

CHAPTER NINE

THE HYPOSTATIC ATTRIBUTES IN RELATION TO THE IDENTITY OF THE DIVINE ESSENCE

The Hypostatic Attributes on the one hand, manifest the relationship between the three Persons and they do not divide the unity of the Divine Essence; whereas on the other hand, they differentiate each Person clearly one from the other and cannot be transmitted.¹ Refusal to accept the differentiation of the three Persons and that their Hypostatic Attributes cannot be transmitted, leads directly to Judaism and Sabellianism, transforming the Trinity into three forms of appearance of the one God, as if under three masks. Although the Son is born and He is a different Person from the Father, as is the Holy Spirit Who proceeds only from the Father, the common Essence of the Son as God is the same as the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The Essence of the Deity is one and undivided, but differentiates in Three perfect Persons. The Three Persons differentiate in reality one from another, but they are neither divided nor do they consist of three gods. The commonality of their Essence excludes any division within the Divine Nature and we do not consider the Divine Essence to be above the three Persons or that the latter are the result of the production of the former. The Deity neither by will nor by force can be divided, but remains undivided and at the same time differentiates in three Hypostases, united, equal and perfect regardless of their order in the Trinity.

¹ Ware, *Way*, pp. 39-43.

In the divinity the unity of Essence is real and is manifested in the common of will, authority, power and the rest of the divine attributes. This unity is also manifested in the unity of the divine actions and will, and is united undividedly by containing the three Persons the one within the other. St. Basil, the Great, in order to help us to understand this great Mystery, uses the example of the rainbow, which has so many colours, which differentiate one from another, yet, they are united as one.

1. The hypostatic attributes are not transmittable and they are the characteristics of the divine Persons.

The relationship of the hypostatic attributes to the divine Essence must be understood in that: preserving the differentiation of the hypostases, we must not divide the unity of the Essence. Undoubtedly, although the naming ‘*Father*’ is not vivid of the Essence, but manifests the relationship of the first Person to the Son, and the naming ‘*Projector*’ manifests the relationship to the Holy Spirit, nevertheless, the hypostatic attributes of the divine Persons within the Trinity are distinguished very clearly². Thus, the hypostatic attribute of ‘*not being born*’, which is ascribed to the Father, is His personal hypostatic attribute and it cannot be transmitted to the other two Persons. The Son, although has the common attribute with the Father and the Holy Spirit that He ‘*is not made*’, yet, His own

² St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, I and II, in Migne, *P.G.*, 45, 404 and 473.

and personal hypostatic attribute is, that He is the ‘*Son*’ and ‘*the only Begotten*’, which cannot be transmitted neither to the Father nor to the Holy Spirit. Finally, the Holy Spirit, because of the common divine Nature, having all the divine attributes with the Father and the Son, is distinguished from the two Persons in that His hypostatic attribute is that He ‘*proceeds*’ only from the Father and is sent into the world by the Son.

The differentiation of the Hypostases within the Deity is an absolute, necessary, essential and fundamental doctrine of Christendom, the denial of which leads to Judaism in the Christian form of Sabellianism³. It is also essential to accept the sameness of the divine Essence within the three Hypostases, because as those who do not accept the personal characteristics of the Hypostases fall into Judaism, likewise, those who do not confess the common of the Essence fall into polytheism⁴.

2. The undivided sameness of the divine Essence consist the equality of the three Persons.

One is the Nature of the Persons in the Holy Trinity. For, if the Persons of the Deity are three in number, they are not divided in their Nature. So, he who confesses, that

³ The heresy of Sabellianism presented the deity as one multi-mask being, who appeared in history in three different ways: as Father in the Old Testament, as Son in the New Testament and as Holy Spirit in the Church. See: Stefanides, *Eccl. History*, pp. 167, 168, 170, 211, note 3. Danielou, *The first*, v.2, pp. 150, 214-217.

⁴ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, I, in Migne, *P.G.*, 45, 336. St. Basil the Great, *Epistle* 210, in Migne, *P.G.*, 32, 772.

they are three Persons in the Deity, neither introduces alienation between them, nor accepts three gods; because the Son is the same to the Father, as the Holy Spirit is identical to the Nature of the two other Persons. The Son is different from the Father as being ‘born’, but He is at the same time God. For, that which is born is the same with Him who begets Him. Neither do we see another deity in the Father and another in the Son, but they are one in their Nature and have the sameness of their Essence⁵. The same refers for the Holy Spirit, who differentiates from the two other Persons, as proceeding from the Father, but is accounted within the Trinity, which is the One God, undivided and of the same Essence, as one Deity. God is the Father, God is the Son, God is the Holy Spirit; one Nature in three Persons, who are spirit, perfect, self-existing, divided in number, but not divided in Deity, nor the one is considered to be higher and the other lesser God⁶. “*God is undivided and unmixed, for neither the hypostases are mixed, because of oneness of the Nature, nor can the Nature be divided although differentiates in three Persons; but, (God) is simultaneously united and divided; divided and yet always remains united*”⁷.

When we speak about the ‘*sameness of essence*’ and ‘*one essence*’ in the three Persons of the Deity, under no

⁵ St. Basil the Great, *Against Sabellius*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 31, 605. St. Athanasius the Great, *Against Arians*, III, in Migne, *P.G.*, 26, 328. St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Homily 1 about the Trinity*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 75, 697.

⁶ St. Athanasius the Great, *To Serapion*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 26, 570. St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Homily 31* and *Homily 34*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 36, 148 and 236.

⁷ Boulgareos, *Theologicon*, p. 223.

circumstances should we acknowledge, that the three Persons are '*parts of one being*' or have derived from '*a higher*' compared to them essence. For then we are led not only to the heresy of the division of the absolute simple Essence of God, but we ignore also the equality of the divine Persons, and even more we might be accepting that they are as three '*brothers*'. But the Deity neither by will nor by force is divided, but remains undivided, as in the example of three suns, which have one light.

The equality of the Persons also remains intact. For God is complete and has no need of anything and the only thing which differs is the relationship between the three Persons, the first in relation with the other two being Father to the Son and Projector to the Spirit; the second because of this relation is called Son and the third being known as He who proceeds from the Father. But these names do not declare difference in the Nature, but manifest only the personal hypostatic attributes⁸. And the Son lacks in nothing, because He is not Father. Neither anything is lacking from the Father, because He is not Son, nor anything is lacking from the Holy Spirit in order to receive it and become Son. But the '*not born*', '*born*' and '*procession*' manifest the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, in order to maintain the unmixed of the three Hypostases in the one Nature and divinity⁹.

⁸ St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Homily* 31, in Migne, *P.G.*, 36, 141, 148 and 152. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, II, in Migne, *P.G.*, 45, 472.

⁹ St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Homily* 31, in Migne, *P.G.*, 36, 141-144.

If in the order of the Trinity the Father appears to be counted as first, second the Son, third the Holy Spirit, this order of numbers must not mislead us to accept inequality amongst the Persons of the Trinity. We proclaim the three Persons to be each one perfect God, preserving each one of them their personal hypostatic attributes¹⁰. If our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ gave us the instruction to baptize the nations in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, He had not given any attention to the counting of numbers. “*For He did neither said, to baptize in the first, second and third; nor in the one and two and three, but through the holy names He granted the knowledge of salvation*”¹¹.

3. The unity of the divine Essence real and not theory.

Concerning the three Hypostases in the Deity, we must not understand them as being the result of a higher being to them, nor that they are the result of division of the united Essence of the Deity. The relationship of the Hypostases to the Essence is not similar to the relationship of the partial ideas to the general idea.

The common and oneness of the Essence is real, because of the co-existence, of the sameness of essence, action, agreement of the will and of the sameness of the authority, power and goodness. The Hypostases

¹⁰ Ibid, *Homily* 40, in Migne, *P.G.*, 36, 417.

¹¹ St. Basil the Great, *About the Holy Spirit*, ch. XVIII, in Migne, *P.G.*, 32, 148-149.

differentiate one from the other only in theory, but in reality they are not divided, as men are. This occurs because there is no space, nor difference in will or opinion or action or power or anything lese, which can bring real division¹². Speaking about men, we speak about many, counting them separate one from another; but concerning God, we cannot speak about three gods, but we confess the Holy Trinity to be the One and only True God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. *“Three in One is the Deity and One in Three, undivided and inseparable. For it is divided inseparably and united dividedly”*¹³.

To understand, according to human capability, this unity of the divine Essence, although it distinguishes into three hypostases, St. Basil the Great takes the example of the rainbow. *“Truly in the rainbow the light is united in itself and yet divided”*¹⁴. In other words, although the light consists of many colours and they are distinguished one from the other, no one can distinguish between the spaces. All the colours are seen and are clearly seen; but, where they join, no one can see, so it becomes impossible for anyone to find precisely where the one colour begins and where the other ends. As in the above example one can see the different colours, but cannot understand the division one from the other, similarly is within the Deity. The hypostatic attributes of the three Persons must be accepted as existing separate one from the other, but all

¹² St. John of Damascus, *Exposition. About the Holy Trinity*, VIII, in Migne, 94, 828.

¹³ St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Homily* 39, ch. 11, in Migne, *P.G.*, 36, 345.

¹⁴ St. Basil the Great, *Epistle* 38, in Migne, *P.G.*, 32, 333.

the rest divine attributes and divine Essence are common and the same for all three Persons.

1. The sameness of the Will and Action of the Holy Trinity.

The unity of the Trinitarian divinity and the undivided sameness of the divine Essence, manifest the unity of the divine Action and Will, as well as their co-existence of the three Hypostases within each other. Concerning the unity of the divine action we notice that the action of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is one and does not differ, nor varies in anything¹⁵. This action is neither divided in many actions nor each Person acts on His own; but whatever is done, it is done by the three Persons simultaneously and not in three actions¹⁶.

St. Gregory of Nyssa says, that “*One and the same action is that of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, one might, one power, one will, one opinion. Whatever the Father does, the Son is also present and performs also; and whatever the Son or the Holy Spirit do, the Father cooperates undividedly; and neither the Son does anything without the Spirit, or the Spirit without the Son and the Father*”¹⁷. And whatever the Father does or wills, the Son and the Spirit in an equal way also do and

¹⁵ St. Basil the Great, *Epistle* 189, in Migne, *P.G.*, 32, 693.

¹⁶ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *That there are not three gods*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 45, 125.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, *Concerning what is the “in the image and likeness of God”*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 44, 1344.

will. For the natural unity of the Holy Trinity “*is one in all*”¹⁸.

God the Father becomes the Saviour of all in the Son who realizes the salvation of the world through the grace of the Holy Spirit. And although we confess that the salvation came from the Holy Trinity, we do not confess that they are three saviours¹⁹. If we had seen that the actions of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit were different, then it would be proper to come to the conclusion, that there are different natures which act. For example, the fire cannot produce cold, neither the ice warmth; but, according to their nature, are their actions. Concerning the Holy Trinity, because we have the sameness of action and will, we have one movement of the three Hypostases and not three same movements, one will, one action and one authority²⁰. Thus, we have sameness of action united with their nature. The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit sanctifies, gives life, enlightens and everything else²¹.

The co-existence or habitation of the three divine Persons within one another (“*περιχώρισις*” or “*ενοίκησις*”) presupposes that there is no difference in the life-giving Nature of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, but whatever is said about the infinite perfection of the one

¹⁸ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Against Nestorius*, book IV, ch. 2, in Migne, P.G., 76, 180.

¹⁹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *That there are not three gods*, in Migne, P.G., 45, 129.

²⁰ St. John of Damascus, *Exposition. About the Holy Trinity*, VIII, in Migne, P.G., 94, 828.

²¹ St. Basil the Great, *Epistle* 189, in Migne, P.G., 32, 693.

divine Person, must be said also for the other two. Because of the sameness of the divine Nature, the three Persons co-exist and live within one another and their unity is undivided without any form of mixture or confusion²². Each one of them live within the others in an undivided and continuous communion, like the example of three suns which contain inseparably one another, but having one light. It is impossible to separate the Son from the Father and the Holy Spirit, or the Holy Spirit from the Son and the Father, or the Father from the Holy Spirit and the Son. The three Persons co-exist within an undivided communion without having anything else interfering or existing except the divine Nature. Also no ‘*non-hypostatic space*’ exists within the divine Essence in order to create emptiness within and to dilate the continuous of the divine communion²³. Classical New Testament references are: John 10:30; 14:7, 9-11; 16:15; 17:9-11²⁴.

5. The incomprehensibility of the mystery through images.

Concerning the attempts which many had made in order to make the mystery of the Holy Trinity more

²² St. John of Damascus, *Exposition. About the Holy Trinity*, VIII, in Migne, *P.G.*, 94, 828.

²³ St. Basil the Great, *Epistle* 38, in Migne, *P.G.*, 32, 332.

²⁴ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *To John*, Homily VII, Homily XI, ch. 2 and 7, in Migne, *P.G.*, 74, 24D, 452C-D and 509. St. Athanasius the Great, *Against Arians III; To Serapion*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 26, 328; 565 and 577. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Arius and Sabellius*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 45, 1293. St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Homily* 40, in Migne, *P.G.*, 36, 417.

understandable through examples and images used from our daily life, we must never forget that which St. Gregory of Nyssa had said: “*It is impossible through words to clarify the inexpressible mystery, because of the absolute unity of the divine Essence; how can it be seen divided and at the same time be understood in oneness; and again that it differentiates in hypostases, but is not divided in the Essence*”²⁵. He confesses that, after many attempts, he was unable to find neither the right image nor the correct images to express this great mystery; and neither the example of the fountain of a river and the running water nor the image of the sun and its light and radiance were correct²⁶.

St. Augustine was not satisfied by the three expressions: “*to exist*”, “*to know*” and “*to love*”, thus he attempted to use the example of another trinity: “*the Mind*”, “*the knowledge*” and “*the love*”. Finally, he used a third example which consisted of: “*the memory*”, “*the thought*” and “*the will*”. But even these examples were unable to clarify the divine mystery of the Holy Trinity²⁷.

The same can be said for all those who attempted to clarify the mystery of the inner life of the Holy Trinity according to the words of St. John, the Apostle and

²⁵ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechesis*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 45, 17.

²⁶ St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Homily* 31, ch. 31 and 32, in Migne, *P.G.*, 36, 169.

²⁷ Trempelas, *Dogmatique*, v. I, p. 308. See also: Gennadius, in Karmeris, *The dogmatics*, v. I, p. 365. Androutsos, *Dogmatique*, p. 90. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *That there are not three gods*; and *Against Eunomius I*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 45, 121; 396. St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Homily* 39, in Migne, *P.G.*, 36, 76.

Evangelist, that “*God is love*”²⁸. According to them God expands Himself as the Father, who loves; and the Son, who is loved; and the Holy Spirit, who unites the two others in mutual love²⁹. As it has been mentioned, that the explanation of the Holy Trinity is the explanation of the unknown by the unknown; since, the nature of God’s love is incomprehensible to our understanding and it remains an unapproachable mystery to all limited mind. And as it has been said, that “*It is not permitted for anyone to speak or think about those things concerning the divinity, which are not mentioned in Holy Scriptures*”³⁰.

In conclusion, the mystery of the Holy Trinity remains an incomprehensible mystery for any intellectual being, either from the angelic hosts or from the human race.

²⁸ 1 John 4:8.

²⁹ St. Gregory Palamas, *Chapters natural, theological, moral and practical*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 150, 1144-1145. Boulgareos, *Theologicon*, p. 271. Martensen, *Dogmatique*, p. 174. Jugie, *Theologia*, v.II, pp. 253-295.

³⁰ Boulgareos, *Theologicon*, pp. 279 and 318.