

CHAPTER SIX
ABOUT MEDITATING ON GOD’S MOST BLESSED TRINITY
BY USING GOD’S NAME ‘THE GOOD’

1. After our consideration of the essential attributes of God, the eye of intelligence must be raised to the contemplation of the most blessed Trinity, so that the second Cherub might be placed across from the first. Now as far as seeing God’s essential properties is concerned, *being* itself is the root principle and the name, through which other essential attributes come to be known. As far as our contemplation of the processions⁵⁶ is concerned, however, the same role belongs to the *good* itself, which is its most basic foundation.

2. Therefore, see and take notice that the ‘best’ (or the ‘highest good’) is simply ‘that, than which nothing better can be conceived.’⁵⁷ Now such a thing exists in such a way that it cannot be rightly imagined as not existing, because it is absolutely *better* to exist than not to exist.⁵⁸ Such a thing also exists in such a way that it cannot be rightly imagined not to be both singular and triple. Indeed, “the good is referred to as self-diffusive.”⁵⁹ The supreme good, therefore, is supremely self-diffusive. But the highest degree of diffusion can only exist as *actual and internal, substantial and personal, natural and voluntary, free and necessary, lacking nothing and perfect*. In the supreme good, then, there must be from eternity a production⁶⁰ that is *actual and of the same essence, and persons*⁶¹ that

⁵⁶ Bonaventure speaks of “processions” within the Trinity, such as ‘generation’ (‘begetting’) and ‘spiration’ (‘breathing forth’), which correspond to the Son and the Holy Spirit.

⁵⁷ Anselm of Canterbury’s definition of God in the *Proslogion*.

⁵⁸ Therefore, something that is ‘best’ will certainly have all those qualities that are ‘better,’ including ‘existence.’

⁵⁹ Pseudo-Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchies*, Bk. 4.

⁶⁰ ‘Production’ corresponds both to the ‘generation’ of the Son and to the ‘spiration’ of the Holy Spirit.

⁶¹ I.e., the result of this production.

are as noble as [the person of] the producer,⁶² who produces by way of both generation and spiration—so that these persons might result from the eternal principle that eternally co-produces.⁶³ This production must result in a beloved and a co-beloved, in one generated and one spirated, so as to form [, together with the producer, three persons:] Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And if this were not the case, it would not be the supreme good at all, since it would not be *supremely* self-diffusive. Indeed, that diffusion in time or history, i.e., *in the created world*, is a mere dot or speck in comparison to the immensity of the eternal goodness. In comparison [to creaturely diffusion,] one surely *can* think of another diffusion that is greater than that one: namely, of that sort of diffusion, in which the one diffusing itself communicates the whole of its substance and nature to the other. Therefore, it would not be the highest good if that [diffusion that it produces] were lacking either in reality or in intelligence.

Are you able, then, with the eye of your mind to reflect on the purity of that goodness, which is the pure act of the principle that in charity loves with a love that is *free*, and with a love that is *due*, and with a love that is a *combination of both*? or which is the fullest diffusion by way of *nature* (i.e., the diffusion by way of the *Word*,⁶⁴ in which all things are spoken) and *will* (i.e., the diffusion by way of the *Gift*,⁶⁵ in which all other gifts are given)? If you are able to reflect in this way, you are able to see that the supreme communicability of the good demands necessarily the existence of a Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That same supreme goodness also demands that there be supreme *communicability* in those three persons; and on account of supreme communicability, that there be *identity of essence*; and on account of the supreme identity of essence, that there be supreme *conformability*; and on account of all of these, that there be supreme *co-equality*; and because

⁶² I.e., God the Father.

⁶³ I.e., simultaneously produces in two different ways (generates and spirates).

⁶⁴ I.e., the Son.

⁶⁵ I.e., the Holy Spirit.

of this, that there be supreme *co-eternity*; and from all of the above, that there be supreme *mutual intimacy*, which means that each person is necessarily in the others through the greatest degree of mutual indwelling, and that one acts with the others in a total unity of *substance*, *power*, and *activity* within the most blessed Trinity itself.

3. But as you contemplate these matters, beware that you do not think that you have come to comprehend the One who is incomprehensible. For you still have something to consider about these six characteristics that will plunge your mental vision into stupefying awe. For here we find the highest degree of *communicability* together with individual properties of persons, highest *unity of essence* together with the plurality of persons, highest *conformability* together with separate personalities, highest *co-equality* together with hierarchy, and highest *co-eternity* and *intimacy* together with procession. Who would not be rapt in wonder at the thought of such marvels?

And yet we know with utmost certainty that all these are present in the most blessed Trinity if we raise our eyes to that super-excelling *goodness*. Indeed, if there is supreme *communication* and true diffusion there, then there is also true origin and true distinction. And since it is the whole that is communicated and not just a part, it follows that whatever is possessed is given, and given in its entirety. Therefore, the producer and the product are both distinguished by their properties and are one in essence.

Now since they are *distinguished* by their properties, it follows that they have personal properties and a plurality of persons. Further, as there is a procession from the source in them, they are hierarchically ordered: not according to temporal priority,⁶⁶ but according to the priority of origin.⁶⁷ Further, there is procession in them, which consists not in local change but in free breathing forth, by the authority of the

⁶⁶ I.e., one comes after the other in time.

⁶⁷ I.e., one is from another, but simultaneous in time.

producer, which is the authority of the sender with respect to the one who is sent.

However, because they are substantially *one*, it is necessary that there be oneness of essence and form, of dignity and eternity, of existence and limitlessness. And as you consider these matters one at a time, you are certainly contemplating truth.

Therefore, when you consider these things in themselves *one by one*, you will have ample material for contemplating *truth*; when, however, you consider these things *in relation to one another*, you will arrive at the source of greatest *wonder*. Therefore, in order that your mind might ascend through admiration to wondering contemplation, you must consider all these matters together.

4. Even the Cherubim that face each other symbolize this.⁶⁸ Nor is there lack of mystery in the fact that they faced each other, *their faces being turned toward the Mercy Seat*. In this is fulfilled what our Lord said in John's Gospel: *This is eternal life, to know the only true God, and the one whom you have sent, Jesus Christ*. For we must come to admire the essential and personal attributes of God not only *in themselves*, but also *in relation* to the most admirable union of God and humanity in the unity of the person of Christ.

5. Now if you are like that first Cherub, when you contemplate the *essential* attributes of God, you are surely amazed, because God's *being* is simultaneously *first* and last; *eternal* and most present; *most simple* and greatest or unlimited; *everywhere in its entirety* and yet never contained by anything; *most actual* and yet never moved; *most perfect* and having nothing superfluous nor deficient—and nonetheless immense and infinite without boundaries; *supremely one* and yet *all-embracing*, as it contains in itself *all* things, and as it represents *all* power, *all* truth, and *all* good. If you are, once again, so amazed, then look toward the *Mercy Seat* and be

⁶⁸ I.e., that these things should be considered together.

[further] astonished that there the First Principle is joined to the last, *God* with the human being created on the sixth day, the *eternal* is joined with a temporal human being, born of the Virgin in the fullness of time; the *most simple* with the most composite, the *most actual* with the supremely passive and dead; the *most perfect* and immense with the modest, the *supremely one* and *all-inclusive* with an individual that is of a composite nature and that is distinct from others—namely, with the human being Jesus Christ.

6. If, however, you are like that other Cherub, when you contemplate the *properties of the persons*, you must be amazed to find *communicability* together with [individual] properties, *being of the same essence* with plurality, *conformability* with [individual] personality, *co-equality* with a hierarchical arrangement, *co-eternity* with production [of one by the other], *mutual intimacy* with procession—since the Son proceeds from the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son, yet the one that proceeds does not depart from the others but remains always with them. If you are so amazed, then, look toward the Mercy Seat and be [further] astonished that in Christ, *personal union* stands together with a trinity of substances⁶⁹ and with a duality of natures;⁷⁰ and that *total agreement* exists there together with plurality of wills; and that there is the *mutual predication* of God and humanity together with a plurality of properties; that there is *co-adoration* together with a plurality of rank; *co-elevation* over all things together with the plurality of eminence; and *co-dominion* together with a plurality of powers.

7. Considering these things, one reaches a perfect illumination of his or her mind: when the mind sees humanity as made in the image of God, as it could on the sixth day of Creation. Now since this ‘image’ functions as a perfectly revelatory likeness,

⁶⁹ I.e., corporeal, spiritual and divine substances: see Ch. 1, n. 3. Bonaventure here refers to the person of Jesus, not to the Trinity.

⁷⁰ I.e., human and divine.

when our mind contemplates our humanity so remarkably exalted in Christ, the Son of God, who is by nature the image of the invisible God—seeing, at the same time, how this humanity is so ineffably united into something one, which is both the first and the last, the highest and the lowest, the circumference and the center, the *Alpha* and the *Omega*, the caused and the cause, the Creator and the creature, that is, *the book written within and without*—at this point our mind has already reached something perfect, which would allow it, with God, to reach the perfection of its illuminations on the sixth step, as on the sixth day of Creation. Nothing further remains but the day of rest, when, in an ecstatic insight, the discerning power of the human mind *rests from all the work that it has done*.