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Francisco Suárez, S. J.
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TREATISE III: ON THE MOST HOLY MYSTERY OF THE TRINITY

**BOOK 3: ON THE TRUE DISTINCTION OF THE THREE PERSON, AND
THE PREDICATES THAT ARE MULTIPLIED IN THEM**

<588, col. a>²

There are three things to be discussed in the present book, namely, what the distinction between the divine persons is, what attributes or predicates are multiplied in the same divine persons by reason of this distinction, and what words or ways of speaking we can use to explain this distinction. But the fourth thing that could be desired here principally—namely, through what the divine persons are distinguished—will be better said in the seventh book, since it presupposes their constitution.

CHAPTER 1.

IT IS SHOWN THAT THE DIVINE PERSONS ARE REALLY DISTINGUISHED FROM EACH OTHER.

1. *The error of Sabellius.* – Here the error of Sabellius that should be discussed occurs first. Sabellius applied the names of the three persons to the same thing and person, as Athanasius reports in the oration against the Arians on the phrase ‘God of God’. He there explains the reason for the names in these words: The Father is expanded into the Son by taking flesh and into the Holy Spirit by sanctifying human beings; that is, the same person, as unbegotten and the principle is called the Father, as incarnate is called the Son, and as dwelling among humans through grace is called the Holy Spirit. This is also taken from the report of Athanasius in his oration against Gregales of Sabellius, and from Basil, in his sermon against Sabellius, and from Eusebius, in the seventh book of his *History*, chap. 5, and Nycephorus, book

¹Translation is based on the Vivés edition (vol. 1).

²Numbers in angle brackets indicate page numbers in the Vivés edition for ease of reference, given that it is the most widely used edition.

six, ch. 26. Nor was this heretic the first author of this error, but it is attributed to him because he explained and defended it more. But it was taught earlier by Praxaeus, as is evident from Tertullian, in his book against him, and by Noethus according to Epiphanius, [*Panarion*], heresy 57. Tertullian also refers to it in his book *De praescriptionibus haereticorum*, ch. 52. Nycephorus in *History*, book 4, ch. 22, says that the Cataphrygians were in this error, that of the Montanists, who are thought to be the same. Perhaps this is why Jerome in Letter 54 to Marcellus says that 'Montanus forced the Trinity into the confines of a single person'. Or perhaps he said this because of his followers, for Epiphanius says of Montanus himself that he did not think badly about the Trinity (heresy 40). And from heretics arose those who are called Patripassians, because they said that the Father suffered and died for us, because they did not distinguish him from the Son. In order to confirm this error, these heretics first of all used all the testimonies by which we showed the divinity of individual persons, then they added everything that proves the unity of God, and from this they thought to conclude that the persons are not distinguished in reality.

2. *The Catholic assertion.* – But Catholic truth teaches that the divine Persons are distinct in reality (in re) from one another: and so properly and really distinguished. The first part is of the faith, strictly speaking, which is defined by all the Councils cited in the third chapter of the previous book, and all the Fathers as well, especially Pope Leo, letter 93, ch. 1, and Ignatius, letter 8 ('We do not believe', he says, 'in one thing with three names, but in three of the same honor'), Nazianzus best in *De Theologia*, oration 3, Hilary, *De Synodis*, in the beginning, and *De Trinitate*, books 6 and 7. We presented the testimonies of Scripture in book 1, ch. 2. For although this word 'the are distinguished' is not formally found in Scripture, yet many things are found that include it, such as 'there are three' (1 John 5[:7]). Also, the names 'Father' and 'Son' (Matt. 28) sufficiently show the distinction, if they are understood with the property, as they should be understood, because no thing begets itself such that the Father and the Son could be with respect to the same person. And the word 'proceed', which is found in John 8 and 14, shows the same thing. Also, the relative 'another', which Christ the Lord uses in John 15 and 16. For a thing entirely non-distinct is not another thing from itself. This also includes that expression by which the Father is said 'to be in the Son' and the 'Son in the Father', both in John 14 and

in John 1 ('the Word was with [God]').³ Furthermore, wherever Christ the Lord says 'to receive himself from the Father' and 'the Holy Spirit from himself and from the Father', he clearly teaches a distinction, since these things are not truly and properly said of the same thing with respect to itself. Finally, it can also be proven from the mission of the persons, as we will see below.

3. *What kind of distinction there is between the persons.* – These, then, clearly show that there is a distinction in reality itself between the persons. That this distinction should be called a 'real' distinction, however, I cannot find discussed under this term by the Fathers or defined by the Councils. Nevertheless, I think it is sufficiently contained in the things that are defined and in the testimonies and expressions that were brought forward. For that reason, I think it absolutely is of the faith. For this distinction, which the faith teaches, is personal; that is, it constitutes distinct persons. But a personal distinction is real. Furthermore, each divine person considered in himself is a true thing subsisting per se and one is not another; therefore, there is a real distinction between them. For to be really distinguished is nothing other than to be true things where one is not the other. The arguments taken from substantial generation and production prove this very thing, since there is no generation and production except between really distinct things. And the same argument can be taken from relative opposition adapted to such a procession.

4. Finally, this can be shown from the principles of metaphysics: for there is no actual distinction in reality itself, except either a real one or a modal one, or, as others call it, a formal one. But this latter distinction is never found except within the same thing that it composes or it in some way coalesces from those things that are said to be distinct in such a way. Hence, what is distinguished in this way from some thing is always like a mode or affection of it, as is easily clear by induction. For this reason, this mode of distinction, which truly and actually is in the thing itself, has no place in God, because in him there is no place for composition or modification or affection through something of itself actually distinct in reality from the substance of God (as needs to be explained more fully below in book 4). Therefore, all that is left is a real distinction, which can exist between the divine persons and which generally exists between all those entities that have reality per se such that one is not a modification of the other.

³Suárez quotes the passage as '*Verbam erat apud Verbum*' but the Vulgate text reads '*Verbum erat apud Deum*.'

The divine persons, moreover, are like this, as is clear from their simplicity and highest perfection. Therefore.

5. In response to the general foundation of the heretics suggested above, it must also be said in general that the true divinity of three really distinct persons is not repugnant to the unity of God, which unity of God is taken from the unity of the divine nature. But one and the same true divinity can belong to the three persons, as will become clear from what is to be said in the following book.