

THE GOD OF THE CHRISTIAN DOCTORS

The Index Volume (No. 219) of the Latin Patrologia contains hundreds of references to passages in the Church Fathers dealing with the nature of God.

The doctors are in agreement on the following points:

1. The Existence of God
Men believe naturally and spontaneously in God. The knowledge of God is instinctive; it comes by nature.
We know God through the visible creation. From the motion of all things and the governing of all things the governing Mind is apparent.
The existence of God is implicit in our thinking, which requires a Greatest and Best, “than which we can think of no greater,” and demands a real existence as a necessary attribute of that greatness.
Yet the acceptance of God’s existence is an act of faith.

2. The Essence of God:
He alone existed before all things. Yet he was never inert or inactive.
As the ancient poets and philosophers declare, God is Mind and Spirit.
He has no genus, being only like himself, completely unmixed and self-contained; he needs nothing, therefore all things are in him.
The human mind cannot comprehend the true nature of God, nor can the angels.
He is the cause of all intelligence, of all life, of all existence.
He is the Supreme Reason, the origin of things.
We can say what He is NOT, but not what he IS.
In Him there is no decrease nor increase.
He is All in All, of one individual simple nature.
“He is that which we can conceive of nothing better.”

3. The Oneness of God:
God is whatever is greatest. Since there cannot be two such, he is necessarily and absolutely One; all things are derived from him, and his perfections are infinite.
God cannot be perfect unless he is one, since all things are in him.
His power would not be infinite if there were any other.
The ancient poets and philosophers, as well as the prophets, agree that one mind rules the universe.
One God, one Name, one Divinity, one Majesty (Ambrose).
The divine nature cannot be numbered or contain parts or numbers: Unity is the essence of divinity. (Hincmar)
Both by natural and written law, there is only one God.
God is the supremely “simplex”, one, and immutable; the supreme substance cannot contain anything less or more than itself. Free of all infirmity and mutability, God’s substance IS his divinity, which can only be one.

4. The Attributes of God:

- a. Eternal: Before all time, he only has no origin and no end; he is divine because he is endless. He alone is uncreated. Nothing existed before him, nothing outside of him. God only is perfect, omnipotent, sempiternal. He is timeless and changeless.
- b. Infinite: He is not in any place, but all place is in him—he is everywhere, and completely everywhere. He circumfuses and transfuses all things. All things are in him, nothing is outside of him. He does not go from place to place, since he is always everywhere. ALL of God is always everywhere; he is boundless, never more in one place than in another; he does not limit himself willingly or unwillingly (Anselm); he is truly in every creature, in every place, in every time and manner.
- c. A Spirit: God is a spirit devoid of any corporeal qualities whatever, as the Platonist and Stoics say. He is by nature invisible and intangible, having no body or parts whatever. His name is masculine (not neuter) but he is not masculine. He is devoid of all quality and quantity, of all place, motion and manner. The incorporeal God cannot be represented by anything, nor in any way conceived or described by our thought. God ONLY is incorporeal, an incorporeal substance. He is Spirit and not soul (Isidore), devoid of anything sensible or corporeal.
- d. Simple: God is simple and uncompounded, not to be thought of in any category of human thought. His nature is supreme simplicity, since nothing can be added to or taken from it. He is the necessary unity of divinity, having no parts or members. “The Spirit of God” is simply a figure of speech, since he IS that spirit. His Oneness allows of no body, because a body has parts.
- e. Immutable: It is necessary to think of the eternal God as immutable and invulnerable; he only is unassailable incorruptible and blissful by nature. Whatever is divine is changeless—it could not be divine if its divinity could be either diminished or increased. Only God is perfect, omnipotent, and changeless. He does not think as men think; he has no emotions, or else he would be subject to fits of change. He is the Highest Good, the Unchanging Creator of Changeful Nature. To think of him as in the slightest degree changeful is to deny His nature. For him there is no time, since there is no change. To be good is to be permanently good, only God is that. The Supreme Essence cannot be in any degree changeful or variable.
- f. Free: God is an absolutely free agent, his motion being eternal and unconfined by any restraint. His law is liberty, not necessity; whatever happens happens because he wills it. The divine Will is the foundation of all things. By his Will alone, all things were created out of nothing. No agent carries out his Will, whatever he Wills happens by the act of being willed.
- g. Omnipotent: What God wills is possible, what he does not will is impossible. (Tertull.) Only God can do all he will; he has only to will it and it is done. God

will share his power with no one. Only the One God can be omnipotent, because all power can only be concentrated in One—otherwise it would not be concentrated. God cannot be better or mightier or more blissful than he is. No one, not even the pagan, denies God's omnipotence; all creatures serve him, willingly or unwillingly. His power and his will are identical.

- h. All-wise: Since all things are God's doing, he knows all things. No created being, not even the angels, can comprehend the nature of his knowing. He alone is wise and knowing. To him there is nothing new. He acts eternally with wisdom and judgment. God is Wisdom, in whom and by whom and through whom all things know and are known that are known. His wisdom and judgment are perfect and unailing.
- i. The Highest Good: God alone is good. The perfect good is eternal and embraces all things. We are born with the idea that God is Good; he is good by very nature and definition. The qualities of his goodness are past, present, and future, i.e., goodness, mercy, and justice. All things exist by his grace; out of his goodness he made all, and not from any necessity. God is the Highest Good as such and without qualification. God is entirely good: he is Goodness itself, his very essence being The Good. He punishes only to bless.
- j. Just: He is the strict and just judge, devoid of malice. What he promises he keeps. He is just to punish and to pardon; he is no respecter of persons, but perfectly right at all times. He alone is just, for he alone has the knowledge to judge.
- k. Holy: Only God is without defect or sin, He is not the author of evil. The most significant thing we can say about God is that he is holy (Jerome). All men are false, only God is true. He cannot sin.
- l. Merciful: God is to be praised above all else for his mercy. To deter men from sin, God conceals his mercy and shows his wrath. Only God is merciful by nature. Without his mercy none could be saved.

4. On the Threefold Nature of the Godhead:

The three persons are confirmed in all the Scriptures.

But they are ineffable and incomprehensible.

The Trinity is a mystery, a great secret; utterly imponderable. It cannot be explained or understood even by the Angels.

Father, Son and Holy Ghost are separate and distinct, yet they are all one and the same Lord God, not three.

One God, one substance, three persons. The three are not to be confused or separated.

“Three” is not meant to imply any plurality.

The Trinity is absolutely immutable and invisible; its operation is ineffable.

The Three are Unity, the One is Trinity, nothing can be said of one of the Trinity that does not apply to all.

An image of the Trinity is memory, intelligence, and will.

Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are three, but the Trinity itself is one God. There is no disparity between the members; distinction of person but unity of essence.

The most important thing about the three persons is that they are absolutely one omnipotent God. This is a great and incomprehensible mystery. (Isidore)

But every man is obliged to believe it.

The Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Ghost is God, yet there are not three gods but one God. Three persons, not three gods.

The first chapter of Genesis emphasizes plurality throughout.