy Trinity: K. Barth², C. H. Dodd³, K. Rahner⁴ and others. K. Barth, a Calvinist theologian, avoids the term „person” and speaks only of three „ways” of the Divine Being (*Seinsweise*): the way of the Father, the way of the Son and the way of the Spirit. The Father pronounces the Word, the Son constitutes the Word as pronounced and the Holy Spirit is the meaning of the Word. C. H. Dodd, an Anglican, would replace the term „person” with biblical term „name”. K. Rahner, a Catholic theologian, is of the opinion that the universal Church — not some individual theologian — could resign from the use of the term „person” and adopt others; these terms would connote various modes of autocommunication and subsistence in the Divine Being.

Many other Catholic theologians⁵ are convinced that this term is irreplaceable and that attempts to discard it are to be rejected. It seems, however, that it is possible to reconcile these opinions. Those who advocate a change in terminology correctly perceive and rightly draw attention to the new light falling on our understanding of personhood as a result of the contemporary semantic revolution taking place around this term. However, they are unable to find a better term. Those who are against this change sense the great value of the term „person” but are not able to appreciate the depth of the revolution which postulates a new theology of the person. It is for this reason that I am of the opinion that the term itself should be maintained with, however, a certain revaluation of some of its meanings, a process which in its own right would contribute to the further development of trinitology.

² *Dogmatik*, I, 1, ed. 5, Zürich 1947.

³ *The Gospel of John*, London 1955.

⁴ *Mysterium salutis*, II, Einsiedeln 1967, p. 317 ff.

⁵ Cf. C. Boyer, *L'Image de la Trinité, synthèse de la pensée augustinienne*, Gregorianum 27(1946) pp. 173—199, 333—352; B. Lonergan, *De Deo Trino*, ed. 2, Romae 1964; O. Gonzalez, *Misterio trinitario y existencia humana*, Madrid 1965; J. Daniélou, *La Trinité et le mystère de l'existence*, Bruges 1968; B. de Margerie, *La Trinité chrétienne dans l'histoire*, Paris 1975, *idem*, *Réflexions sur la Trinité „économique et immanente”*, *Esprit et Vie* 90(1980) pp. 177—184, 209—218; L. B. Porter, *On Keeping “persons” in the Trinity. A Linguistic Approach to Trinitarian Thought*, *Theological Studies* 41(1980) pp. 530—548; J. Moltmann, *Trinität und Reich Gottes*, München 1980.

Towards the Fullness of the Person

The contemporary understanding of the person as a *pleroma* of „whoness" draws much of its inspiration and material from the contemporary sciences and departs from the classical psychological-philosophical tradition. We recall that St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory Nazianzenus, St. John Damascene and especially SS. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas created a specific psychological trinitology whose main elements were concepts such as: soul, *psyche*, intellect, will, memory. Each of the Persons of the Trinity was associated with one of these elements, e.g. the Father — memory, mind, intellect; the Son — word, thought, truth; the Holy Spirit — will, love, freedom. This psychologism which mightily narrowed the concept of the person became especially apparent in the theological doctrine of the processions of the Divine Persons in God; the Person of the Son was conceived in the womb of the Paternal intellect and the Holy Spirit was spirated in the activity of the divine will⁶.

Against this sort of trinitology it is necessary to posit three basic objections:

a) In this model the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit are not full persons in the contemporary understanding of the word. They are only abstract relations of divinity, viz. *personae dramatis divinitatis*.

b) Each of the Divine Persons is presented in terms of a certain theological reduction; the Father is only memory, soul or being; the Son is only thought, the Holy Spirit is identified only with the will. From this point of view one of the Persons cannot possess the remaining features of personhood specifically found in the other two Persons. Thus, the Father as Father would be deprived of truth and love, the Son as Son could not enjoy the faculties of love and the principle of being and the Holy Spirit as Holy Spirit would be without being and intellect. In the long run, only the sum-total of the three Persons would yield a Divine Person in the fullness of its reality. The principle of appropriation unfortunately does not explain much about the Trinity looking *ad intra*.

c) The concept here criticized is based upon an inadequate ancient anthropology which passes over a very important element of personhood: existence — activity — human acts. In truth, this anthropology does not take into account the exterior and interior self-realization of the person.

⁶ Cf. E. Bailleux, *Personnalisme de saint Thomas en théologie trinitaire*, Revue Thomiste 61(1961) pp. 25—42; G. Folch, *Personalidade Psicológica e Misterio Trinitario*, Liturgia e Vida 20(1973) pp. 2—28; Y. Congar, *Je crois en l'Esprit Saint*, Paris 1980.

In accordance with contemporary anthropology each Person of the Holy Trinity — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — must individually possess being, existence, intellect and will, all in the same meaning and all expressing themselves in activity. We would find no personhood in the Trinity at all if being, intellect, will and self-realization could not be equally predicated of all three personal subjects. K. Rahner contends that in the Trinity there is but one mind, one consciousness, one will, one freedom and one center of activity because these elements constitute the nature of God which is one and the same. According to this doctrine however, the three Persons arise thanks to the divine nature (*natura generans personas*) and are the personal subjects of the divine nature. In my opinion however, such a concept of the Divine Person would imply an empty hypostasis and in view of such an eventuality we would be faced not only with the option of eliminating the term „person” from trinitology but with the very necessity of doing so. The elements belonging properly to personhood would simply be predicated of the divine nature and not of the Divine Persons. Divine Personhood would depend solely upon participation in the divine nature, i.e. a sharing in the divine essence and would imply an „empty” subject (in contrast to a „personal” subject), deprived of a real three-fold ego. Most importantly, the Divine Person would be something secondary with respect to an anonymous, unpersonal being. Yet on the contrary, it seems that the Divine Person is more „primitive” than its nature and that it cannot be separated from its own existence, intellect and individual center (an individual center which is nevertheless a shared center) of activity.

If each of the Persons of the Holy Trinity is to be a genuine person, it must express itself in all the elements proper to persons: subsistence, mind, will and activity. While on the one hand each of the Divine Persons is identical with the divine essence, we should speak of each of them as subsisting, loving, and acting. The reduction of the person to understanding-intellect was possible only for Greek anthropology and it was in this tradition that Boethius declared that the person is a „rational substance”. Existence, will, freedom and activity were simply passed by.

Earlier, we touched on the problem of the priority of nature for personhood in God; is the divine nature antecedent or the Divine Person? It seems that according to Greek tradition, nature was conceived to be antecedent and moreover that this was one of the conclusions following from monotheism⁷. It was only afterwards that we note attempts to „justify” a three-fold plurality of persons, for the most part as an answer to the accusation of polytheism. It was in this spirit that Gregory of Nyssa and Hilary of

⁷ Cf. S. Breton, *Unité et monothéisme*, Paris 1981.

Poitiers expressly taught that the divine nature enjoyed primacy before the Divine Persons, and that the divine nature „begets" and spirates the Persons. Of late, the primacy of unity in God was emphasized in the thought of Teilhard de Chardin; for him unity was the principle characteristic of divinity because in God we meet with an eternal process of development from three-foldness towards unity⁸. It was very often the case that in order to evade accusations of tritheism theologians emphasized unity in God by accenting the primacy of nature.

It seems, however, that in the spirit of personalism we can reverse this order of things; the person and the structure of personhood are primary and nature as a principle of being and activity is secondary. The very expression „the personal God" is misleading insofar as it excessively suggests and emphasizes nature. God is not so much a „personal nature" as much as the „Persons of God". It would be better to say „God in the form of Persons" or „the tri-personal God". The word „God" in common language is improperly associated with nature or being as occupying a position of primacy to the detriment of personhood. The reality of God is in reverse; „God" means most of all „Persons": Father, Son and Holy Spirit, taken individually or as a Trinity. The Divine Persons themselves vindicate the unity of divinity and the divine nature because no real difference arises between them and the divine nature. The person is primary; its essence, nature and being are something secondary. If thus we are to speak of an eternal process in God, this will be a process from Person towards Person through nature. Here, we find no primacy of number, unity or triuneness because with respect to God these categories are empty. The order of the mystery itself enjoys primacy and this mystery contains the mystery of the Divine Person qua person.

The foundation of personhood is to be found in the potential and achieved fact of an infinite realization and perfection of being and only secondarily in the ability of „raising up" another person or „self-discovery" in other persons. In the Holy Trinity this process of Person to Person goes on via nature-essence. In the Father as a *Principium sine principio* is found the first realization of essence among the Divine Persons. The Person of the Son is begotten and thus, He possesses the divine essence as begotten; His Person is „paternotropic", i.e. of its interior identity tending towards the Father. The Person of the Holy Spirit possesses the same divine essence as spirated by the Persons of the Father and the Son. The begotten Person is a condition of the Father's status as a Divine Person and the spirated Person as a mutual terminus fulfills the personal and ontic community in divinity. As a result, none

⁸ Cz. Bartnik, *Teilhardowska wizja dziejów*, Lublin 1975, p. 19 ff.

of the Persons of the Trinity would be able to be itself without the remaining two and without the identity of nature.

The Basic Antinomy of the Person

In Christian theology we observe a certain antinomy repeatedly making its appearance in the concept of the person: *solitas* — *communitas*, *singularitas* — *universalitas*, *unicitas* — *pluralitas*. Classical thought was fond of conceiving reality in terms of universals — hence, it was prone to view the human race, society and the nature of God as something universal, necessary and „repeating” (a circular, not linear path of evolution). The human person was viewed as being in a certain opposition towards this generality.

The characteristics used to describe the person in classical thought betray this tendency: *individua*, *singula*, *sola*, *unica*, *incommunicabilis*, *irrepetibilis*, etc. It is important to remember that classical thought considered these characteristics to be of a lower order of perfection than the abstract universals. On the one hand, Christianity preserved this sort of thought and yet on the other, it simultaneously promoted the revalorization of the individuality of the human ontos. Christian doctrine held that the human soul, individual, unrepeatable, distinct and unique was endowed with the highest of all created values. These ideas found a place in the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, wherein the person functioned as metaphysical counterpoint to the melody of the universality of the common thesaurus of divine attributes which were understood as belonging to the divine essence-nature. As a result of this for many centuries the essential characteristic of the person was conceived as its distinctness, individuality and „lonley” subsistence. In accordance with this, theology sought to demonstrate the „distinctness” of each of the Persons of the Holy Trinity in order to distinguish the Divine Persons from the divine nature. The treatment of the person as a sort of metaphysical „seperateness” in spite of its convenience in the dogmatic tract on the Trinity proved to be cumbersome for theology in general; the person understood primarily as an individuum was at odds with the „socialness” of being. In consequence, personalism would rapidly have decayed into a sort of individualism (cf. J. B. Metz). Thus, the Trinity would have had to be interpreted as a triad of individuals admittedly bound by one common nature, yet so bound „against” the interior structure of their personhood.

Being heirs to the theories of W. Stern, E. Mounier, P. Teilhard de Chardin and others, we are presently witnessing a departure from the practice of associating the person with distinctness, singularism and solitariness. The person by no means excludes subsistence

in a common, social and universal framework, regardless of whether this be a subsistence as *ontos* or a subsistence as *nous*. The person not only does not eliminate or exclude „social“ subsistence, but assumes it, builds upon it, fulfills it and bestows upon it a personal name. The structure of the person postulates „the other“, person and other beings. The person itself is the unexpected solution to the antinomy „unity — plurality“. The structure of the person qualifies and changes being, from being in the sense of „in itself“ (substance) to being „for“: being for self as a person, being for some one else as a person and being for everyone as a society of persons. Thanks to the appearance of persons, all reality ceases to be anonymous and its depths are endowed with a new structure which orients reality towards the person. The person is never merely an element of reality, a role, a function or an instrument. It constitutes a new dimension and sense of reality. The person is the „salvation“ of being. The person as a phenomenon arises at the cross-currents of a wonderful metaphysical dialectic; the person achieves subsistence when by virtue of its interior indivisibility and immunity from dissolution into more general categories of reality it „conquers“ the very epicenter of being; yet on the other hand, this very same individual subsistence takes place thanks to its characteristic of existing in relation to other persons and all reality. Thus, the individual person exists when it opens its interior unto other persons. Conversely, human society becomes a genuine society when it serves persons, helping them to become fully themselves.

Today, the Augustinian doctrine that the Person in the Holy Trinity is a substantial relation is applied in theological discourse in a somewhat different manner. Today we add that the person is never a diminution or even less so a negation of another person or extra-personal reality. On the contrary, the very nucleus of the person rotates on an axis of a positive relation towards being: towards the person, towards persons, towards the society of persons and towards reality as a whole. Today we add that the person is the crowning glory and *raison d'être* of all being. If the person „arranges“ all reality and other persons towards itself, it does so not out of egoism or apotheosis but in accordance with the creative act of God and the structure of a certain ontological axiology. In all humility, the person is the ultimate concentration and pleromification of being and the center of the communion of all things.

Hence, the Divine Persons of the Holy Trinity are substantial relations subsisting in an eternal tandem „towards“ each other. In the shadow of these relations as it were we observe the „relational“ character of the created person which is not so much an

image of the divine nature as much as an image the Person in God. The Person of the Father is completely for the Person of the Son and the Son, for the Father. Together, they are for the Holy Spirit, who Himself is for the Father and the Son. Each Person constitutes an „I” in God and together, they are the divine „We”. The trinitarian dialectic is the epitome of mystery; personhood totally passes over into community and community, totally into individuality. The principle of this „passing over” is found in one and the same nature, i.e. the divine essence.

Existence in the Trinity

In dealing with the Holy Trinity, it behooves us to introduce the Thomistic category of existence (*existere, esse*). Up to the present, the Trinity was considered in categories of essence: the model of the person, relation, nature, essence, etc. Theology conceived God in terms of structures, concepts, intellectual constructions and potentialities, passing over existence in all its dimensions. In terms of this essentialistic framework of thought, theological discourse on the Trinity is indifferent to the fact of whether the Trinity actually existed or whether it was merely the creation of religious imagination. As a rule, the Persons and the divine nature were treated as pure mental constructions, concepts and products of faith and theology. If it is true that the divine nature was conceived more „realistically” than the Divine Persons, this was not nature as existent but nature as the reality of divine activity *ad intra* and *ad extra*. Even St. Thomas Aquinas who understood God as subsisting existence itself (*Ipsum Esse Subsistens*) associated existence (*esse*) rather with the divine nature and not with the Persons. All the more so later theologians on the whole understood the divine *esse* in an essentialistic manner: as infinity (F. Suarez), as *Coincidentia Oppositorum* (Nicholas of Cues), as *Ens Summe Perfectum* (Descartes), as the fullness of being (K. Rahner), and as the personal monad, the Omega (P. Teilhard de Chardin) to mention but a few.

Is existence to be attributed only to the divine nature or are we to attribute it to the Divine Persons as well? Naturally, we understand existence as something more than a mere predicate indicating the factual and real existence of a thing. Existence is both the undefinable realness of being and itself a reality; hence, it is a pure „fact” as well as the „existing” of things in the most proper sense of the word. Even if existence does not imply the deepest contents of being which we attribute to essence, it cannot be distilled out of the structure of being. In a word, existence cannot be „shallowed out” to the level of pure factuality because it possesses its own numerous dimensions and depth. In God, existence

cannot be something really and substantially distinct from either the divine essence or the Divine Persons. In the spirit of existential Thomism we say that in God existence is essence and that the essence of God is „to be". For this reason, when we speak of existence in God our thought does not capture the reality of existence as it is in God but is confined to considering aspects of existence which although having a foundation in the reality of God nevertheless are not subsistent in God, as such.

There is no doubt that existence must be associated with the divine nature, i.e. the divine essence. Existence belongs to God in virtue of the very nature of the Supreme Being Himself. The divine existence flows from the fullness of the divine being. Besides this, the divine nature „must" possess the fullness of existence in so far as it is the principle of divine activity *ad extra* as is especially true of the activities of creation and salvation. Creation means that God allows other essences having their foundation in the divine essence to participate in divine existence, i.e. He allows them to exist as created. Salvation, which is the fulfillment of creation, its necessary postulate and its ontological conclusion means the amplification of created existence and the advancement of intelligent beings to the status of personal existence in the Holy Trinity. The divine existence, identical with the divine nature, is the foundation for the ever-unfolding divine providence, the economy of creation and salvation and in consequence the autorealizational activity of creatures. The divine existence, therefore, is existence in itself as well as a creative and soteriological existence.

Divine existence ought to be understood as fused with divine personhood. Three reasons justify this claim:

1) Creation bears the traces (*vestigia*) not only of the divine nature but of the Divine Persons as well. Even if a trinitarian picture of the universe was not applied to the created world, it suffices that we accept it in the sphere of salvation as in the case of the trinitological economy of salvation (K. Rahner).

2) Persons who would not possess their „own" existence at least virtually (*virtualiter*) distinct from nature would not be real. They would only be artificial conceptions or models of persons or empty modes of nature (modalism).

3) Finally, existence in an uncreated Person is identified with it. An uncreated Person would not be itself if it were not identical with existence. The uncreated Person is simply qualified by a real self-subsistence. In view of these reasons, real existence of necessity implying an immortal existence constitutes an essential structural element of the created person.

Esse Personale

In 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council (not accepted by all theologians as an ecumenical council) taught that the Divine Persons (taken together or separately) are identical with the divine essence. Thus, the essence of God is identical with the Person of the Father in so far as the Father begets the Son, with the Person of the Son in so far as He is begotten by the Father and with the Person of the Holy Spirit in so far as He proceeds from the Father and the Son. This does not mean that the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit are three participants in a divine nature distinct from Themselves but rather that each of them in their totality is the same nature. If this were not true, God would not be triune but quadruplex: Father, Son, Holy Spirit and divine nature. The distinction between the Divine Person and the divine nature is an intellectual distinction, not a real one, albeit having its justification in re⁹.

If we were to accept the above-mentioned primacy of nature, it would be necessary to also accept the thesis that the divine nature begets and communicates existence to the Divine Persons. Yet it seems that in the teaching of Lateran IV the primacy of the Divine Persons comes into play. Among the Divine Persons the Person of the Father enjoys and wields primacy because it is He of whom it is said *fons et origo totius divinitatis*. This is also evident in the teaching of many eastern theologians. In the wake of this truth is necessary to say that existence belongs to the Father *sine principio*. We might allow ourselves to say that here, in the depth of the Father's Person most properly existence is identical with the Divine Person; it constitutes that trinitological *Esse personale* and *Existere Personae et in Persona*. *Esse Divinum* therefore occurs not only as *esse naturae* but most of all as *esse personale* and *esse personalia*.

Personal existence is not in reality distinct from the existence of nature (*existere in natura*) just as the essence of the Divine Person is not substantially distinguished from the divine nature-essence. Here St. Anselm's famous principle is applied: *Omnia sunt unum ubi non obviat relationis oppositio*. Thus, the one and the same common existence in and of the Trinity „commences" in the Person of the Father, whom the Fathers of the Church fittingly named *Principium sine principio* and „Being". Further, the eternal begetting of the Son is the act of granting Him filial existence and the spiration of the Holy Spirit is a sort of two-way realization or a timeless affirmation of the existence of the Persons of the

⁹ B. de Margerie, *La Trinité chrétienne*, p. 195 ff; cf. Św. Augustyn, *O Trójcy Świętej*, trans. M. Stokowska, Poznań 1963.

Father and the Son. Thus, we have *Esse Paternale Esse Filiale* and *Esse Procedens* (or *re-spiratum*). The existence of the Father is begetting; the existence of the Son is the realization of begetting and the existence of the Spirit is the eternal reception of the realizing spiration. While *Esse Naturae* is identical in each Person, it remains relational and on the plane of divine personhood it is specific and pertinent to the given Divine Person. In God, the constitutive element of divine personhood is not only the structure of its relations viewed from the perspective of essence but relations of existence. Thanks to an internal relation of the divine existence to triune personification, in God there exists begetting existence, begotten existence and an existence which affirms the first two existences. Absolutely speaking, without these relations existence is one and the same.

It can be said that in the Trinity there are three „I's" and not only three modes of one and the same existence, which amounts to personalistic modalism. In God, there really are „three existing Ones" (*Tres realiter Existentes*). Consequently, this means that there are three personifications of one and the same *Actus Purus*, i.e. three personifications of the same activity, act and existence. In accordance with this, each Person creates in virtue of an individually possessed divine existence: *Creator Genitor*, *Creator Genitus* and *Creator Procedens* (St. Thomas Aquinas). These wonderful personal-existential relations take place *ad intra* as well. The three Divine Persons together and separately exist through one and the same existence but relationally each of them is its own personal existence. Existence, therefore, is relational. The Trinity is not glued together out of three constructs, potentialities or modes of our perception. In the Trinity we find three personal realities. This reminds us of K. Barth's thesis that each of the Divine Persons possesses *relative subsistere* as well as *unum proprium subsistere*¹⁰. If each of the Divine Persons would not possess its own respective *esse personale* and *existere in persona*, our trinitology would be only scripturalistic and not real. If this were the case, one Person would not be able to address the other, pronouncing the word „You". Man would not be able to call the Father, Son or the Holy Spirit „You". The Father and the Son or even all three Persons would not be able to say „We" and man, for his part would not be able to call them „You" or „They". All personal address with respect to the Persons of the Holy Trinity would be reduced to a mere matter of language, without an objective counterpart in essentialistic trinitology and reality¹¹.

¹⁰ *Dogmatik I*, I pp. 381ff.

¹¹ It seems that in the Trinity there is no "They" (e.g. Father and Son) because of an interior-personal mode of existence.

Once it was a theological dictum that God *ad intra* was triune and one *ad extra*. Today we must redress this thesis in the sense that God is both tripersonal and one, simultaneously *ad intra* and *ad extra*. This holds true not only in the economy of creation but in the economy of salvation as well. Both in the uncreated divine universe as well as in the created emanating universe God expresses Himself as three-fold and as a perfectly simple singularity. Existence is the central point of the axis whose ends lead either to a threefold plurality or to a singular unity. We deal here not with a matter of quantity or number with respect to the Divine Persons but with the question of the mode of their existence. In this sense we return to the old patristic adagium: *tres subsistentiae (hypostaseis) consubstantiales in una eademque substantia*. Such is the heritage left by St. Basil the Great, Rufin and St. Hilary of Poitiers. This allows us to approximate the term *persona* and *prosopon* to the terms *hypostasis* and *subsistentia* in an ecumenical fashion.

In fine, the existential conception of the trinitological dogma assumes more of the characteristics proper to the mystery. Moreover, it champions the primacy of a genuine „personalism” over „naturalism”. Above all, the Divine Persons are God: that God is tri-personal is a matter of secondary importance. The divine nature does not exhaust the reality of the Divine Persons, who are indeed the crowning glory of the mystery of God.

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