

This is the view of the Catholic Church regarding the Trinity:

<https://www.catholic.com/magazine/online-edition/explaining-the-trinity>

## Processions and Relations in God

In Catholic theology, we understand the persons of the Blessed Trinity subsisting within the inner life of God to be truly distinct relationally, but not as a matter of essence, or nature. Each of the three persons in the godhead possesses the same eternal and infinite divine nature; thus, they are the one, true God in essence or nature, not “three Gods.” Yet, they are truly distinct in their relations to each other.

In order to understand the concept of person in God, we have to understand its foundation in the processions and relations within the inner life of God. And the Council of Florence, AD 1338-1445, can help us in this regard.

The Council’s definitions concerning the Trinity are really as easy as one, two, three... four. It taught there is one nature in God, and that there are two processions, three persons, and four relations that constitute the Blessed Trinity. The Son “proceeds” from the Father, and the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father and the Son.” These are the two processions in God. And these are foundational to the four relations that constitute the three persons in God. These are those four eternal relations in God:

1. **The Father actively and eternally generates the Son**, constituting the person of God, the Father.
2. **The Son is passively generated of the Father**, which constitutes the person of the Son.
3. **The Father and the Son actively spirate the Holy Spirit in the one relation within the inner life of God that does not constitute a person**. It does not do so because the Father and Son are already constituted as persons in relation to each other in the first two relations. This is why CCC 240 teaches, “[The Second Person of the Blessed Trinity] is Son only in relation to his Father.”
4. **The Holy Spirit is passively spirated of the Father and the Son**, constituting the person of the Holy Spirit.

We should take note of the distinction between the “generative” procession that constitutes the Son, and the “spirative” procession that constitutes the Holy Spirit. As St. Thomas Aquinas explains, and Scripture reveals, the Son is uniquely “begotten” of the Father (cf. John 3:16; 1:18). He is also said to proceed from the Father as “the Word” in John 1:1. This “generative” procession is one of “begetting,” but not in the same way a dog “begets” a dog, or a human being “begets” a human being. This is an intellectual “begetting,” and fittingly so, as a “word” proceeds from the knower while, at the same time remaining in the knower. Thus, this procession or begetting of the Son occurs within the inner life of God. There are not “two beings” involved; rather, two persons relationally distinct, while ever-remaining one in being.

The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, but not in a generative sense; rather, in a spiration. “Spiration” comes from the Latin word for “spirit” or “breath.”

Jesus “breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit...” (John 20:22). Scripture reveals the Holy Spirit as pertaining to “God’s love [that] has been poured into our hearts” in Romans 5:5, and as flowing out of and identified with the reciprocating love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father (John 15:26; Rev. 22:1-2). Thus, the Holy Spirit’s procession is not intellectual and generative, but has its origin in God’s will and in the ultimate act of the will, which is love.

As an infinite act of love between the Father and Son, this “act” is so perfect and infinite that “it” becomes (not in time, of course, but eternally) a “He” in the third person of the Blessed Trinity. This revelation of God’s love personified is the foundation from which Scripture could reveal to us that “God is love” (I John 4:8).