

T W O

DIVINE SECRET

The secret is this: God does not live a lonely life. For within His utter simplicity three divine Personalities possess the one same nature and live Their divine life in the utmost intimacy; intimacy attainable only in a family that is divine. The secret, then, is a mystery: the inner life of God consists in a perfect unity and multiplicity at the same time. We cannot know *how*; we can only know that this is true. For God told us so!

When did He reveal the secret to us here below? It was not necessary. Why not wait till we get to heaven? The only answer: Love does such things! He did not wish to wait. What real lover ever holds back secrets? This mystery is a mystery of love. Remember, “God is love” (1 John 4:8).

Where do we find this secret? We read it in the Sacred Scriptures. “The New Testament is the revelation of One God in Three Persons and of our union with

him.”¹ In fact it has been said that the entire New Testament is a development of the doctrine of the Divine Trinity:² that in one God there are three Divine Persons, really distinct; each having one and the same divine nature. In reading the New Testament we find hundreds of references to the names of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And while the sacred authors do not use the words “person” and “nature” as such, they use expressions which correspond to the ideas of nature and personality for each member. For example, they describe attributes or qualities of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit which show Them to have characteristics of real Persons acting according to Their one divine nature, that is, knowing, willing (loving), acting. For by a person we mean any individual subject existing in a rational nature to which all the subject’s actions are attributed.

Thus the Father *knows*: “no one knows who the Son is except the Father” (Luke 10:22); the Son *knows*: “Christ Jesus, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:2–3); the Holy Spirit *knows*: “the things of God no one knows but the Spirit of God” (1 Corinthians 2:11).

Each Person *wills*: “not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of my Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21); “no one who knows who...the Father is except the Son, and him to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Luke 10:22); “but all these things are the work of one and the same Spirit who allots to everyone according to his will” (1 Corinthians 12:11).

The three Divine Persons *act*: “but the Father dwelling in me, it is he who does the works” (John 14:10); “For the works which the Father has given me to accomplish, these very works that I do, bear witness to me” (John 5:36); “But all these things are the work of one and the same Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:11).

Scripture assures us, moreover, that these three Divine Persons are *distinct* one from the other: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17); “I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again I leave the world and go to the Father” (John 16:28); “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things” (John 14:26); “For if I do not go, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go I will send him to you” (John 16:7).

Also we learn from the texts of Scripture that not only is each Person distinct but all possess *divine nature*, being truly God: “Father, the hour has come! Glorify thy Son, that thy Son may glorify thee,...Now this is everlasting life, that they may know thee, the only true God” (John 17:1, 3); “Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who though he was by nature God, did not consider being equal to God a thing to be clung to, but emptied himself, taking the nature of a slave and being made like unto men” (Philippians 2:5–7); “Ananias, why has Satan tempted thy heart, that thou shouldst lie to the Holy Spirit and by fraud keep back part of the price of the land?... Thou hast not lied to men, but to God” (Acts 5:3–4).

Finally we see that each Divine Person possesses *one* and the *same* divine nature—three Persons in one God: “Is God the God of the Jews only and not of the Gentiles also? Indeed of the Gentiles also. ...For there is but one God” (Romans 3:29–30); “For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one” (1 John 5:7).

The secret is all there—written simply, clearly, as it came from the lips of Christ and was taught by Him to His disciples. Before He told it, it was a secret. Once revealed, it was secret no longer. He wanted it told and retold till the end of time. And that is precisely what has happened. The apostles, through the inspiration of God, not only inscribed it in the pages of the New Testament, but also, as preachers of Christ’s word, they taught it to their followers; their successors continued to teach it uninterruptedly.

This continual teaching of all the truths of Christianity is called oral Tradition, the handing down of the official teaching of Christ through the Catholic Church from one generation to the next. This consists in no mere haphazard passing on of beliefs like legends, in the human tradition, that can easily become distorted and lose their original meaning. This oral Tradition of the Church is divine, as divine as Scripture, and serves, along with Scripture, as the source of all the truths revealed by Christ. From our catechism we recall that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Church enables her to *teach*, sanctify, and rule all her members; teaching them infallibly. The Church exercises this divine role of

teaching and interpreting all that Christ revealed by drawing from Scripture and Tradition. Her voice is the living voice of her Founder, keeping alive the heritage of His Gospel, both in its written and its oral content.

Tradition is not only a turning to the teaching of the past, but is also a present, living, developing teaching of everything revealed directly by Christ or through the apostles until their death. The Church uses many means of exercising her teaching office: infallible declarations by the Holy Father, like the recent dogma of the Assumption; ecumenical councils; creeds, like the Nicene Creed recited in the Mass; official catechisms; as well as the more intimate preaching of the clergy under the guidance of the bishops in every diocese.

But for the more valuable facets of Tradition the Church does turn to the past, namely, to the “Fathers of the Church.” Commencing with the Apostolic Fathers, who had personal contact with the apostles or immediately followed them, the Church produced a series of illustrious leaders, renowned for learning and sanctity, who continued to hand down, through the early centuries, by their preaching and writings, the authentic truths revealed directly by Christ, or through His apostles, both those contained in the sacred books and those preached orally. Right here we see that there has always been a happy blending between Scripture and Tradition; some truths to be found in the written word, some in the spoken, many in both.

For the authentic interpretation of the mysteries of revelation we need sound guides. God has given us these

holy and illustrious men, whom we call the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, those shining lights whom God willed to shine in the firmament of His Church, so that by means of them the darkness of the heretics might be dispelled. Men such as Irenaeus, Cyprian, Hilary, Athanasius, Basil, the two Gregorys, Ambrose, Jerome, Chrysostom, Augustine, Cyril. These and the Bishops and Shepherds, sober, learned, holy, who drank in the Catholic Faith with their mother's milk, drank it with their food, who have ministered this food and this drink to great and simple. It was by means of such planters, cultivators, and teachers, that, since the Apostles, the Church has grown.³

What gives tremendous weight to the authority of these Fathers is the harmonious agreement among them on the essential points of the revealed mysteries they have preserved.

God's greatest secret, that relating of His inner life, the sublime mystery of the Most Holy Trinity, we find especially detailed by the Fathers in Tradition, as well as in Scripture.

Theologians always draw first on these sources of our faith, on Scripture and Tradition, in formulating all the doctrines revealed by Christ to His one true Church. But to help us understand a little more clearly the doctrinal meaning of the mysteries of faith they often resort to analogies, comparisons, likenesses, similitudes to human ways of thinking and acting with which we are

familiar. This should not surprise us. For did not the greatest Teacher make abundant use of such analogies? Recall His many parables: the mustard seed, the treasure hidden in a field, the pearl of great price, etc. The kingdom of heaven is like all these things, He said. In addition to such similitudes, Our Lord often cited examples from nature: “Consider the lilies of the field”; “You are the salt of the earth,” etc. The story form of teaching was another favorite, classic examples of which are the parables of the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan. Why did Christ use this method so frequently? Because it well suited His purpose in conveying supernatural truths to His hearers in terms and figures that they easily understood.

It was only natural that the Fathers, in imitating the simplicity of the Gospel, found it helpful to resort to the appeal of analogies in explaining the Christian mysteries.

It is not surprising, then, that later theologians, including St. Thomas, had recourse to this method. For example, it helps us to see a similarity between the development of our supernatural growth in the Divine Life of grace and our natural growth from infancy to maturity. Thus baptism is rebirth, confirmation is soldiering, penance medicine, the Holy Eucharist nourishment. All these helps do not, however, detract from the tremendous mystery that is Divine Life, received and developed from the sacraments and added to our human nature, so that it participates in the very nature of God. But analogies do help, especially since we have to cooperate and make use of our supernatural powers, just as

we make use of our natural powers and gifts of nature—body and mind.

So it is that when we come to the most sublime and important mystery of the Trinity—the secret of secrets—theologians make use of many human analogies in order to bring to our minds the fact that in one God there is a real Father, a real Son, and a real Person of Their mutual love. Their similitudes enable us to delve a bit more deeply into the secret of God's intimate life. From these analogies we could never discover the Trinity, but once we have learned about it from divine revelation they help us to acquaint ourselves more fully with it.

We must bear in mind that it was Christ Who revealed this secret to the apostles and that we find it recorded in the New Testament and authentically taught by the Fathers. It is only within the focus of the divine light of revelation that we find the story of the Divine Family and our incorporation into it. If we caught a bird's-eye view by a philosophical approach to the Divine Spirit in the preceding chapter, we merely add here and there the tiny tapers of human analogies in the following chapters, which serve to remove in some small way and only imperfectly the darkness of our feeble minds in the presence of this mystery—anticipating the destined day when we shall *see* the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, face to face.