

# The unity and the triune of God (The trinitarian doctrine)

By Michael Vass. Galenianos\*

## Prologue

The trinitarian doctrine is the “most fundamental doctrine of the Church”<sup>1</sup>. Its content is summarized in the fact that God is *μονὰς ἅμα καὶ τριάς*, i.e. one and at the same time triune. This is not an arbitrary invention; it arises from God’s revelation, as recorded in the Bible. The present study of the Trinitarian doctrine consists of three sections: The first describes the teaching of Scripture and Church Tradition on God’s unity (that God is one); the second presents in a summary fashion the biblical evidence for God’s trinity; and the third presents the orthodox teaching on the *synamfoteron* of God’s unity and trinity.

## 1. God’s unity

That God is one constitutes one of the Bible and the Tradition of the Church’s basic teachings.

The Decalogue’s first commandment states: “*I am the Lord your God [...] You shall have no other gods before me*”<sup>2</sup>. In *Deuteronomy*, it has also been written: “*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one*”<sup>3</sup>. Again, through the prophet Isaiah God reveals that: “*Before me no god was*

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1. N. Mitsopoulos, *Θέματα Ὁρθοδόξου Δογματικῆς Θεολογίας*, Athens 1983/2008, p. 58.

2. *Ex.* 20, 2-3.

3. *Deut.* 6, 4; cf. *Mark* 12, 29.

formed nor will there be one after me. I am the Lord, and apart from me, there is no savior”<sup>4</sup> and that: “I am the first and I am the last; apart from me, there is no God”<sup>5</sup>.

In his Epistles, St. Paul says that: “one is God”<sup>6</sup>, “there is no God but one”<sup>7</sup>, “one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all”<sup>8</sup>. God’s unity is also indicated in the Epistle of James: (“There is one God”)<sup>9</sup>.

In the Tradition of the Church, God’s unity is also presented with logical-philosophical arguments, mainly to counter polytheism.

The apologist Athenagoras argues that, if two or more gods existed in the beginning, they either would be in one and the same place or each would have his own<sup>10</sup>. The first is out of the question, for they cannot be alike, since they are gods, but because they are uncreated, they are not alike; the created things are similar to the examples («τὰ μὲν γὰρ γεννητὰ ὅμοια τοῖς παραδείγμασιν»)<sup>11</sup>, the uncreated are dissimilar, for they were neither created by someone nor according to a pattern. If, on the other hand, the many gods form a whole, as the hand, the eye, and the foot are complementary parts of one body, then God is one. Nevertheless, God is pure, indifferent, and indivisible, unlike man who is born and corruptible, made up and divided into parts.

Now, if each god is in a special place and the one who created the world is above the things he created and decorated, where is the other god or gods? If the world is spherical and enclosed by circles of heaven

4. *Isaiah* 43, 10-11.

5. *Isaiah* 44, 6.

6. *Romans* 3, 30; cf. *Galatians* 3, 20 («ὁ δὲ Θεὸς εἷς ἐστίν»), *Timothy* 2, 5 («εἷς γὰρ Θεός»).

7. *1 Corinthians* 8, 4.

8. *Ephesians* 4, 6.

9. *James* 2, 19.

10. P. Christou translates the original phrase, «ἥτοι ἐν ἐνὶ καὶ ταυτῷ ἦσαν ἡ ἰδίᾳ ἕκαστος αὐτῶν» as: “either they would be contained in one and the same being or each would be a separate being”: «ἡ θὰ περιείχοντο εἰς ἓν καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ ὃν ἡ ἕκαστος θὰ ἦτο αὐτοτελὲς ὄν» (ΕΠΕ 83, *Ἀπολογηταὶ* 2, 142-143), apparently to show more directly its connection with the similarities that Athenagoras mentions later on.

11. Commenting on this sentence, P. Christou argues that “here is subject to the Platonic theory of Ideas based on which beings are created” (ΕΠΕ 83, *Ἀπολογηταὶ* 2, 142, note 14).

and the world's creator above, what is the place of the other god or gods? For he is not in the world, nor is he a god of another world or around the world, for therein is the world's creator. But if he is neither in the world nor around the world (since around the world God the creator possesses everything), then where is he? Is it above the world and God, in another world, and around another world? But if this is the case, He is neither around us nor holds the world together nor is He great in power.

If he is neither in another world [for he (the creator) fulfills everything] nor around another world [for he (the creator) possesses everything], he does not exist at all, since there is no place for him to exist... Does the other god provide? But if he is not a creator, he cannot provide for. Since, therefore, he neither provides for, nor is there any place for him, one from the beginning and only one is God, the creator of the world<sup>12</sup>.

Saint Gregory of Nyssa reduces God's unity to the perfection attributed to the divine. He advises Christians, when in dialogue with someone who claims that there are many gods, to ask him the question of whether the divine is perfect or incomplete. In case he answers, as is expected, that it is perfect, because otherwise the very concept of the divine becomes problematic, it is not difficult to explain to him that there is no reason to divide the divine into many gods since the one as absolutely perfect will not differ in any way from the other, i.e. he will have no special quality or attribute to present<sup>13</sup>.

Athenagoras and Gregory of Nyssa's arguments are repeated by St. John of Damascus, who formulates them as follows (in translation):

To those who remain unconvinced by the Bible, we will talk in the following way. The divine is perfect and is not devoid of goodness and power; it is beginningless, immutable, indescribable<sup>14</sup> - to put it simply, it is perfect in all of its aspects. If we admit the existence of many gods, we should point out some differences among them. For if they are identical, there will be one rather than many. But if there is a difference between them, where is the perfection? For a man could not be a god if he does not attain perfection regarding goodness,

12. *Πρεσβεία περὶ Χριστιανῶν*, 8, BEΠΕΣ 4, 286<sup>42</sup>-287<sup>30</sup>.

13. *Λόγος Κατηχητικός*, Πρόλογος, BEΠΕΣ 68, 379<sup>6</sup> et seq.

14. Indescribable: it cannot be described, enclosed in an outline, i.e. infinite.

power, wisdom, time, or place. Thus, the one identity of all proves one rather than many gods.

Then how, if there are many, will the indescribable be preserved? For where one would be, the other would not be. How will the world be ruled by many without being broken up and destroyed, since there will be opposition among the rulers? Difference creates opposition. And if one claims that everyone ruled a place, who is the one who put order and made them distribute? So that would probably be God. Thus, there is one God, perfect, indescribable, creator of the universe, the one who holds all things together and governs them, beyond all limits of possibility and source of perfection<sup>15</sup>.

Therefore, according to the Church's teachings, God's unity is indisputable.

## 2. God's triune

In the New Testament, it is revealed that God is not only one but also triune: Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. God's triune nature is revealed in Jesus Christ's baptism in the Jordan River: "*As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him, I am well pleased'*"<sup>16</sup>. Other clear evidence for God's triune nature are the following passages: "*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*"<sup>17</sup> and "*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all*"<sup>18</sup>.

God in the New Testament is the Father and the other two persons. Christ is the incarnate Son and Word of God ("*You are the Messiah, the*

15. *Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως*, Α' 5 (5), P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki 1992, Text-Translation into Modern Greek-Introduction-Commentary by N. Matsoukas (NM), p. 41.

16. *Matthew* 3, 16-17; cf. *Mark* 1, 9-11 and *Luke* 3, 21-22.

17. *Matthew* 28, 19.

18. *2 Corinthians* 13, 13; cf. *1 Peter* 1, 1-2.

son of the living God”<sup>19</sup>, “the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known”<sup>20</sup>, “Who, being in very nature God [...] and being found in appearance as a man”<sup>21</sup>, “Word of God”<sup>22</sup>), whose divinity is also explicitly confessed. The first sentence of the Gospel of John explicitly states that the Word is God: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” In this Gospel we find the confession of the apostle Thomas to Christ: “My Lord and my God!”<sup>23</sup>. The apostle Paul further states that Christ is the “Messiah, who is God over all”<sup>24</sup>.

The Holy Spirit, as the “Spirit of God”<sup>25</sup>, “Spirit of the Father”<sup>26</sup>, “Spirit of Christ”<sup>27</sup>, “Spirit of the Lord”<sup>28</sup>, “the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father”<sup>29</sup>, as another “advocate”<sup>30</sup>, as the Spirit who “always searches the depths of God”<sup>31</sup> etc. is also God<sup>32</sup>. Holy Spirit’s divine nature is implicitly but clearly stated in the apostle Peter’s rebuke to Ananias, which “serves

19. Matthew 16, 16.

20. John 1, 18; cf. John 1, 14; 3, 16-18; A’ John 4, 9.

21. Philippians 2, 6-8.

22. Revelation 19, 13: “[...] and his name is the Word of God”.

23. John 20, 28; cf. A’ John 5, 20. On the title “God” attributed to Christ in the works of the Evangelist John, see V. Tsakonas, *Ἡ Χριστολογία τοῦ κατὰ Ἰωάννην Εὐαγγελίου καὶ τῶν ἐπιστολῶν*, Athens 1994, p. 113 et seq. and 169 et seq.

24. Romans 9, 5; cf. Ephesians 5, 5; 2 Thessalonians 1, 12; 1 Timothy 3, 16; Titus 2, 13. For the issues of interpretation related to these passages, see V. Tsakonas, *Τὸ φιλολογικὸν καὶ θεολογικὸν πρόβλημα τῆς θεότητος τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς τὸν ἀπόστολον Παῦλον*, Athens 1994, pp. 177-190.

25. Matthew 3, 16.

26. Matthew 10, 20.

27. Romans 8, 9.

28. 2 Corinthians 23, 17.

29. John 15, 26.

30. John 14, 15-17; 14, 25-26; 15, 26-27; 16, 5-11; 16, 12-15. For the term “advocate” in the Gospel of John, see V. Tsakonas, *Ἡ περὶ Παρακλήτου-Πνεύματος διδασκαλία τοῦ Εὐαγγελιστοῦ Ἰωάννου (ὕπὸ τὸ πρῖσμα τῆς καθόλου βιβλικῆς πνευματολογίας)*, Athens 1992, p. 128 et seq.

31. 1 Corinthians 2, 10.

32. See P. Trempeles, *Δογματικὴ τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας*, vol. 1, Athens 1978, pp. 257-268; M. Farantos, *Ἡ περὶ Θεοῦ ὀρθόδοξος διδασκαλία*, Athens 1985, pp. 209-221.

as a direct testimony and affirmation of the name of the Holy Spirit as God”<sup>33</sup>: “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God”<sup>34</sup>.

In the light of the New Testament, it becomes clear that there are also testimonies regarding God’s triune nature in the Old Testament, although not as clear as those of the New Testament. These testimonies are sometimes divided into four groups: 1) Plural indications; 2) Theophanies; 3) the hypostatization of God’s word and wisdom; and 4) the attribution of names and attributes of God to the Messiah<sup>35</sup>.

The use of the plural number in God’s speeches is presented as a hint for God’s triune nature: “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness”<sup>36</sup>, “The man [Adam] has now become like one of us”<sup>37</sup> and “Let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other”<sup>38</sup>, as well as the thrice-holy angelic hymn “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory”<sup>39</sup>.

Of the theophanies, God’s appearance to Abraham in the form of three men stands out as indicative of God’s triune nature: “The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre [...] Abraham looked up

33. N. Hexas, Ὁρθόδοξος Δογματική, vol. Β' (Ἡ Θεολογία τοῦ Ὁμοουσίου), Athens 2006, p. 191.

34. Acts 5, 3-4. See St Cyril of Alexandria’s relevant remarks: «Εἰ μὲν οὖν οὐχ ὁμοούσιον τῷ Θεῷ τὸ Πνεῦμά ἐστιν, οὐκ εἰς Θεὸν ἔσται πεπλημελεγκῶς ὁ εἰς αὐτὸ πλημελεῶν» (Περὶ ἁγίας τε καὶ ὁμοουσίου Τριάδος, Λόγος Ζ' - Περὶ τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος, ὅτι Θεὸς καὶ ἐκ Θεοῦ κατὰ φύσιν, PG 75, 1084D).

35. See Δογματική. Κατὰ τὰς παραδόσεις τοῦ τακτικοῦ Καθηγητοῦ τοῦ Πανεπιστημίου κ. Ἰωάννου Καρμίρη, Fititikos Theologikos Syndesmos Publications, Athens 1964, pp. 121-123. N. Mitsopoulos, Θέματα Ὁρθόδοξου Δογματικῆς Θεολογίας, op.cit., pp. 127-128.

36. Gen. 1, 26. Γιὰ τὸ ἐρώτημα: σὲ ποιὸν ἀπευθύνεται τὸ «ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον» βλ. N. Hexas, Ὁρθόδοξος Δογματική, vol. Γ' (Ἡ περὶ δημιουργίας διδασκαλία), Athens 2006, pp. 130-135.

37. Gen. 3, 22.

38. Gen. 11, 7.

39. Isaiah 6, 3.

and saw three men standing nearby”<sup>40</sup>. It is worth noting that the narration of “the hospitality of the three angels”<sup>41</sup> under Abraham inspired, as is well known, the great Russian hagiographer Andrej Rubljow in the hagiography of the icon of the three angels, which only the Orthodox Church recognizes as denoting the mystery of the triune God’s existence and life”<sup>42</sup>.

In several instances (and especially in the passages: *Prov.* 1, 20 et seq.; *Book of Wisdom* 6, 129, 1 et. seq; 16, 12; 18, 15 et seq.; *Book of Sirach* 1, 1 et seq.; 24, 1 et seq.), the word and wisdom of God appear in such a way as to give the impression that they are distinct hypostases. “According to certain Church Fathers”, this hypostatized word or God’s wisdom, “may indicate the second person of the Holy Trinity”<sup>43</sup>.

However, the case of the following verse from the Psalms mostly indicates God’s triadic nature: “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth”<sup>44</sup>. In interpreting this verse, Basil the Great attacks those who separate the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son and explains that the “word” here is not the common speech, but God’s Word, and the “spirit” is not the vapor diffused in the air, but the Holy Spirit<sup>45</sup>.

40. *Gen.* 18, 1-2.

41. The terms “angels” and “men” are used interchangeably for at least two of the three men who subsequently went to Sodom (see *Gen.* 19, 1 et seq.).

42. M. Farantos, *Ἡ περὶ Θεοῦ ὀρθόδοξος διδασκαλία*, pp. 222-223.

43. N. Mitsopoulos, *Θέματα Ὀρθοδόξου Δογματικῆς Θεολογίας*, p. 128.

44. *Psalms* 32, 6; cf. *Psalms* 17, 7: «... ἐξαποστελεῖ τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ καὶ τῆξει αὐτά; πνεύσει τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ, καὶ ρυήσεται ὕδατα». Καὶ στοὺς δύο αὐτοὺς ψαλμικοὺς στίχους βλέπει ὁ Μέγας Ἀθανάσιος τὸν Λόγον καὶ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα καὶ παρατηρεῖ: «Οὐδὲν γὰρ ἐστὶν ὃ μὴ διὰ τοῦ Λόγου ἐν τῷ Πνεύματι γίνεται καὶ ἐνεργεῖται» (*Ἐπιστολὴ πρὸς Σεραπίωνα Θμούεως Ἐπίσκοπον*, 31, BEΠΕΣ 33, 116<sup>25-26</sup>).

45. Ὁμιλῖαι εἰς τοὺς Ψαλμοὺς, ΛΒ', 4, BEΠΕΣ 52, 67<sup>3-11</sup>: «Ποῦ οἱ τὸ Πνεῦμα ἐξουθενούντες; ποῦ οἱ χωρίζοντες αὐτὸ ἀπὸ τῆς δημιουργικῆς δυνάμεως; ποῦ οἱ τῆς πρὸς Πατέρα καὶ Υἱὸν συναφείας αὐτὸ διατέμνοντες; Ἀκουέτωσαν τοῦ ψαλμοῦ λέγοντος ... Οὔτε γὰρ Λόγος, ἡ κοινὴ αὕτη λαλιά, νομισθήσεται ἐξ ὀνομάτων καὶ ῥημάτων τὴν σύστασιν ἔχουσα, οὔτε τὸ Πνεῦμα ἀτμὶς εἰς ἀέρα διαχεομένη ἀλλὰ καὶ Λόγος ὁ ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν καὶ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιον, ὃ ἰδίως τῆς προσηγορίας ταύτης τετύχηκεν».

Finally, God's names and qualities are attributed to the person of the Messiah. In the *Book of Isaiah*, the Messiah is called "Emmanuel"<sup>46</sup> ("God with me", as interpreted in the Gospel of Matthew, where the Messiah is also identified with Jesus Christ)<sup>47</sup> and "son of the Lord" (*Ebed Jahve*)<sup>48</sup>. It is also said that "he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace, there will be no end"<sup>49</sup>.

Messiah's divinity is also denoted in the following verses from the Psalms: "He said to me, 'You are my son; today I have become your father'"<sup>50</sup>, "The LORD said to my lord: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"<sup>51</sup> and "like dew from the morning's womb"<sup>52</sup>. Here, of course, there is no evidence for God's triune nature, but it is suggested that there is a second divine person.

According to St. Isidore of Pelusium, the reason why God's triune nature was not plainly revealed in the Old Testament was the Jews' penchant for polytheism. To avoid falling into idolatry, they had to be taught the lesson of monarchy<sup>53</sup> at first and gradually the distinction between hypostases<sup>54</sup>.

46. *Isaiah* 7, 14.

47. *Matthew* 1, 22-23.

48. *Isaiah* 52, 13. For further details regarding this term, see G. Galitis, *Ερμηνευτικά της Καινῆς Διαθήκης (Πανεπιστημιακαὶ παραδόσεις)*, Thessaloniki 1984, pp. 285-287.

49. *Isaiah* 9, 5-6.

50. *Psalms* 2, 7.

51. *Psalms* 109, 1; cf. *Matthew* 22, 43-45; cf. also *Gen.* 19, 23 («καὶ Κύριος ἔβρεξεν ἐπὶ Σόδομα καὶ Γόμορα θεῖον καὶ πῦρ παρὰ Κυρίου ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ»), where many Church Fathers and ecclesiastical writers see an implicit manifestation of the Son.

52. *Psalms* 109, 3.

53. The term "monarchy" in theology is synonymous with "monotheism"; it denotes the existence of a single principle of everything: God. St. Gregory the Theologian states that there are three conceptions of God: anarchy, polyarchy, and monarchy. Christians honor monarchy, but the monarchy that does not refer to a single person (Λόγος ΚΘ - Θεολογικός Τρίτος, Β', ΒΕΠΕΣ 59, 239<sup>24-30</sup>).

54. *Ἐπιστολῶν βιβλίον Β', Ἐπιστολὴ ΡΜΓ'*, PG 78, 589 A: «Ἰουδαίοις τοῖς εἰς πολυθεῖαν ῥέπουσι νομοθετῶν [ὁ Θεός] οὐκ ἔδοκίμασε διαφορὰν προσώπων εἰσαγαγεῖν ἵνα καὶ μὴ διάφορον φύσιν ἐν ταῖς ὑποστάσεσιν εἶναι δογματίσαντες, εἰς εἰδωλολατρίαν ἐκκυλισθῶσιν ἀλλὰ τὸ τῆς μοναρχίας ἐξ ἀρχῆς μαθόντες μάθημα, κατὰ μικρὸν τὸ τῶν ὑποστάσεων ἀναδιδαχθῶσι δόγμα, τὸ πάλιν εἰς ἐνότητα φύσεως ἀνατρέχον».



Based on divine revelation, as recorded in the Bible, the Church proclaims her faith in the Triune God in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed: *“I believe in one God, the Father almighty [...] And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages [...] And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father; Who, with the Father and the Son, is adored and glorified”*.

### 3. The *Synamfoteron* of God's unity and triune

The harmonization of God's unity with His triune was a supreme theological issue. Some felt they were not harmonized, so they denied both, contradicting divine revelation. The “Monarchians” denied God's triune nature, and “tried to prove that the three persons of the Holy Trinity constitute a ‘monarchy’, a ‘unity’, a person, which was always identified with the Father”<sup>55</sup>.

Monarchianism is divided into “tropical” and “dynamic”. Tropical Monarchianism or “Sabellianism” (from Sabellius, the main representative of this sect) takes the three divine persons as personages, in which God appears in history. There is only one divine person, which is presented in three different ways according to the needs of the time. As the Father, He is the creator of the world and the lawgiver of the Old Testament; as the Son, He is the redeemer of the world; and as the Holy Spirit, He is the one who guides and sanctifies the Church.

Dynamic Monarchianism perceives the Word and the Holy Spirit not as persons but as God's impersonal powers. Thus, the incarnation of the Word is understood as the indwelling of this impersonal power of God in Jesus. Jesus Christ was not God but man; he was adopted by God because of his moral excellence. Because of his teachings, this dynamic Monarchianism was called “Adoptionism”.

The degradation of the Son, even more of the Holy Spirit, in order for the unity of God to be saved, can also be observed in the heresy of “Arianism” (by the heresiarch Arius). Both persons are regarded as

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55. See Vl. Pheidas, *Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία*, vol. Α', Athens 1992, p. 240.

God's creations, with the Son being the superior creature, placed in a special space between God and His creations. Thus, a triple gradation between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit arises and God's triune nature is abolished.

On the opposite side of Monarchianism and Arianism is the heresy of "Tritheism", which abolishes the unity of God by taking the three divine persons as autonomous deities. According to one view, tritheism "represents the interest of polytheism and pluralism within Christian theology"<sup>56</sup>.

In contrast to the heresies mentioned above, Orthodox theology accepts the unity and trinity of God's *synamfoteron* on the basis of the distinction between essence and substance. These two terms are not unambiguous, but in the field of theology, they are generally used as follows: Essence (like nature) means the genus and the species<sup>57</sup>, while substance means the individual and the particular person<sup>58</sup>. Thus, the distinction between essence and substance corresponds to the distinction between the common and the particular, as Basil the Great states: «Οὐσία δὲ καὶ ὑπόστασις ταύτην ἔχει τὴν διαφορὰν ἣν ἔχει τὸ κοινὸν πρὸς τὸ καθ' ἕκαστον, οἷον ὡς ἔχει τὸ ζῶον πρὸς τὸν δεῖνα ἄνθρωπον»<sup>59</sup>.

Now, God is one according to His essence<sup>60</sup> and triune according to His substances. The trinity does not negate unity, for the divine essence

56. M. Farantos, *Ἡ περὶ Θεοῦ ὀρθόδοξος διδασκαλία*, p. 401.

57. On this topic, John of Damascus comments: «Οἱ δὲ ἅγιοι Πατέρες τὸ εἶδος, καὶ τὸ γένος ἐκάλεσαν φύσιν, καὶ μορφήν, καὶ οὐσίαν» (*Κεφάλαια φιλοσοφικά*, Ε', PG 94, 544A).

58. *Op.cit.*, ΚΘ', PG 94, 576A: «Τὸ τῆς ὑποστάσεως ὄνομα δύο σημαίνει. Ἀπλῶς μὲν γὰρ λεγόμενον, σημαίνει τὴν ἀπλῶς οὐσίαν. Ἡ δὲ καθ' ἑαυτὴν ὑπόστασις τὸ ἄτομον σημαίνει καὶ τὸ ἀφοριστικὸν πρόσωπον».

59. *Ἐπιστολὴ 236 (Ἀμφιλοχίῳ ἐπισκόπῳ)*, 6, BEΠΕΣ 55, 289<sup>37-39</sup>.

60. It is worth noting that, God, as being beyond and above every created essence, is "supersubstantial". According to John of Damascus: «Οὐσία τοίνυν ἐστὶ Θεός, καὶ πᾶν κτίσμα. Εἰ καὶ ὁ Θεὸς οὐσία ἐστὶν ὑπερούσιος» (*Κεφάλαια φιλοσοφικά*, Δ', PG 94, 537B).

as simple, incorporeal, infinite, etc.<sup>61</sup> is not divided like the human one<sup>62</sup>. In a letter, reported under the name of Basil the Great but presumed to have been written by Gregory of Nyssa, it is pointed out that between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit there is nothing else than the divine nature, to be divided, nor any gap that would break its continuity<sup>63</sup>. Therefore, being consubstantial<sup>64</sup> the three divine persons are one God, not three<sup>65</sup>. As St. Gregory Palamas states, «τριάς γὰρ ἡμῖν ὑπάρχει ὁ Θεός, ἀλλ' οὐχὶ τριπλοῦς»<sup>66</sup>.

God's unity is ensured by the divine substances' common will and energy. The divine persons do not have a separate will nor do they act separately from one another<sup>67</sup>. Athanasius the Great, based on many

61. It should be noted here that, despite the rich theological vocabulary about God's physical attributes, His essence (i.e., what God is) is completely unknown. Gregory the Theologian writes in this regard: «Θεόν, ὅτι ποτὲ μὲν ἐστὶ τὴν φύσιν καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν οὔτε τις εὔρεν ἀνθρώπων πώποτε, οὔτε μὴ εὔρη» (Λόγος ΚΗ' – Θεολογικός Δεύτερος, ΙΖ', ΒΕΠΕΣ 59, 227<sup>36-37</sup>).

62. See John of Damascus's relevant comment: «Ἡμεῖς γὰρ γεννώμενοι τεμνόμεθα διαμπάξ [= ἀπ' ἄκρου εἰς ἄκρον] τῶν πατέρων καὶ χωριζόμεθα... Ἡμεῖς δὲ καὶ γινώμη τεμνόμεθα καὶ δυνάμει καὶ τόπῳ. Διὸ καὶ ἄνθρωποι, οὐκ ἄνθρωπος ὁ δεῖνα καὶ ὁ δεῖνα λεγόμεθα ἐπὶ δὲ Θεοῦ οὐχ οὕτως» (Πρὸς Ἰορδάνην ἀρχιμανδρίτην περὶ τοῦ τρισαγίου ὕμνου, 7, PG 95, 40C).

63. Γρηγορίῳ ἀδελφῷ περὶ διαφορᾶς οὐσίας καὶ ὑποστάσεως, 4, ΒΕΠΕΣ 55, 59<sup>34-39</sup>, 69, 199<sup>14-19</sup>: «διότι οὐδὲν ἐστὶ τὸ διὰ μέσου τούτων [Πατρὸς καὶ Υἱοῦ καὶ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος] παρεννερόμενον οὔτε πρᾶγμα ὑφ' ἑστώς ἄλλο τι παρὰ τὴν θείαν φύσιν, ὥς καταμερίζειν αὐτὴν πρὸς ἑαυτὴν διὰ τῆς τοῦ ἁλλοτρίου παρεμπτώσεως δύνασθαι, οὔτε διαστήματός τινος ἀνυποστάτου κενότης, ἥτις κεχηνένοι ποιεῖ τῆς θείας οὐσίας τὴν πρὸς ἑαυτὴν ἁρμονίαν, τῇ παρενθήκῃ τοῦ κενοῦ τὸ συνεχὲς διαστέλλουσα».

64. The divine person's consubstantial nature is revealed in several passages of the Holy Scriptures and especially in the words of Christ "I and the Father are one" (John 10, 30) and "anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14, 9). For further details about the theology of consubstantiality, see the above-mentioned second volume of N. Xexakis, Ὁρθόδοξος Δογματική.

65. Cf. K. Skouteris, Τὰ 39 ἄρθρα τῆς Ἀγγλικῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Ὑπὸ τὸ φῶς τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Συμβολικῆς παραδόσεως, Athens 1982, pp. 110-111: «Ἡ Θεαρχικὴ Τριάς δὲν εἶναι Τριάς θεοτήτων, ἀλλὰ μία καὶ ἡ αὐτὴ θεότης ἐν Πατρὶ καὶ Υἱῷ καὶ Ἁγίῳ Πνεύματι θεωρουμένη ... Ἡ Τριάς εἶναι ὄντως εἷς Θεός, δεδομένου ὅτι εἰς ἐκάστην θείαν ὑπόστασιν ὑπάρχει ὅχι μέρος τῆς θείας οὐσίας ἀλλὰ ὁλόκληρος ἡ θεότης».

66. Κεφάλαια φυσικά, θεολογικά, ἠθικά τε καὶ πρακτικά PN', πε', Φιλοκαλία τῶν Ἱερῶν Νηπιτικῶν (Astir Publications, Athens <sup>5</sup>1952), vol. Δ', p. 165.

67. Cf. M. Farantos, Ἡ περὶ Θεοῦ ὀρθόδοξος διδασκαλία, p. 385: «Ἡ ταυτότης τῆς θελήσεως καὶ τῆς ἐνεργείας τῶν τριῶν θείων ὑποστάσεων δὲν θὰ πρέπει νὰ ἐκληφθεῖ

passages from the Holy Bible, writes: «Ὁ γὰρ Πατὴρ διὰ τοῦ Λόγου ἐν Πνεύματι ἁγίῳ τὰ πάντα ποιεῖ καὶ οὕτως ἡ ἐνότης τῆς ἁγίας Τριάδος σώζεται»<sup>68</sup>. Therefore, the deity is one; this is demonstrated by the commonality of the energy of the divine substances, as well as from the undivided substance<sup>69</sup>.

The symamfoteron of God's unity and triune nature is demonstrated by the teaching on the divine persons' inter-embracing, which is based mainly on the words of Christ *"I in the father and the father in me"*<sup>70</sup>, *"in me the father and I in him"*<sup>71</sup>, *"I in my father"*<sup>72</sup> and *"you, father, in me and I in you"*<sup>73</sup>. John of Damascus writes that the persons of the Holy Trinity are inter-embraced, with the embracing being «ἀδιάστατος» ("without removal/distancing") and «ἀνεκφοίτητος» ("uninterrupted, constant"), without there being any coalescence (fusion, syneresis), conflation (mixture) or confusion between them<sup>74</sup>.

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ἐν τῇ ἐννοίᾳ τῆς ὁμογνωμίας καὶ ὁμοφωνίας τριῶν ἀτόμων, τὰ ὅποια ἔχοντα διάφορον θέλησιν καὶ ἐνέργειαν ἀπλῶς ἐναρμονίζονται εἰς τὸ θέλημα καὶ εἰς τὰς ἐνεργείας των». 68. Πρὸς Σεραπίωνα, 28, ΒΕΠΕΣ 33, 116<sup>10-11</sup>. Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, Περὶ τοῦ μὴ οἶεσθαι λέγειν τρεῖς θεοὺς πρὸς Ἀβλάβιον, ΒΕΠΕΣ 68, 176<sup>38-41</sup>: «πᾶσαν ἐνέργειαν οὐ διηρημένως ἐνεργεῖ κατὰ τὸν τῶν ὑποστάσεων ἀριθμὸν ἢ ἁγία τριάς, ἀλλὰ μία τις γίνεται τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ θελήματος κίνησίς τε καὶ διάδοσις».

69. Gregory of Nyssa observes in this regard: «εἴτε οὖν ἐνεργείας ὄνομα ἢ θεότης, ὡς μίαν ἐνέργειαν πατὴρ καὶ υἱὸς καὶ ἅγιος πνεύματος, οὕτω μίαν φαρμὴν εἶναι τὴν θεότητα· εἴτε κατὰ τὰς τῶν πολλῶν δόξας φύσεως ἐνδεικτικόν ἐστι τὸ τῆς θεότητος ὄνομα, διὰ τὸ μηδεμίαν εὐρίσκειν ἐν τῇ φύσει παραλλαγὴν ἐκ τῆς τῶν ἐνεργειῶν ταυτότητος οὐκ ἀπεικόντως μιᾶς θεότητος τὴν ἁγίαν τριάδα διοριζόμεθα» (Πρὸς Εὐστάθιον περὶ τῆς Ἁγίας Τριάδος, ΒΕΠΕΣ 68, 160<sup>7-12</sup>).

70. John 14, 11. Πρὸς John 14, 10.

71. John 10, 38.

72. John 14, 20.

73. John 17, 21. Cf. John 17, 22-23 and John 1, 18: "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known". A biblical testimony about the Holy Spirit's embracing is 1 Corinthians 2, 10-11.

74. Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως, Α', 14 (14), ΝΜ, p. 92. For more details, see our previous article: «Ἡ περιχώρηση στὸ τριαδικὸ καὶ τὸ χριστολογικὸ δόγμα κατὰ τὸν ἅγιο Ἰωάννη τὸν Δαμασκηνό», Θεολογία/Theologia 3, 86 (2015), pp. 121-132. For the teachings about "embracing", see more generally see V. Tsingos, Περιχώρησις. Θεολογικὸ περιεχόμενο τοῦ ὅρου καὶ ἐφαρμογές του κατὰ τὴ Δογματικὴ τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας, Thessaloniki 2015.

Yet, if the divine persons do not differ in substance, will, energy, etc., where do they differ and they are three? What are their hypostatic attributes, so that they can be distinguished? Summarizing the teachings of the Holy Scriptures and the Church's tradition up to his time, John of Damascus writes that the Father is «ἀναίτιος καὶ ἀγέννητος» (“not coming from anyone, but He is the beginning and cause of existence and nature in all”), the Son is «ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς γεννητῶς» and the Holy Spirit is also «ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς, ἀλλ’ οὐ γεννητῶς, ἀλλ’ ἐκπορευτῶς». We are aware of the difference between birth and procession, but we don't know what exactly this difference is. The Son's birth and the Holy Spirit's emanation take place together<sup>75</sup> – «ἄιδίως» (eternally) and «ἀνάρχως» (without a beginning in time), as he mentions elsewhere<sup>76</sup>, because God is timeless.

The three divine persons, therefore, differ in their mode of existence, and, as Gregory of Nyssa concludes, because they are distinguished from each other only concerning their cause while their essence remains unchangeable and indivisible, the Holy Trinity is one deity<sup>77</sup>.

However, the fact that the Father is the sole cause of the other two divine persons' existence is brought in as another element, indicating God's unity. Gregory the Theologian points out that the unity in the Holy Trinity is the Father, from whom the other two divine persons originate and to whom they are reduced, not so that they may combine but may coexist, without being separated by time, will, or power<sup>78</sup>. Gregory of

75. Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως, Α', 8 (8), NM, p. 60.

76. *Op.cit.*, p. 50.

77. Περὶ τοῦ μὴ οἶεσθαι λέγειν τρεῖς θεούς, ΒΕΠΕΣ 68, 181<sup>14-19</sup>: «Ἐπειδὴ τοίνυν τὰς μὲν ὑποστάσεις ἐπὶ τῆς Ἁγίας Τριάδος ὁ τοῦ αἰτίου διακρίνει λόγος, τὸ μὲν ἀναιτίως εἶναι τὸ δὲ ἐκ τοῦ αἰτίου πρεσβεύων, ἡ δὲ θεία φύσις ἀπαράλλακτός τε καὶ ἀδιαίρετος διὰ πάσης ἐννοίας καταλαμβάνεται, διὰ τοῦτο κυρίως μία θεότης καὶ εἷς θεὸς καὶ τὰ ἄλλα πάντα τῶν θεοπρεπῶν ὀνομάτων μοναδικῶς ἐξαγγέλλεται».

78. Λόγος ΜΒ' – Συντακτῆριος εἰς τὴν τῶν ΡΝ' ἐπισκόπων παρουσίαν, ΙΕ', ΒΕΠΕΣ 60, 128<sup>38-41</sup>: «Φύσις δὲ τοῖς τρισὶ μία, Θεός. Ἐνωσις δέ, ὁ Πατὴρ, ἐξ οὗ καὶ πρὸς ὃν ἀνάγεται τὰ ἑξῆς οὐχ ὡς συναλοίφωσθαι, ἀλλ' ὡς ἔχεσθαι, μῆτε χρόνου διείργοντος, μῆτε θελήματος, μῆτε δυνάμεως». Cf. N. Matsoukas, *Δογματικὴ καὶ Συμβολικὴ Θεολογία*, vol. Β', Thessaloniki <sup>2</sup>1996, pp. 93-94: «Ὁ τριαδικὸς Θεός εἶναι μονάδα, γιατί ὑπάρχει ἓνα αἶτιο καὶ μία οὐσία ... ἐπειδὴ τὸ πρόσωπο τοῦ Πατέρα εἶναι ἡ μοναδικὴ ρίζα, πηγὴ καὶ αἰτία τῶν ἄλλων προσώπων τῆς Τριάδας, γι' αὐτὸ ἀκριβῶς ὁ

Nyssa<sup>79</sup> and John Damascene<sup>80</sup> attribute God's unity to the coexistence of the one and only cause with its effects.

In this way, the following curious but admirable thing emerges: when we turn our attention to the deity, the first cause, and the monarchy, we imagine one thing. Again, when we turn our attention to the timeless things that originate from the first cause and are homologous to it, the things worshipped are three<sup>81</sup>. God is thus both a monad and a trinity, "one in three" and "three in one", according to the established terminology.

In order to avoid misunderstandings and with the help of Aristotelian philosophy, Saint Maximus the Confessor makes certain remarks on these terms: the trinity is not coincident [συμβεβηκός]<sup>82</sup> of the monad, nor the monad of the trinity. The monad does not differ from the trinity in nature, for the divine nature is one and simple. Neither the trinity is inferior in power to the monad nor the monad to the trinity. The monad

Θεός εἶναι τρισυπόστατη μονάδα».

79. Πῶς τρία πρόσωπα λέγοντες ἐν τῇ θεότητι οὐ φαμεν τρεῖς θεούς. Πρὸς Ἑλλήνας ἀπὸ τῶν κοινῶν ἐννοιῶν, ΒΕΠΕΣ 68, 165<sup>31-35</sup>: «Ἐν γὰρ πρόσωπον καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ τοῦ Πατρὸς, ἐξ οὐπερ ὁ Υἱὸς γεννᾶται καὶ τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἐκπορεύεται. Διὸ δὴ καὶ κυρίως τὸν ἕνα αἴτιον μετὰ τῶν αὐτοῦ αἰτιατῶν ἕνα Θεὸν φαμεν τεθαρόρηκτως, ἐπειδὴ καὶ συνυπάρχει αὐτοῖς».

80. Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως, Α' 8 (8), NM, p. 66: «... οὐδὲ τρεῖς Θεοὺς λέγομεν τὸν Πατέρα καὶ τὸν Υἱὸν καὶ τὸ Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα, ἕνα δὲ μᾶλλον Θεόν, τὴν Ἁγίαν Τριάδα, εἰς ἕν αἴτιον Υἱοῦ καὶ Πνεύματος ἀναφερομένων». The above demonstrates how erroneous the teaching of Western theology about the Holy Spirit's emanation not only from the Father but also from the Son (the well-known *Filioque*) is; by placing two principles in the Holy Trinity, it abrogates God's unity and downgrades the person of the Holy Spirit. See our earlier study on this subject: *Πελοποννησιακὰ Γράμματα/Peloponnisiaka Grammata* 2 (2017), pp. 715-723.

81. Λόγος ΛΑ' – Θεολογικὸς Πέμπτος, ΙΔ', ΒΕΠΕΣ 59, 273<sup>22-25</sup>: «ὅταν μὲν οὖν πρὸς τὴν θεότητα βλέψωμεν, καὶ τὴν πρώτην αἰτίαν, καὶ τὴν μοναρχίαν, ἐν ἡμῖν τὸ φανταζόμενον ὅταν δὲ πρὸς τὰ ἐν οἷς ἡ θεότης, καὶ τὰ ἐκ τῆς πρώτης αἰτίας ἀχρόνως ἐκεῖθεν ὄντα καὶ ὁμοδόξως, τρία τὰ προσκυνούμενα». Although such a comparison would of course be dubious, one might dare to say that what St. Gregory says here is somehow reminiscent of the quantum theory in modern physics.

82. The coincident is "an Aristotelian term, denoting everything that has no independent substance but is a definition of the being or substance, e.g. the quality, the quantity, the place it occupies, the time, its relation to other beings, etc. The coincident is the being's 'accompaniment'. Coincident is also any accidental, secondary, and changing characteristic" (S. Gikas, *Φιλοσοφικὸ Λεξικό*, Athens <sup>6</sup>1987, p. 290).

is not something common and general which is considered only through thought by the particulars<sup>83</sup>, for it is self-existent and self-sufficient. The trinity does not derive from the monad, because it is unborn and “self-revealed” («αὐτοφανερούμενη»)<sup>84</sup>. The deity is a monad and trinity, a monad in essence, the trinity in the mode of existence. It is a monad as a whole, not divided into substances, and a trinity as a whole, not confused with the unity<sup>85</sup>.

Despite these very enlightening remarks, how the deity can be «ἀμέριστος ἐν μεμερισμένοις», as Gregory the Theologian characteristically mentions<sup>86</sup>, remains a forever mystery<sup>87</sup>, “a paradox” (inexplicable, incomprehensible), according to St. Maximus himself<sup>88</sup>. We might have known it, if it wasn’t

83. We are dealing here with the theory of Nominalism, according to which general concepts are only bare names. Cf. our older article: «Ρεαλισμός, νομιναλισμός και ὀρθόδοξη δογματική θεολογία», *Παρνασσός/Parnassos* MZ’ (2005), pp. 137-144.

84. The divine essence does not precede the three substances as a cause of their existence. Cf. M. Farantos, *Ἡ περὶ Θεοῦ ὀρθόδοξος διδασκαλία*, p. 386: «“Θεὸς καθ’ αὐτόν” δὲν ὑπάρχει, ἐν τῇ ἐννοίᾳ τῆς ὑπάρξεως κάποιας θείας φύσεως ὡς μιᾶς “τετάρτης” πραγματικότητος».

85. *Εἰς τὴν προσευχὴν τοῦ Πάτερ ἡμῶν πρὸς τινὰ φιλόχριστον ἐρμηνεία σύντομος, Φιλοκαλία τῶν Ἱερῶν Νηπτικῶν*, vol. B’, p. 195. Cf. Ioannis Karmiris, *Σύνοψις τῆς Δογματικῆς Διδασκαλίας τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας*, Athens 1960, pp. 16-17: «Τοιουτοτρόπως ἡ μία θεία οὐσία εἶναι ἐν ταῖς τρισὶν ὁμοτίμοις καὶ ἀδιαιρέτοις ὑποστάσεσι, χωρὶς ὅμως καὶ νὰ ἀποτελεῖται ἐξ αὐτῶν, καθ’ ὅσον νοοῦμεν ταύτας οὐχὶ ὡς μέρη τῆς θεότητος, οὔτε ὡς ποιότητες ἐν ἄλλῳ θεωρουμένας, ἀλλ’ οὔτε καὶ ὡς ὅψεις ἢ ἐκφάνσεις τῆς μιᾶς θείας οὐσίας, ἀλλ’ ἐκάστην τούτων ὡς ἰδίως καὶ καθ’ ἑαυτὴν ὑφισταμένην ἐν τῇ μιᾷ καὶ τῇ αὐτῇ θείᾳ οὐσίᾳ, ἥτις εἶναι κοινὴ καὶ τῶν τριῶν ὑποστάσεων».

86. *Λόγος* ΛΑ’, ΙΔ’, ΒΕΠΕΣ 59, 273<sup>20</sup>.

87. Cf. Chr. Androutsos, *Δογματικὴ τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἀνατολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας*, Athens 1992, p. 89: «Τὸ δόγμα τῆς ἁγίας Τριάδος, ὑπερβαῖνον τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην κατάληψιν καὶ μόνον ἐπὶ τῆς αὐθεντίας τῆς θείας Ἀποκαλύψεως ἐρειδόμενον, δὲν δύναται νὰ καταστήτῃ προσιτὸν εἰς τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην διάνοιαν, ἀλλ’ οἰκειοῦται τις αὐτὸ μόνον διὰ τῆς πίστεως».

88. *Περὶ ἀγάπης κεφαλαίων ἑκατοντὰς δευτέρα*, ΚΘ’, *Φιλοκαλία τῶν Ἱερῶν Νηπτικῶν*, vol. B’, p. 18: «Χρὴ γὰρ καὶ τὸν ἕνα Θεὸν τηρεῖν καὶ τὰς τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις ὁμολογεῖν, κατὰ τὸν μέγαν Γρηγόριον, καὶ ἐκάστην μετὰ τῆς ιδιότητος. Καὶ γὰρ διαιρεῖται μὲν, ἀλλ’ ἀδιαιρέτως, κατὰ τὸν αὐτόν, καὶ συνάπτεται μὲν διηρημένως δέ. Καὶ διὰ τοῦτο, παράδοξος καὶ ἡ διαίρεσις καὶ ἡ ἑνωσις. Ἐπεὶ τί ἔχει τὸ παράδοξον, εἰ ὡς ἄνθρωπος ἀνθρώπῳ ἡνωταί τε καὶ κεχώρισται, οὕτω καὶ ὁ Υἱὸς τῷ Πατρί, καὶ οὐδὲν πλέον;». Cf. Hosios Thalassios, *Περὶ ἀγάπης καὶ ἐγκρατείας ἑκατοντὰς τετάρτη*, 4γ’.



for the fact that «ἀπερινόητος ἀνθρώπου φύσει καὶ ἄρρήτος παντελῶς ἡ οὐσία τοῦ Θεοῦ»<sup>89</sup>. Then we might have known what the birth of the Son from the Father is, what the Holy Spirit's procession from the Father is, and what the difference between birth and procession is. Yet, «τὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μὴ τὸ Πνεῦμα τοῦ Θεοῦ»<sup>90</sup>.

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Φιλοκαλία τῶν Ἱερῶν Νηπτικῶν, vol. Β', p. 228; John of Damaskus, Ἑκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως, Α' 8 (8), NM, p. 48.

89. Basil the Great, Ἀνατρεπτικὸς τοῦ ἀπολογητικοῦ τοῦ δυσσεβοῦς Εὐνομίου, Λόγος Α', 14, BEΠΕΣ 52, 175<sup>25-26</sup>.

90. 1 Corinthians 2, 11.