Notes on ‘The Social Theory of the Trinity’

Nicene Creed: ‘We believe in one God, The Father…and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages…true God from true God, begotten not made, of one essence (όμοουσιον) with the Father … and in the Spirit, the Holy … proceeding from the Father, jointly worshipped with Father and Son’. Synodical Letter of the Council of Constantinople: ‘a single godhead and power and essence (ουσία) of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit’.

Gregory of Nyssa (*ad Ablabium*)

'That is the only way by which we distinguish one Person from the other, by believing, that is, that one is the cause and the other depends on the cause. Again, we recognize another distinction with regard to that which depends on the cause. There is that which depends on the first cause and that which is derived from what immediately depends on the first cause. Thus the attribute of being only-begotten without doubt remains with the Son, and we do not question that the Spirit is derived from the Father. For the mediation of the Son, while it guards his prerogative of being only-begotten, does not exclude the relation which the Spirit has by nature to the Father.'

According to Aristotle ουσία has the primary sense of an individual thing, a particular human or horse; the secondary sense of what is common to all members of a species (being a human , or being a horse).

Basil of Caesarea (*Letter* 236.6)

‘The distinction between ουσία and ύποστασις, is the same as that between the general and the particular; as, for instance, between the animal and the particular man… In the case of the Godhead we confess one ουσία, but we confess a particular ύποστασις.

Fourth Lateran Council (A.D.1215) declared that the unity of the Godhead is not just a collective unity ‘in the way that many persons are said to be one people, and many faithful one church’. Rather there is ‘a certain supreme reality (*res)*, that is, divine substance, essence or divine nature’ which ‘truly is the Father, and is the Son, and is the Spirit’. It had earlier said that the Trinty is ‘undivided according to its common essence but distinct according to the properties of its persons.'

Properties (universals) include both monadic universals, that is things which could be possessed by more than one substance, and relations, that is things which relate two or more substances to each other. Having a mass of 10kg. is a monadic universal – many different things can have a mass of 10kg. ‘Being taller than ‘is a relation which can relate many different pairs of humans to each other. An essential property of a substance is one without which the substance would not exist; an accidental property (an ‘accident’) of a substance is one which a substance does not need to have in order to exist. The essence of a substance consists of all the properties (together with any thisness) separately necessary and jointly sufficient for the existence of the substance. A substance has thisness if and only if there could have existed instead (or in addition to) that substance, a different substance which had all the same properties as it.

Boethius: 'a person is ‘an individual substance (*substantia)* of a rational nature’.

Aquinas ‘Nature and will function differently as causes. The will is the source of effects that can exist in one way or in another; nature of things that can exist only in the one way’. (*Summa theologiae* Ia.41.2).

Augustine: If the Father 'wished to generate [an equal] but could not, he is weak; if he could but did not wish to, he is envious’. (*De Diversis Quaestionibus* 83 q.50).

Richard of St. Victor: ‘It seems to be an excellence in true love that one should wish the other to be loved as much as one is loved oneself; in such mutual love there is nothing rarer, nothing more excellent than that you should wish the one who is supremely loved by you and by whom you are supremely loved, to be loved also by some third person... it is a sign of weakness not to allow someone else to share your love’. (*De Trinitate* 3.11.)