THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST 1

A. What means this birth?

- Nativity, nature, substance and hypostasis:

The **person** is a substance, complete, subsisting per se and existing apart from others.

In scholastic philosophy, nature, essence, and substance are closely related terms. Both essence and substance imply a static point of view and refer to constituents or mode of existence, while nature implies a dynamic point of view and refers to innate tendencies. When applied to the same substantial being, the terms substance, essence, and nature in reality stand only for different aspects of the same thing.

Nature has reference to the production of things, and hence generally includes in its connotation the ideas of energy and activity. It denotes the substance or essence considered as the source of activities. "*Nature properly speaking is the essence (or substance) of things which have in themselves as such a principle of activity*" (Aristotle, Metaphysics, 1015a, 13). By a process of abstraction the mind arises from individual and concrete natures to those of species and genera.

Hypostasis means, literally, that which lies beneath as basis or foundation. This theological term is used with reference to the Incarnation to express the revealed truth that in Christ one person subsists in two natures, the Divine and the human.

"*Nature, properly speaking, does not begin to exist, rather is it the person that begins to exist in some nature.*" As a matter of fact, nature designates that by which something is; whereas person designates something as having subsistent being. When we say that our Lord Jesus Christ is born we speak about "*the hypostasis, not the nature*" (St. John Damascene, De Fide Orth. III).

St. Thomas Aquinas, in the Summa (III, 35, 1), explains that "*Nativity can be attributed to someone in two ways: first, as to its subject; secondly, as to its terminus. To him that is born it is attributed as to its subject and this, properly speaking, is the hypostasis, not the nature.*" In Christ, Divine nature and human nature, each retaining its own properties, are united in one subsistence and one person, the Hypostasis.

- Nativity and subject:

"*To be born is to be generated; as a thing is generated in order for it to be, so is a thing born in order for it to be. 'To be', belongs to that which subsists*" and 'person or hypostasis' designates something as subsisting. Nature designates form, whereby something subsists.

Consequently, nativity is attributed to the person or hypostasis as to the proper subject of being born, but not to the nature.

- Nativity and terminus:

"*To the nature nativity is attributed as to its terminus*". The terminus of generation and of every nativity is nature. As a consequence, nativity is said to be "*the road to nature*".

B. A temporal nativity (III, 35, 2):

- Necessity:

The person of the Son of God is perfect and did not need a temporal birth, so there is no necessity for Him. However, St. Cyril wrote that "*we do not say that the Son of God had need, for His own sake, of a second nativity, after that which is from the Father: for it is foolish and a mark of ignorance to say that He who is from all eternity, and co-eternal with the Father, needs to begin again to exist. But because for us and for our salvation, uniting the human nature to His Person, He became the child of a woman, for this reason do we say that He was born in the flesh.*"

- A double nativity:

"*We confess two nativities in Christ: one of the Father, which is eternal; and one which occurred in these latter times for our sake*" (St. John Damascene, idem). Nature is said as the terminus of the movement of nativity.

However, in Christ there is a twofold nature. He received one of the Father from eternity and He received the other one from His Mother in time, all united in His Divine Person.

Therefore we must attribute to Christ a twofold nativity. He was born of the Father from all eternity and He was born of His Mother in time.

Christ can be said to have been born twice in respect of His two nativities. He can be said to be born twice, as He is born once from eternity and once in time. Eternity and time differ much more than two different times, although each signifies a measure of duration.

<u>C. The Blessed Virgin Mary is truly the Mother of Christ in respect of His temporal nativity (III, 35, 3):</u>

"*The generation of Christ was in this wise. When His Mother Mary was espoused to Joseph…*" (Mt., 1:18). So, "*the Blessed Virgin Mary is in truth and by nature the Mother of Christ.*" His body was not brought down from Heaven, but was taken from the Virgin Mother, and formed from her purest blood, which is required for motherhood.

"*The temporal nativity by which Christ was born for our salvation is, in a way, natural, since a Man was born of a woman, and after the due lapse of time from His conception. However, it is also supernatural, because He was begotten, not of seed, but of the Holy Ghost and the Blessed Virgin, above the law of conception,*" (St. John Damascene, idem). Thus, then, on the part of the mother, this nativity was natural, but on the part of the operation of the Holy Ghost it was supernatural.

<u>D. The Mother of Christ is the Mother of God (III, 35, 4)</u>

- Holy Scripture:

Although we do not find it said expressly in Scripture that the Blessed Virgin is the Mother of God, yet we do find it expressly said in Scripture that "*Jesus Christ is true God*" (1 Jn 5:20), and that the Blessed Virgin is the "*Mother of Jesus Christ*" (Mt 1:18). Therefore, from Holy Scripture it follows of necessity that she is the Mother of God. Christ is of the Jews "*according to the flesh, who is over all things, God blessed forever*" (Romans 9:5). However, He is not of the Jews except through the Blessed Virgin. Therefore He who is "*above all things, God blessed forever,*" is truly born of the Blessed Virgin as of His Mother.

- "*Every word that signifies a nature in the concrete can stand for any hypostasis of that nature.*"

As the union of Incarnation took place in the hypostasis and in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, it is manifest that this word *God* can stand for the hypostasis, having a human and a Divine nature. Therefore whatever belongs to the Divine and to the human nature can be attributed to that Person.

Both when a word is employed to stand for it, signifying the Divine Nature, and when a word is used signifying the human nature.

- Conception and birth of God:

Conception and birth are attributed to the person and hypostasis in respect of that nature in which it is conceived and born. Since the human nature was taken by the Divine Person in the very beginning of the conception, it follows that it can be truly said that God was conceived and born of the Virgin.

A woman is called a man's mother after she conceived him and gave birth to him. "*Just as when a man's soul is born with its body, they are considered as one being: and if anyone wish to say that the mother of the flesh is not the mother of the soul, he says too much. Something like this may be perceived in the generation of Christ. For the Word of God was born of the substance of God the Father: but because He took flesh, we must of necessity confess that in the flesh He was born of a woman*" (St. Cyril, Letter against Nestorius). Thus, we must say that the Blessed Virgin is called the Mother of God, not as though she were the Mother of the Godhead, but because she is the mother, according to His human nature, of the Person who has both the divine and the human nature.

Although the name *God* is common to the three Persons, yet sometimes it stands for the Person of the Father alone, sometimes only for the Person of the Son or of the Holy Ghost. When we say, "The Blessed Virgin is the Mother of God," *God* stands only for the incarnate Person of the Son.

So, "*if anyone confess not that the Emmanuel is truly God, and that for this reason the Holy Virgin is the Mother of God, since she begot of her flesh the Word of God made flesh, let him be anathema*" (Council of Ephesus).