

THE TRINITY AND THE FAMILY-LIKE NATURE OF GOD

By Rick McKinney, 2024

(Scripture quotes and references are from New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition)

The early Christian Creeds - Apostles, Nicene, and Athanasian, all affirm the triune nature of God as implied throughout the New Testament documents and conveyed more directly by the Lord's charge to his disciples to, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 28:19), as well as St. Paul's declaration, "And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba. Father" (Gal. 4:6). God is a union or communion of three persons.

All created things and all created beings are designed by God to manifest His glory (Ps. 19:1), but according to the Book of Genesis, unique among all creation, human beings are said to be made in the image and likeness of God; male and female He created them (Gn. 1:26-27). It would seem of course that Adam and Eve, the first couple, unlike God, could perhaps be considered a communion of two persons but not three persons. However, in the very next verse it is written, "God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion" (Gn. 1:28). In other words, our first parents were endowed and charged with starting a family, a community or communion of three or more persons. And indeed, starting a family, is the standard expectation and endowment of most all male/female couples who get married.

It is instructive that the triune, communal and "family-like" nature of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit can be seen in the Holy Family, which is perhaps an icon of the Holy Trinity. In the Holy Family Jesus, the Son of God is present, and Joseph, His foster father, images God the Father to God the Son, as indeed all fathers appear to do to their own children for good or ill. Then there is Mary, the mother of Jesus, His maternal comforter, the ponderer who was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, and who is often called the spouse of the Holy Spirit. Undoubtedly, no human person was or is closer to the Holy Spirit than Mary.

The triune family-like nature of God also appears to have been revealed to Moses when God tells him that He is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob (Ex. 3:6). No person in history is more associated with fatherhood than Abraham, the "father of many nations" and the father of three major religions. Isaac is best known as the long-promised son given over to sacrifice as is the Christ, the Son of God. Jacob is the blessing seeker who became the blessing bestower at the end of his life. And it is the Holy Spirit that those in Christ have come to know as "the" blessing, for the gift of the Holy Spirit (Lk. 11:13), "is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Him" (Ac. 2:38-39). The family of Abraham and its long history, as related in the Scriptures, reveals who God is and what His nature and character are like.

In the sacred text it is written, "God is love" (1 Jn. 4:8) and that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (Jn. 3:16). It is said that love without sacrifice is cheap and not worthy of the name,

“but God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us” (Rm. 5:8). Laying down one’s life out of love is what manifests what true love is and to do that requires, it appears, that one has a bodily life to lay down in space and time. God is love and He desired and predetermined to manifest that love by humbling himself, taking on the form, in Christ Jesus, of a human servant slave, emptied himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross. And thus, His name so manifests the glory of God that it induces every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth to bend the knee and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:5-11). The incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ appears to be integral to the manifestation of God’s glorious nature and character to all heavenly and earthly beings.

Not that God needs anything, but He does appear to desire things, as St. Paul relates, “God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:3-4), as well as Jesus quoting the Psalmist saying, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” (Mt. 9:13). Just as a couple with one or more children may desire and choose to adopt many more children, so it appears that God desires a large family with many children, born of the Spirit, chosen before the foundation of the world to be conformed to the image of His Son in true holiness (Rm. 8:28-30, Eph. 1:4-6). And He chose one virgin daughter, full of grace, to be the mother of His only begotten Son (Lk. 1:26-38), as well as the mother of all His adopted children (Jn. 19:27, Rev. 12:17, Gn. 3:20). Of course, the term “adoption” is not a full expression of what happens to the children of God’s kingdom who, “are born of the Spirit” (Jn. 3:5-8). In other words, baptized believers are begotten of God, not entirely dissimilar to the Son who is begotten of the Father. And Jesus is not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters (Heb. 2:11-12)

God also desires a radiant spousal bride for His Son, one formerly stained by sin, but now, at His own great cost, presented to Himself without stain or blemish or blame (Eph. 5:25-27, Rev. 21:2), and so for her to partake in a union or communion with the divine nature (2 Pt. 1:4, 1 Cor. 10:16). God’s purpose for human beings appears to be family related – sons, daughters, mother, bride, spouse, for as Jesus said, “whoever does the will of my Father is my brother, and sister and mother” (Mt. 12:50); “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my name’s sake will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life” (Mt. 19:29). For it is the family, especially the human family, that sacrificial love is most clearly made manifest. Unlike other creatures, human beings take a couple decades or more to fully mature and require the loving provision, protection and guidance of their parents who are committed to them and to each other for the long haul. Is it any wonder that the attacks of the enemy, and his fallen angels, center on undermining marriage and the family and our identity as beloved sons and daughters of God?

When St. Paul writes about marriage and the sacrificial love a husband should have for his wife he states, “This is a great mystery, but I am speaking about Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:32). Paul declares that human marriage images the marriage of Christ and his church in eternity, which mysteriously precedes it, not the other way around.

In contrast to human beings, angels are God's faithful standing servants, guardians, worshipers, and wind-like messengers (Lk. 1:19, Ps. 91:11, Rev. 7:11, Heb. 1:7), but they are not begotten into families and apparently do not participate in the family of God as do the saints, the children of God, and heirs with Christ (Rm. 8:16-17), nor are they the bride of Christ (Rev. 21:9). Yet they long to look at the unveiling of God's plan for the human-race (1 Pt. 1:12), perhaps like John the Baptist, the friend of the bridegroom (Jn. 3:29).

All of creation was made to glorify God, but it appears that in many ways in order to manifest a great deal of the manifold variety of God's glorious heartfelt nature, He desired the creation of flesh and blood beings made in His image and family-likeness that were capable of freely cooperating or resisting in the manifestation of His character and holy nature, a nature that is humble, merciful, faithful, loving, intimate, longsuffering, sacrificial, obedient, trusting, entrusting, guiding, guarding, providing, healing, forbearing, forgiving, nurturing, assuring, interceding, revealing, sharing, uniting, imparting and much, much more. These God-like natures are epitomized in a well-functioning, human family (Heb. 12:9-10), but are not exclusive to it, as is evident in the many celibate brothers and sisters whose sacrificial lives seem to anticipate the coming resurrection age (Lk. 20:34-37).

God created human beings in space and time with tangible bodies as well as minds, wills, hearts, and spirits. Of course, with beings who have an independent freedom there is the strong possibility, as it was with the angels, of them not seeking, trusting, or obeying God. Unfortunately, this has been the propensity of human beings since our first parents and there seemed no remedy to heal the breach. But unlike the angels, we beings within time are afforded the opportunity and grace to change within time and God foreordains Himself the sacrificial and transforming role to affect that change in time and space. He did this by first preparing a chosen people and then sending forth His only begotten Son to effectively redeem the human-race by tangibly giving up His own body and blood in sacrifice, and then be raised in glory. By sending forth the Holy Spirit, God empowers and makes holy a new creation of saintly brothers and sisters in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17, Rm. 8:29).

Jesus prayed, "I ask that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be one in us" (Jn. 17:21). So, it appears that God Himself desired to share our human nature so we could share in His divine nature (2 Pt. 1:4), a loving nature that is family-like, sacrificial, and marked by holy and humble character; He in us and we in Him as spousal bride and sons and daughters of God, reflecting and manifesting God's glorious nature, a nature that is divinely and purposively family-like.

THE HEARTFELT NATURE OF GOD
Compiled by Rick McKinney, 2024

God's Care-Filled, Loving Self-Sacrificial Nature
God's Tender Intimacy, Longing and Spousal Nature
God's Guiding, Guarding, Providing and Paternal Nature
God's Attentive, Comforting, Nourishing and Maternal Nature
God's Child-Like Littleness, Preciousness, and Innocent Nature
God's Trinitarian, Unitive, Communal and Family-Like Nature
God's Ever-Faithful and En-Trustful Nature
God's Forbearing and Forgiving Nature
God's Full-Life Wholeness and Healing Nature
God's Good, Kind, Beautiful and Generous Nature
God's Humility, Learning and Obedient Nature
God's Incarnational Sharing and Participatory Nature
God's Infilling, Indwelling and Indwelled Nature
God's Joyous, Dance-Like and Song-Filled Nature
God's Merciful, Compassionate and Pitying Nature
God's Mournful, Aching and Grieving Nature
God's Patient and Longsuffering Nature
God's Peace Making and Reconciling Nature
God's Proclaiming, Unveiling and Revealing Nature
God's Providential and Subtle Orchestrate-Like Nature
God's Purposeful, Redemptive and Re-Creational Nature
God's Pure, Temperate and Undivided Nature
God's Transforming, Purifying and Perfecting Nature
God's Truth Filled Authenticity and Genuine Nature
God's Uniting and Amicably Harmonious Nature
God's Wrathful, Sin Consuming and Atoning Nature

God manifests these glorious natures principally to, through and for human beings, made in His image and likeness, and remade in the likeness of Christ our Lord, the image of the invisible God.