

## THE IMPORTANCE OF ORDER IN THEOLOGICAL DISCUSSION

Thomas' doctrine of God in the first part of his *Summa Theologiae* is a carefully developed construction of a theological grammar<sup>1</sup>. It is properly read according to its own development with each article contextualized within Thomas' increasingly precise terminology and distinctions. For that reason, the precision of Thomas' theological terminology in one section cannot be imported into another, especially into an earlier one. Contrary to the commentary of Cajetan and modern criticisms dependent upon that commentary, Thomas is not and cannot be discussing an absolute, concrete essence in *Summa Theologiae* I, qq. 2-26. The subject of the discussion is the divine essence<sup>2</sup>, *unum et trinum*, not separated from relations and Persons, nor absolutized as a monopersonal God, nor the Person of the Father as unoriginate fount and unity of the Godhead. The *essentia* of the explicitly trinitarian questions (*ST* I, qq. 27-43) is then not the same as the *essentia* of the earlier questions. In an effort to demonstrate this thesis and its implications for a more sympathetic reading of Thomas' Trinitarian teaching, our procedure in this article will be 1) to elucidate the development of Thomas' use of *essentia* and why it is necessary to postpone the distinction between essence and person until q. 39; and 2) to analyze the way in which Thomas constructs his Trinitarian grammar and makes use of various terms as he fills out the discussion of the distinction and unity of divine Persons.

### A. THE DEVELOPMENT OF A THEOLOGICAL GRAMMAR

If we compare Thomas' treatment of the term *essentia* at the beginning and end of his discussion «*de Deo*» (*ST* I, qq. 1-43), we can see the way in which Thomas' notion develops. Compare for example the discussions of questions 3 and 39. First, that of q. 3:

«God is indeed the same as his essence or nature. We understand this point from the fact that in material things there is a composition of matter and form, [hence] it is necessary that

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, it is not «merely» a grammar. As an examination of the rules for speaking accurately about the divine for the purposes of communication (theological discussion) and religious address (profession of faith and prayer), this grammar extends beyond the concerns of logic to the life of faith itself.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2 and q. 27 prologues.

nature or essence differs from the supposit [...] Thus, since God is not composed of matter and form, (as shown in a. 2), it is appropriate [to say] that God is his deity, his life, and whatever else may be predicated of God»<sup>3</sup>.

Thomas uses *essentia* to signify the absence of composition in God, i.e., no composition of the creaturely type. This negative procedure is meant to separate from our understanding of God anything that pertains to creatures.

Later in question 28, Thomas begins to discuss the distinctions pertaining to that *essentia* made known by revelation. He enumerates there a plurality of relations that are present in that one divine *essentia*. These relations must be really different because the Father is not the Son and neither of them is the Holy Spirit. He reiterates, however, that whatever is in God is the divine essence *secundum rem*. Relation, in so far as it is in God, must be of the divine essence too<sup>4</sup>. The concept of relation allows for distinctions of mutuality without detracting from the divine simplicity and unity as far as we understand it. Hence, Thomas can introduce distinct terms without implying that he is signifying realities distinct from one another.

In the later discussion of q. 39, Thomas discusses the connection between the unity of divine essence and plurality of divine Persons that are themselves really distinguished from one another but distinguishable from the essence only by the consideration of reason. The object is to clarify the theological grammar without abrogating divine simplicity as previously formulated. The following texts from q. 39 reveal this higher level of precision:

«[T]he divine simplicity requires that in God essence and supposit are the same [it also requires] that in intellectual substances, there is nothing other than person»<sup>5</sup>.

«Names signifying the divine essence substantively, are predicated in the singular and not in the plural of the three Persons [...] for we do not say that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three gods but one God. In three supposits of human nature, there are three humanities, but in the three [divine] Persons, there is one divine essence»<sup>6</sup>.

We have then come full circle from q. 3. Thomas first established a lack of composition understood in the Aristotelian sense, that is, in terms of substance metaphysics. He then defines the character of the divine essence as the form of divinity and the concept of relation as the means of marking distinctions within that singular reality. The issue of composition thereby surfaces with those distinctions. In q. 39 he must deny any composition of essence and personal supposita as he clarifies the manner of signification that alone distinguishes divine essence from divine Person:

«In order to determine the truth of speech, it is necessary to consider not only the thing signified but also the manner of signifying [...] Although according to the thing signified

<sup>3</sup> «Respondeo quod Deus est idem quod sua essentia vel natura. Ad cuius intellectum sciendum est, quod in rebus compositis ex materia et forma, necesse est quod differant natura vel essentia et suppositum [...] Et sic cum Deus non sit compositus ex materia et forma, ut ostensum est (a. 2) oportet quod Deus sit sua deitas, sua vita, et quidquid aliud sic de Deo praedicatur» (ST I, q. 3, a. 3c). Cf. also, ST I, q. 3, a. 4c: «quod Deus non solum est sua essentia, ut ostensum est (a. 3), sed etiam suum esse».

<sup>4</sup> Cf. ST I, q. 28, a. 2c.

<sup>5</sup> «[Q]uod divina simplicitas hoc requirit, quod in Deo sit idem essentia et suppositum; quod in substantiis intellectualibus nihil est aliud quam persona» (ST I, q. 39, a. 1c).

<sup>6</sup> «Unde nomina significantia divinam essentiam substantiva, singulariter, et non pluraliter, de tribus Personis praedicantur [...] Patrem autem et Filium et Spiritum Sanctum non dicimus tres deos, sed unum Deum: quia in tribus suppositis humanae naturae sunt tres humanitates; in tribus autem Personis est una divina essentia» (ST I, q. 39, a. 3c).

“God” and “deity” may be the same, they are not signified in the same manner. This name “God” may supposit for person from its natural manner of signification because it signifies the divine essence in the one having it<sup>7</sup>.

“Essence”, however, may not naturally supposit for person because it signifies the essence as an abstract form. Therefore, those things that are proper to the Persons, and distinguish the Persons one from another, cannot be attributed to the essence. [Such attribution] would signify a distinction in the divine essence in the same way as there are distinctions in the supposit<sup>8</sup>.

From these texts, it is evident that Thomas’ use of “essence” becomes quite exacting, signifying in these later passages only the abstract form of divinity that at the same time does not differ from the Persons *secundum rem*. In the earlier questions, Thomas uses “essence of God”, “his (ejus) essence”, “God” and “deity” without any precise rules of distinction<sup>8</sup>. In q. 3, “deity” or “essence” is the form which is identical to “God”. By the time he concludes the grammatical clarification concerning the signification and supposita of “God” in q. 39, however, he is able to move far beyond this unity of *essentia* and *esse*. Hence, he can define precisely the way in which “God” may signify one divine Person or all three or the unity of divinity.

«[O]thers have better said that the name “God” supposits properly for Person according to its manner of signifying. Therefore, when this name “God” supposits for essence as when it says, “God creates”, this predicate is suited to the subject by reason of the form signified —deity. When it supposits for Person, either one only in the case of “God generates” or two in the case of “God spirates” or three in the case of “Kings of the ages, immortal, invisible, only God”»<sup>9</sup>.

The rules for the *modus significandi* are then based upon a twofold manner of predication, the substantive (corresponding to the use in q. 3) and adjectival.

«Those things that signify the essence substantively are predicated of the three Persons in the singular only and not in the plural. But those things that signify the essence adjectivally are predicated of the three Persons in the plural on account of the plurality of supposit<sup>10</sup>».

The two modes of predication are applied to the Persons who are the supposita of the divine essence. This essence is signified through the mode of form because it is *maxime una*, as it was demonstrated in the question on the unity of God (ST I, q. 11). Note that the *maxime* is applied specifically to the Persons *per se*. It is on the basis of

<sup>7</sup> «[Q]uia ad veritatem locutionum, non solum oportet considerare res significatas, sed etiam modum significandi, ut dictum est. Licet autem secundum re, sit idem Deus quod deitas, non tamen est idem modus significandi utrobique. Nam hoc nomen Deus, quia significat divinam essentiam ut in habente, ex modo suae significationis naturaliter habet quod possit supponere pro persona [...] Sed hoc nomen essentia non habet ex modo suae significationis quod supponat pro persona; quia significat essentiam ut formam abstractam. Et ideo ea quae sunt propria personarum, quibus ab invicem distinguuntur, non possunt essentiae attribui; significaretur enim quod esset distinctio in essentia divina, sicut est distinctio in suppositis» (ST I, q. 39, a. 5c).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. ST I, qq. 3, 7 and 8 especially.

<sup>9</sup> «[A]llii melius dixerunt quod hoc nomen *Deus* ex modo significandi habet ut proprie possit supponere pro persona, sicut et hoc nomen *homo*. Quandoque ergo hoc nomen *Deus* supponit pro essentia, ut cum dicitur, *Deus creat*: quia hoc praedicatum competit subiecto ratione formae significatae, quae est deitas. Quandoque vero supponit personam: vel unam tantum, ut cum dicitur *Deus generat*; vel duas, ut cum dicitur *Deus spirat*; vel tres, ut cum dicitur *Regi saeculorum, immortalis, invisibilis, soli Deo*» (ST I, q. 39, a. 4c).

<sup>10</sup> «Ea quidem quae substantive essentiam significant, praedicantur de tribus Personis singulariter tantum, et non pluraliter; quae vero adjective essentiam significant, praedicantur de tribus Personis in plurali [...] propter pluralitatem suppositorum» (ST I, q. 39, a. 3 ad 1).

this unity of the *Persons* that we can predicate things of them substantially in the singular. God remains one because «person» does not delimit an essence or nature but «personality»<sup>11</sup>. There are three personalities or personal properties, and these are the subject of predication of God in the plural.

And in case anyone is still confused on the matter, Thomas makes the point crystal-clear in the next article (*ST* I, q. 39, a. 4). Essential names supposit for the *Persons* concretely such that we can say, «God begot God» or «God from God».

«[T]he name «God» is similar to the singular terms in that the form it signifies is not multiple. It is similar to the common terms, however, in that the form signified is present in many supposits. Thus, it is not necessary that «God» always supposit for the essence which it signifies»<sup>12</sup>.

The justification for this manner of supposition is the real unity and plurality in God. There are only *Persons* in God, yet the divine essence is one *secundum rem*. The unity of divine nature is more real than the unity of humanity which is one only according to our consideration of it. To signify the common nature of humans, one must supply an adjunctive term: «man is a species». With divine nature, the opposite is true but only for the sake of precision. «God» may supposit for divine nature or divine Person, but an adjunct must be supplied in order to determine which Person is indicated. For example, «God» simply stated may supposit for any one Person or all three, but in the sentence «God generates» the supposita is clearly the Father alone. Recall here the discussion in q. 3, a. 3 where Thomas defines the unity of God over against the composition of matter and form in humans. There the contrasting predication revolves around the significata of *homo* and *humanitas*. The first term includes things which are not in the second, namely, *these* bones and *this* flesh, the matter of a human. By this measure, the terms «God» and «divine essence» do not signify differently. «God» then signifies *this* divine essence.

With this point we have the basis for explaining the great distance between questions 3 and 39 and their respective discussions of theological predication. The arguments may appear quite similar if one assumes that «God» is a proper name. If «God» refers to «a Person» or «Persons per se» in q. 3, a. 3, then the question of simplicity concerns the unity of *Persons* and essence rather than essence and *esse*. If, on the other hand, «God» in q. 3, a. 3 refers to the subsisting nature, it is identical to the divine essence and is not distinguished even by reason. With the introduction of the term «person», Thomas clarifies his theological grammar. He uses «person» to define the supposita of the divine nature while «God» supposits for what is *maxime una* and is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The primary referent then in q. 39 is not «God» but the three *Persons* who are God.

In order to preserve the correct grammar of theological discourse, one must take into account these discussions and their order. By reason of differing supposition,

<sup>11</sup> «Ad quantum dicendum quod forma significata per hoc nomen *persona*, non est essentia vel natura, sed *personalitas*» (*ST* I, q. 39, a. 3 ad 4).

<sup>12</sup> [H]oc nomen, Deus, licet conveniat cum terminis singularibus in hoc, quod forma significata non multiplicatur; convenit tamen cum terminis communibus in hoc, quod forma significata invenitur in pluribus suppositis. Unde non oportet quod semper supponat pro essentia quam significat» (*ST* I, q. 39, a. 4, ad 1).

«God» may supposit for divine Person or divine essence. Yet the term is not indifferent to forms of speech such that one may say that the essence begets or proceeds. Only personal supposita may be the subject of actions *ad extra* or *intra*. For the same reason, it is improper to substitute essential names for «God» or to suppose that essential names may supposit for essence or Person in the same way as the term «God» does<sup>13</sup>.

Thomas' language becomes ever more precise in the *Summa* as he moves toward that most complex discussion of essential and personal predication in q. 39. The terms «essence», «essence of God» and «God» are used interchangeably and in the most general way in qq. 2-26. In question 12, there is an explicit distinction made, but it is certainly not that between «essence» and «person» but between «essence» and «God»<sup>14</sup>. The subsequent discussions of relation and Person are built upon the affirmation that they are one with the divine essence and distinguished only according to our understanding. Hence, Thomas can strongly identify «relation» as the being of God while affirming a real distinction of Persons<sup>15</sup>.

The order of these discussions of predication is not, a matter of indifference. It is of the utmost importance that the reader pay attention to the placement of such material. A rigid interpretation of his terminology would lead one so suppose that Thomas treats divinity as a form without supposita before he treats the supposita of that form (the divine nature without the fact of the divine Persons). It is one thing to abstract essence from existence in a composite being, but it is quite another (and an impossible) endeavor to abstract the essence from existence in one whose essence is being itself. Divine nature is really one and identical with its supposita. Having said that, the question remains as to why Thomas did not place the more advanced discussion of predication (q. 39) before he discussed the Persons or at least when he introduced the term into his treatise. He could have perhaps forestalled some misunderstandings by informing the reader earlier that he was making a shift in his use of certain terms. In that case, we would be able to make better sense of his treatment of the Persons. On the other hand, such conjecture supposes that one first clarifies one's grammar in order to pursue understanding and communicate such understanding to others. In that case, correct speech would be the basis for plumbing the divine mysteries assuming that the grammar (the level of signification) may give insight into the divine mysteries. Or could it be that a precise way of speaking (theological grammar) is itself the result and not the basis of theological discussion? This question will remain in the background as we attempt to analyze the progression of argumentation leading to q. 39.

<sup>13</sup> «[Q]uia ad veritatem locutionum, non solum oportet considerare res significatas, sed etiam modum significandi [...] Licet autem, secundum rem, sit idem «Deus» quod «deitas», non tamen est idem modus significandi utrobique. Nam hoc nomen «Deus», quia significat divinam essentiam ut in habente, ex modo suae significationis naturaliter habet quod possit supponere pro persona» (ST I, q. 39, a. 5c).

<sup>14</sup> In qq. 27-43, Thomas drops the use of «essentia De» in favor of «divina essentia» or «essentia» alone in the context of the explicit discussion of Persons.

<sup>15</sup> [Q]uidquid est in Deo, est eius essentia. Sic igitur ex ea parte qua relatio in rebus creatis habet esse accidentale in subjecto, relatio realiter existens in Deo habet esse essentiae divinae, idem omnino ei existens [...] Et sic manifestum est quod relatio realiter existens in Deo, est idem essentiae secundum rem» (ST I, q. 28, a. 2c).

## B. ORDER AND METHOD OF TRINITARIAN DISCUSSIONS (QQ. 27-39)

In the following section we will examine Thomas' methodology in the Trinitarian questions of his *Summa* in order to elucidate the logic of his topical structure. We use the term «topical» as a way of distinguishing Thomas' method from a systematization, a deductive construction of theology from a central premise<sup>16</sup>. Thomas' order of discussion makes sense, of course, but it does not follow a logical progression of argumentation whereby each question follows from its predecessor as a conclusion follows a major and minor premise<sup>17</sup>. The explanation of Thomas' ordering of topics will at the same time open the door for discussing the role and character of rational argument in theological disputation as well as illumine Thomas' own theological method as he addresses ever more difficult questions of Trinitarian doctrine<sup>18</sup>.

We will begin with a schematic outline of Thomas' discussion of the Trinity based upon the instructions Thomas gives to the reader in the prologues to several key questions<sup>19</sup>.

A. PROCESSIONS (q. 27)<sup>20</sup>.

B. RELATIONS (q. 28).

C. PERSONS (constituted by subsistent relations) (qq. 29-43)<sup>21</sup>.

1. «person» considered absolutely (qq. 29-38).

a) considered in common (qq. 29-32).

— defining of «person» (q. 29).

— number of Persons (q. 30-31)<sup>22</sup>.

— our knowledge of the Persons (q. 32).

b) Persons considered singly (qq. 33-38).

— Father (q. 33).

— Son (qq. 34-35).

— Holy Spirit (qq. 36-38).

<sup>16</sup> Abelard was alone among medievals in thinking that theology could be systematically constructed in this way. Unfortunately, it is a commonplace assumption that the study of theology as a science in the thirteenth century was precisely a deductive effort. H. C. SCHMIDBAUR, *Personarum Trinitas. Drei trinitarische Gotteslehre des heiligen Thomas von aquin* (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1992), pp. 110ff.

<sup>17</sup> Regarding a logical progression, one might ask why Thomas does not begin the discussion of distinctions in God with the appropriations. It would seem logical to place the theory of appropriation at the transition point between what is more easily understood by natural reason (i.e., being within its grasp) and what is known only by revelation. Such would be the case if Thomas proceeded rationally, or was, in fact, demonstrating the Trinity as Abelard attempted.

<sup>18</sup> The character and role of the *sed contra*, for instance, within the *Summa* are different in kind from that of Thomas' other works. In his *quaestiones disputatae* this part of the text often represents another philosophical argument[sl]. Within the *Summa*, however, the *sed contra* is overwhelmingly a theological authority, biblical or patristic (usually Augustine). See L. ELDERS, «Structure et fonction de l'argument «sed contra» dans la Somme Théologique de Saint Thomas»: *Divus Thomas* 80 (1977) pp. 245-246.

<sup>19</sup> ST I, qq. 27, 29, 33, 39.

<sup>20</sup> Procession in the manner of a word (a. 3); procession in the manner of love (a. 4).

<sup>21</sup> The nature or character of «person» (a. 2); their distinction (a. 3); their number (a. 4).

<sup>22</sup> Q. 30 concerns the issue of number itself in God; q. 31 concerns the implications of such plurality.

2. *Persons considered comparatively* (qq. 39-42).
  - a) Persons and essence (q. 39).
  - b) Persons and relations or properties (q. 40).
  - c) Persons and notional acts (q. 41).
  - d) Persons with one another (q. 42).
3. *Missions* (q. 43).

We will refer to this outline and to the structural relations among its various parts as a basis for our study. For methodological considerations, we will also refer to the forms of argumentation within particular questions.

In order to clear the table of any muddled assumptions about Thomas' methodology, it is useful to distinguish Thomas' ordering here from that of Augustine, the father of the so-called «Latin trinitarian tradition» and a very important guide for Thomas. Thomas does not by any means imitate Augustine's *De Trinitate*. In fact, there are some important and very telling differences between the two theologians. First, Thomas' sequence of topics from processions to relations to missions is the reverse of Augustine's ordering. Second, the bulk of Augustine's text (Bks. 8-15) is an investigation of the processions as a way of understanding the perfect distinction, equality and oneness of the Three<sup>23</sup>. Thomas, on the other hand, is most concerned with the issue of relations, or more specifically with the use of «person» for identifying what those relations constitute. As seen above, only the first question concerns the processions strictly speaking<sup>24</sup>. The idea that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are subsistent relations is indeed Augustine's own contribution to Trinitarian discussions. He was unable, however, to make any fruitful use of the term «person» because of its imprecision and improper connotations due to its Greek use at that time in theater and politics. Not until Boethius wrote his theological tractates in the sixth century did the term receive a specifically Latin definition. Thomas made great use of Boethius' definition, but his own contribution lay in the focus of his discussion, the subsistent character of the Three.

A third key difference between Thomas and Augustine is the use of the doctrine of the divine image. This doctrine appears in the *Summa* some fifty questions after the discussion of the Trinity (q. 93). For Augustine, this doctrine was the basis for the bulk of his *De Trinitate*<sup>25</sup>. He tried to locate that image in various triads in the human mind and eventually finds the desired image of the Trinity in the mind's memory, understanding, and love especially as such faculties are directed toward God. Augustine realized, however, that the dissimilarity between this image and the Trinity itself remained indissoluble and that the endeavor was ultimately a failure. The issue remains of whether this failure was unexpected or a point of polemics<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. the prologues to Bks. 8 and 9.

<sup>24</sup> The issue of procession does return to the fore in q. 41 on the notional acts, but the term of procession as a way of speaking about derivative divine nature (the Father alone is unoriginate) is subordinate throughout to the conception of personal actions or «notional acts». More will be said about this later.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. AUGUSTINE, *De Trinitate*, Bks. 8-15.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. J. CAVADINI, «Augustine's *De Trinitate*»: *Augustinian Studies* XXXIII (1992) pp. 103-123.

Perhaps it was Thomas' own awareness of the insurmountable divide between creatures and creator that led him to set aside this doctrine for his text. Regardless, the important point is that we cannot lump together too casually Thomas and Augustine as representing «a Latin tradition». There is no one order of topics or manner of argument in «Latin» discussions, certainly not in these two theologians.

Having made that last point, the question of Thomas' own methodology comes to the fore. That is, if he does not use the doctrine of the divine image to illustrate the way in which God is one and three, then what is his method? This question is inescapable precisely because Augustine's rubric is widely assumed to be THE mode of Trinitarian discussion in the Latin west<sup>27</sup>. To answer this question, we will first proceed to the heart of Thomas' treatise, the question on our knowledge of the divine Persons<sup>28</sup>.

### 1. *Our knowledge of the Trinity* (ST I, q. 32 a. 1).

Thomas explicitly divides what can be known of God through creation from what can be known by faith<sup>29</sup>. The role of argument in the latter case is different in so far as arguments from reason proceed from and not to affirmations of faith. Beyond merely distinguishing the categories of arguments, Thomas is also concerned about protecting the dignity of the faith. The dignity of theology is in having God as its subject and possessing perfect certainty through divine revelation<sup>30</sup>. To attempt an argument from reason for the truth of any one article of faith detracts from its dignity. The proper method must move from revelation to elucidation, from the knowledge imparted through revelation to the clarification of it through careful analysis and coordination with other known truths. Misplacing arguments from reason with respect to doctrinas such as that of the Trinity represents a twofold danger for the faith:

«He who attempts to prove the Trinity of Persons by natural reason, denigrates the faith in two ways: 1) he harms the dignity of the faith because the faith pertains to invisible things that exceed human reason; and 2) he [harms] the practice of bringing others to the faith. When someone offers reasons for proving [the truth of] the faith that are not cogent, he will be ridiculed by the unfaithful, for they believe that it is on account of these reasons that we believe»<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. my «Thomas Aquinas *De Deo*: Setting the Record Straight on His Theological Method», *Sapientia* LIII (1998) pp. 119-154.

<sup>28</sup> «Utrum Trinitas divinarum Personarum possit per naturalem rationem cognosci» (ST I, q. 32 a. 1).

<sup>29</sup> Thomas is thereby categorically distinguished from those theologians who treated the doctrine of the Trinity as something knowable through the rational investigation such as Anselm and Abelard. For an overview of the method and structuring of Trinitarian discussions of the twelfth-century, see MARCIA COLISH's *Peter Lombard*, vol. I (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), pp. 227-302.

<sup>30</sup> It is important to note that the preambles are accessible to reason alone but are treated here in the *Summa* as being divinely revealed because in that form they are more certain and complete. For a discussion of the problems incurred if one attempts to proceed by reason alone in establishing the preambles, see ST I, q. 1 a. 1c.

<sup>31</sup> «Qui autem probare nititur Trinitatem Personarum natural; ratione, fidei dupliciter derogat. Primo quidem, quantum ad dignitatem ipsius fidei, quae est ut sit de rebus invisibilibus, quae rationem humanam excedunt [...] Secundo, quantum ad utilitatem trahendi alios ad fidem. Cum enim aliquis ad



Faith is of things not seen, not irrational or unintelligible to be sure, but simply beyond the grasp of unaided reason. Where arguments cannot demonstrate a certain truth, they can provide no grounds for belief. The Christian's faith in such truths as the Incarnation or the Trinity of Divine Persons rests on authority (of the entire Christian tradition), and this authority alone is the basis for any proofs<sup>32</sup>. Thomas makes the very same point in the very first question of the *Summa*: «Those things that are above human cognition and may not be investigated by reason are nevertheless revealed by God to be received in faith»<sup>33</sup>.

The use of reason with regard to theological doctrine then provides two types of arguments:

«One type of argument from natural reason seeks to prove various principles. In the case of natural science, reason is sufficient for proving that the motion of the heavens is always of a uniform velocity. Regarding another type of argument, reason cannot prove the principles. With the premises already posited, however, arguments may be offered for showing their congruence with the effects that follow [...] In the first type of argument, reason may prove God to be one and the like. But [only] in the second type, may reason lead to the manifestation of the Trinity; namely, having posited the Trinity, one may offer arguments for this doctrine's congruence with other known principles»<sup>34</sup>.

The rational method (first mode), represented by the ancient philosophers, did not and could not attain to any knowledge of the divine Persons. Thomas is unequivocal on this matter:

«It is impossible by natural reason to attain to a knowledge of the Trinity of divine Persons [...] Man does not attain to a knowledge of God through natural reason except from creatures. Creatures, however, lead to a knowledge of God as effects lead to a knowledge of a cause. Therefore, natural reason is able to know that God is the principle of all things [...] The creative power of God, however, is common to the whole Trinity and pertains to the unity of essence and not to the distinction of Persons. Therefore, by natural reason one can know only what pertains to the unity of essence not about those things that pertain to the distinction of Persons»<sup>35</sup>.

Any distinctions that the philosophers posited with respect to God are necessarily false and incomplete. The philosophers' knowledge of God, or more generally speak-

probendam fidem inducit rationes quae non sunt cogentes, cedit in irrisionem infidelium: credunt enim quod huiusmodi rationibus innituntur, et propter eas credamus» (ST I, q. 32 a. 1c).

<sup>32</sup> «Quae igitur fidei sunt, non sunt tentanda probare nisi per auctoritates, his qui auctoritates suscipiunt» (ST I, q. 32 a. 1c).

<sup>33</sup> [E]a quae sunt aliorum hominis cognitione, non sint ab homine per rationem inquirenda, sunt tamen, a Deo revelata, suscipienda per fidem» (ST I, q. 1 a. 1 ad 1).

<sup>34</sup> «Uno modo, ad probandum sufficienter aliquam radicem: sicut in scientia naturali inducitur ratio sufficiens ad probandum quod motus caeli semper sit uniformis velocitatis. Alio modo inducitur ratio, non quae sufficienter probet radicem, sed radici iam posita ostendat congruere consequentes effectus [...] Primo ergo modo potest induci ratio ad probandum Deum esse unum, et similia. Sed secundo modo se habet ratio quae inducitur ad manifestationem Trinitatis: quia scilicet, Trinitate posita, congruunt huiusmodi rationes» (ST I, q. 32 a. 1 ad 2).

<sup>35</sup> «[I]mpossibile est per rationem naturalem ad cognitionem Trinitatis divinarum Personarum pervenire [...] Homo per rationem naturalem in cognitionem Dei pervenire non potest nisi ex creaturis. Creaturae autem ducunt in Dei cognitionem, sicut effectus in causam. Hoc igitur solum ratione naturali de Deo cognosci potest, quod competere ei necesse est secundum quod est omnium entium principium [...] Virtus autem creativa Dei est communis toti Trinitati: unde pertinet ad unitatem essentiae, non ad distinctionem Personarum. Per rationem igitur naturalem cognosci possunt de Deo ea quae pertinent ad unitatem essentiae, non autem ea quae pertinent ad distinctionem Personarum» (ST I, q. 32 a. 1c).

ing, our natural knowledge of God is limited to knowing the essential attributes. Certain Platonic philosophers may have posited that the power, wisdom and goodness of God were three different levels of divinity<sup>36</sup>. This kind of division posits false distinctions as well as inequality in God<sup>37</sup>. More importantly, by reasoning upon the divine attributes, the philosophers were most deficient in understanding the Holy Spirit, the third Person. Their schema of attributes led only to two levels of substance by which the Creator and Word were distinguished. The third Person was not even posited as a substance. The Platonic notions of begetting or proceeding and the related ideas of superiority and inferiority are more aptly applied to the creation of the world not the eternal begetting of the Son by the Father<sup>38</sup>.

More important for modern readers is that even as Thomas distances himself from such rational investigations of plurality in God, by similitudes, attributes or otherwise, he sees his own project as following Augustine's. For Thomas, there is no demonstration of the Trinity. Thus, we move from faith to cognition, instead of from cognition to faith<sup>39</sup>. Thomas boldly presents the counter argument in the second objection as the practice of Richard of St. Victor and Augustine. Thomas thereby does not deny the manner of argumentation presented there as evidence, only the conclusion. Hence, the argument that «for the manifestation of the Trinity of Persons, Augustine proceeds from the procession of word and love in our minds» does not actually contradict Thomas' method. Thomas merely rejects the conclusion that such procedure entails a demonstration of the Trinity<sup>40</sup>. The key word that distinguishes the right procedure from the wrong one is «manifest». According to Thomas, Augustine and Thomas himself in his own work intends only to manifest the doctrine. Moreover, according to Thomas, Augustine's method as well as his own method pursues only manifestation with respect to this doctrine.

Intellect is not present univocally in us and in God, therefore, the similitude of our intellect, which Augustine uses, is «not sufficient to prove anything about God»<sup>41</sup>. The proper theological procedure, and Augustine's procedure, with respect to the doctrine of the Trinity (as with other articles of faith) is «from faith to cognition». The role of reason is to manifest such doctrine divinely revealed. With this response Thomas set himself over against much of the early medieval tradition of reading Augustine as well as modern readings of Augustine's *De Trinitate*<sup>42</sup>. The theologian

<sup>36</sup> ST I, q. 32 a. 1 ad 1.

<sup>37</sup> Abelard's attempt to proceed in the same manner results only in false conceptions about God, for the essential attributes are predicated in the singular and are truly one.

<sup>38</sup> ST I, q. 32 a. 1 ad 1.

<sup>39</sup> «Et inde est quod Augustinus, *Super Io.* dicit quod per fidem venit ad cognitionem, et non e converso» (ST I, q. 32 a. 1 ad 2).

<sup>40</sup> «Augustinus vero procedit ad manifestandum Trinitatem Personarum, ex processione verbi et amoris in mente nostra: quam viam supra (q. 27 a. 1 ad 3) secuti sumus» (ST I, q. 32 a. 1 ob. 2).

<sup>41</sup> «Similitudo autem intellectus nostri non sufficienter probat aliquid de Deo, propter hoc quod intellectus non univoce invenitur in Deo et in nobis» (ST I, q. 32 a. 1 ad 2).

<sup>42</sup> Michael Schmaus contends that Thomas was the first medieval theologian to understand Augustine's Trinitarian work. Not even Albert saw the importance of the final two books and the polemic of the whole. M. SCHMAUS, «Die trinitarische Gottesebenbildlichkeit nach dem Sentenzenkommentar Alberts des Grossen», in *Virtus Politica* (Stuttgart: Friedrich Frommann Verlag, 1974). Anselm is then not

can indeed reason about the Trinity using the divine attributes or similitudes in our mind, for instance, but such work is only an aid to understanding (*eine Denkenhilfe*). The difference between the philosopher's formulation of separated beings corresponding to the perception of identifiable attributes and the Christian's theory of appropriation (an aid in «manifestation») is that the latter alone is based upon and *proceeds from* the belief in the doctrine of the Trinity, the reality of three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, distinct yet one in being and nature. Any findings by the philosopher can only be false and unworthy of that same Trinity.

On the other hand, the view that Thomas in some way does offer demonstrations or rational arguments for the Trinity is not entirely groundless. For instance, Thomas discusses the distinction of Persons in terms of an intellectual and willed procession much like the mental procession in our own minds. This view is generally based upon q. 27, the transition point between questions on the unity of God (qq. 2-26) and those on the Trinity of Persons per se (qq. 27-43).

«Whoever understands, there proceeds within him something from the very thing that he understands. The concept of the thing understood proceeds from its knowledge. The voice then signifies this conception and is called a "word of the heart" signified by the word of the voice»<sup>43</sup>.

The question for Cajetan is whether this statement (or more particularly, the *Quicumque*) is understood to have universal application (to creatures and to God) or to creatures alone<sup>44</sup>. If it applies to God as well, then it seems that a procession in God can be proven, and this Cajetan denies. That is, having posited that God is a knowing being, we would know that there must be a procession within him. Moreover, by the very perfection and simplicity of God's knowing, we could assert that the processed one (the [W]ord) must be equal to God who is knowing. We would then have two who are equal and perfect—the beginning points of Anselm's argument in the

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the paradigmatic follower (reader) of Augustine because his optimism about unaided reason is too great. The proof of his misguided procedure of demonstrating rather than elucidating this doctrine is seen in the impossible conclusions he reaches in ch. 62 of the *Monologion*. Anselm there concludes in ch. 64 that his argument leads to positing multiple fathers and sons and processions in God which, of course, cannot be true. Augustine's procedure is one of searching for an image of the Trinity whose formulation is already known and defined by revelation and tradition. Anselm, on the other hand, pursues demonstration until he reaches an impasse, but does not deny the validity of what comes before such an impasse. Hence, in ch. 64 Anselm acclaims his own constructions of «necessary reasons» for the doctrine and for the consequent belief in it and only then admits that the doctrine cannot be fully explained. Anselm set the stage for much of the 12th-century attempts to demonstrate the Trinity which on the whole were not in error but wrongheaded in that they allowed the findings of image-psychology to inform the doctrine rather than the converse. Hence, it may be that Boethius is the more faithful follower of Augustine's method as he seeks to order a grammar according to the demands of the doctrine thereby altering the nature of the language used. In fact the second chapter of Boethius' *De Trinitate* reads just like Augustine's work in books 5-7 and Thomas' *Summa* I, q. 2 a. 13 and *passim*. For an examination of this kind of procedural error in Hugh of St. Victor, for example, see his *Tractatus de trinitate* edited by ROGER BARON in «*Tractatus de trinitate et de reparatione hominis* du MS. Douai 365»: *Mélanges de Science Religieuse* XVIII (1961), pp. 111-112. On other figures, see EDMUND J. FORTMANN, *The Triune God: A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), pp. 173-94.

<sup>43</sup> «Quicumque enim intelligit, ex hoc ipso quod intelligit, in eo procedit aliquid intra ipsum, quod est conceptio rei intellectae et ex ejus notitia procedens. Quam quidem conceptionem vox significat; et dicitur *verbum cordis*, significatum verbo vocis» (ST I, q. 27 q. 1c).

<sup>44</sup> CAJETAN, *In Summam Theologiae* I, q. 24, a. n. VII.

*Monologion*. The contrary possibility is that the aforementioned statement is applicable to creatures alone and that God remains unknowable as such. Cajetan's conclusion is, however, not a certainty.

The statement's universal validity can be affirmed without concluding that one may prove anything about such an intellectual procession in God. The applicability of the statement to God does not constitute a demonstration of procession in God, but a suitable portrait of the notion of a procession remaining within the agent. As Lonergan reminds us, Thomas «regularly writes as a theologian» and therefore «simply states» what is true<sup>45</sup>. The fact that Thomas states «that in all intellects, there is a procession of an inner word» is not a datum of rational reflection but the truth as made known by revelation. The central issue is then not the product of this procession, *verbum cordis*, but rather the fact and nature of this procession. The idea of procession is meant to be a way of understanding the relations and not a way of constituting the divine Persons<sup>46</sup>. But does this avenue of investigation proposit to unlock the mystery of the Trinity? Did Thomas intend to use the conception of intellectual life freed from creatureliness or imperfections to tell us more about who the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit really is?

For Thomas, we know causes by way of their effect. God as Infinite Being, however, exceeds our finite knowing capacity and is therefore incomprehensible to us. Yet the *Summa* is not a Maimonidean lament over the impossibility of making meaningful statements about God. Nor, does the doctrine of the Trinity raise the veil from the incomprehensibility of God. We must then square these two aspects of Thomas' theology with our one manner of knowing.

There is a sense in which we know God as one or as three in the same way: from His effects. The effects of God in creation tell us much about God as a cause but only as one cause. This is the rational investigation of God from creatures to creator. Our knowledge of God as Three is also by way of effect, those of a dove, a voice from heaven, etc. —the revelation of God in Christ. Thus, to say we know something of God as three is not to say that our manner of knowing is fundamentally changed, only the manner by which those effects are made known. The effect of creation is evident to everyone always. The particular effects that make up the life, death, and resurrection of Christ as well as prophetic visions were evident to certain persons at a particular time and passed on for later generations as the Christian tradition.

What Thomas says at the beginning of his *Summa* about our knowledge of God remains true throughout<sup>47</sup>. Whatever we know about God, including the Trinity of Persons, is by means of particular effects.

«Through the revelation of grace in this life, we do not know what God is (*quid est*), thus we are ignorant of him. Nevertheless, we know him in two ways: first, through the demonstrat-

<sup>45</sup> B. LONERGAN, S. J., *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, ed. David B. Burrell, C. S. C. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), p. 196.

<sup>46</sup> It is no mistake then that Thomas separates the question of procession and that of the Word as a *verbum cordis* by 6 questions (q. 27 and q. 34).

<sup>47</sup> «Ad tertium dicendum quod per effectus non proportionatos causae, non potest perfecta cognitio de causa haberi: sed tamen ex quocumque effectu potest manifeste nobis demonstrari causam esse [...] Et sic ex effectibus Dei potest demonstrari Deum esse: licet per eos non perfecte possimus eum cognoscere secundum suam essentiam» (ST 1, q. 2 a. 2 ad 3).

ion of his highest effects; second, through divine revelation we attribute something to him that natural reason cannot know, for example that God is one and three»<sup>48</sup>.

The incomprehensibility of God then remains a fundamental part of Thomas' theology. The insurmountable inadequacy of human knowing with respect to the essence of God is due to the infinity of God and the finitude of our minds. The knowing act involves the increasing correspondence of the mental image to the known object, a commonplace of Thomistic epistemology. The mental image must become like the known reality. But this possibility does not entirely hold true in the case of the knowledge of God by the finite mind. The absence of this natural possibility does not, however, mean that God is for us only a vague, indefinite reality. On the contrary, «whatever is knowable is known in so far as it is in act. Thus, God, who is pure act without any mixture of potency, is maximally knowable in as much as he is»<sup>49</sup>. God is not unseen or unknown but *incompletely* known, for God as an object of knowledge exceeds all created intellects. The example of an owl looking at the sun is instructive. Our blindness is produced only by the excess of light not its absence.

The revealed possibility of a direct vision of God means only that no created intellect on its own can attain to a knowledge of God. The necessary «becoming like» is accomplished by the *lumen gloriae*. This «light» makes our own intellect capable of seeing according to its own, proper habit.

«A created light is necessary for seeing the essence of God, but through this light the essence of God does not become intelligible (though according to itself, the divine essence is intelligible). The intellect, however, becomes enabled for understanding in the same way that a power becomes more powerful for doing a given work through the habit [of doing such work]»<sup>50</sup>.

The incomprehensibility is, however, not eliminated, for «the vision is the approach to God in his blessed, light-filled incomprehensibility»<sup>51</sup>. Neither is the manner of human knowing is abrogated, nor is the chasm between the infinitude of God and the finitude of our minds bridged. Rather, our minds are enabled (*disponatur*) to bear that excess of light<sup>52</sup>. The whole of God is seen and it is seen *totaliter*, yet such «totality» is on the part of the object, not the knowing subject<sup>53</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> «[L]icet per revelationem gratiae in hac vita non cognoscimus de Deo *quid est*, et sic ei quasi ignoto jungamur; tamen plenius ipsum cognoscimus, in quantum plures et excellentiores effectus ejus nobis demonstrantur, et in quantum ei aliqua attribuimus ex revelatione divina, ad quae ratio naturalis non pertingit, ut Deum esse trinum et unum» (ST I, q. 12 a. 13 ad 1). The most telling effects of the distinction of Persons are the divine missions which are themselves the content of revelation.

<sup>49</sup> «[C]um unumquodque sit cognoscibile secundum quod est in actu, Deus, qui est actus purus absque omni permixtione potentiae, quantum in se est, maxime cognoscibile est» (ST I, q. 12 a. 1c).

<sup>50</sup> «[L]umen creatum est necessarium ad videndum Dei essentiam, non quod per hoc lumen Dei essentia intelligibilis fiat, quae secundum se intelligibilis est: sed ad hoc quod intellectus fiat potens ad intelligendum per modum quo potentia fit potentior ad operandum per habitum» (ST I, q. 12 a. 5 ad 1).

<sup>51</sup> «Die incomprehensibilität nimmt in der Schau nicht ab, sondern zu; die visio ist damit Annäherung an Gott gerade in seiner beseligenden, lichtvollen *Unbegreiflichkeit*» (SCHMIDBAUR, *Ibid.*, p. 109).

<sup>52</sup> «[O]mne quod elevatur ad aliquid quod excedit suam naturam, oportet quod disponatur aliqua dispositione quae sit supra suam naturam» (ST I, q. 12 a. 5c).

<sup>53</sup> W. Hoye points out that the impossibility of comprehending God is due to «inadequacy of the human spirit: God is too knowable for us». Thomas reconciles this impossibility of comprehension with the reality of vision by referring to modes. That is, according to Hoye, «the divine mode of being ex-

It is within this context that we must understand Thomas' statements about the processions. The intellectual justification of belief is not a proof or an attainment to such mysteries as the inner-divine processions. Rather such justification is an aid to understanding. Thomas' discussion of processions and relations, plurality in God, is built upon revealed, not naturally known, similarities. His dependence upon revelation in these arguments is seen most clearly in the way he distinguishes procession and relation in God from processions and relations in us.

## 2. *Distinctions in God.*

Thomas points out that scripture uses language pertaining to procession but not *secundum quod est ad aliquid extra*. In fact, if one considers the matter carefully, it is evident that the Scriptural reference to procession in God (John 8: 42) refers to an act remaining within God. Such action is most like or «most evident» (*maxime patet*) in the act of understanding in the intellect of rational creatures<sup>54</sup>. The key to understanding this question is, however, NOT the similarity of intellectual procession in us and in God. That is, the key to the question is not Cajetan's proposed interpretation of the applicability of intellectual procession to God and to creatures. The basis of discussion is the dissimilarity between the two, i. e., our intellect and God's being which is intellect<sup>55</sup>. In rational creatures, there are two aspects of the procession of an inner word: the productive aspect with the inner word itself and the intelligible aspect or the mental activity that is the sufficient cause of the procession. The latter aspect in us is indicative of the intelligence of the agent, since the power of understanding a thing determines the quality of the word processing or the concept of the thing. Hence, in us, there is always an imperfection or incompleteness of the concept with respect to the thing in so far as our concepts are distant from actual existent things and only intentions of them. To the objection that the implied diversity resulting from such procession negates God's simplicity, Thomas writes:

«Procession within an intelligible being need not entail diversity. On the contrary, the more perfectly something proceeds, the more it is one with the one from whom it proceeds [...] The divine word is perfectly one with him from whom he proceeds without any diversity»<sup>56</sup>.

The inner word proceeds from the act of understanding alone because intellect is the divine nature or substance. In God intellect is substance, and act of under-

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ceeds the human mode of knowing» (W. HOYE, *Actualitas omnium actum: Man's Beatific Vision of God as Apprehended by Thomas Aquinas* [Meisenheim am Glan: Hain, 1975], pp. 247-248). Cf. also ST 1, q. 12 a. 7 ad 3.

<sup>54</sup> ST 1, q. 27 a. 1c.

<sup>55</sup> «[E]a quae in Deo dicuntur, non sunt intelligenda secundum modum infirmarum creaturarum, quae sunt corpora; sed secundum similitudinem supreamurum creaturarum, quae sunt intellectuales substantiae; a quibus etiam similitudo accepta deficit a repraesentatione divinorum. Non ergo accipienda est processio secundum quod est in corporalibus, vel per motum localem, vel per actionem alicuius causae in exteriorem effectum [...] Sed secundum emanationem intelligibilem, utpote verbi intelligibilis a dicente, quod manet in ipso. Et sic fides catholica processionem ponit in divinis» (ST 1, q. 27 a. 1 end c).

<sup>56</sup> «[I]d quod procedit ad intra processu intelligibili, non oportet esse diversum; imo, quanto perfectius procedit, tanto magis est unum cum eo a quo procedit [...] Verbum divinum sit perfecte unum cum eo a quo procedit, absque omni diversitate» (ST 1, q. 27 a. 1 ad 2).

standing is act of existence. The Word that proceeds from him is of the same nature and substance as its principle. His thought of himself is himself, i. e., his *intentio intellecta* of himself is also the *res intellecta*.

The task Thomas addresses in q. 27, is one of exegesis not rational speculation. Scripture provides evidence for begetting and processing in God. The theologian must make sense of these details by showing how such things cohere with what else we know about God. We know God's being is intellect. For there to be a processing or begetting, it must be according to intellect. Such processing is perfect and complete intellectual act which is called "generation" due to the identity of intellect and substance in God.

"To understand divinity is the very substance of understanding [...] hence, the word proceeding proceeds as one subsisting in its own nature. Consequently, this one is properly called "begotten" and "Son"»<sup>57</sup>.

Thomas' argument in the discussion of processions is an attempt to make sense of the revelation about God *in se* by coordinating such texts with rules already (rationally) established, such as the unity and simplicity of God. Thomas has available several key texts such as John 14:16, Ps. 2:7 and others all of which indicate plurality, procession and begetting in God<sup>58</sup>. To these he applies several basic principles established in earlier questions. For example, within these articles, we can discern the following key: 1) to understand divinity is the end of perfection<sup>59</sup>; 2) in God it is the same thing to understand and to be<sup>60</sup>; 3) whatever is in God is God<sup>61</sup>; 4) in one simple act, God understands and wills all<sup>62</sup>; 5) whatever is in God is one with the divine essence<sup>63</sup>. Each of these principles is the result of demonstrations in earlier questions (*ST* I, qq. 2-19). Thomas uses these principles to interpret and make sense of the revelation about plurality in God. The construction of Thomas' theological grammar is a careful process by which the more evident things are used to interpret and understand the less evident things. This is not to imply that Thomas' arguments become weaker and weaker as the discussion strays farther and farther from what is demonstrable. There are two different levels of meaning or kinds of meaning in the statements, "God is eternal" and "There are processions in God". The meaning of the first statement can be easily if not perfectly grasped. The meaning of the second statement is simply much more difficult to delineate.

Thomas' speech about God is guided by two fundamental beliefs: we cannot comprehend God (*ST* I, qq. 1-2); and we can know and name God only by means of

<sup>57</sup> "Sed intelligere divinum est ipsa substantia intelligentis, ut supra (q. 14 a. 4) ostensum est: unde verbum procedens procedit ut eiusdem naturae subsistens. Et propter hoc proprie dicitur genitum et Filius" (*ST* I, q. 27 a. 2 ad 2).

<sup>58</sup> "Ego ex Deo processi" (John 8:42); "non potest facere a se Filius quidquam" (John 5:19); "Ego hodie genui te" (Psalm 2:7); "nondum erant abyssi, et ego iam concepta eram, ante colles ego parturiebar" (Proverbs 8:24); "Rogabo Patrem meum, et alium Paracletum dabit vobis" (John 14:16). These texts reveal real distinction, relations of origin as well as eternity with respect to the Three.

<sup>59</sup> "[C]um divinum intelligere sit in fine perfectionis" (*ST* I, q. 27 a. 1 ad 2).

<sup>60</sup> "[I]n Deo idem est intelligere et esse" (*ST* I, q. 27 a. 3 ad 3). Will is also identical to being and intellect. Cf. *ST* I, q. 19 a. 1c.

<sup>61</sup> "[Q]uidquid est in Deo, est Deus" (*ST* I, q. 27 a. 3 ad 2).

<sup>62</sup> "Deus uno simplici actu omnia intelligit, et similiter omnia vult" (*ST* I, q. 27 a. 5 ad 3).

<sup>63</sup> "[Q]uidquid est in divinis, est unum cum divina natura" (*ST* I, q. 27 a. 4 ad 1).

creatures (ST 1, q. 13). The process of speaking about God then is essentially, though not completely, negative. What we mean by saying that God is eternal is that God is without beginning or end and that the existence of God is demonstrable. What we mean by saying that there are processions in God is that there is an act within God similar to our intellectual acts yet without a beginning or end and not other than the being and nature of God nor resulting in anything other than God —essentially a series of negations leaving us with a term defined less by its own content than by the constellation of other terms and principles that cohere with it. When Thomas reminds his reader toward the end of the discussion of processions that «we cannot name God except by way of creatures», his intention is to strip his terminology of all creaturely connotations. The term «procession» may be taken from its application to creatures, but its meaning with respect to God must be determined by all the aforementioned principles which guide such removal of inappropriate meaning. Consider, for instance, the resulting distinctions and conclusions Thomas reaches in q. 27 on the processions. First, such procession is not by way of local motion, exterior or interior effect. It is most similar to intellectual emanation because intellectual substances are the highest creatures we know (a. 1). Understood as a generation, it does not involve a difference in nature. This point delineates the difference between our intellectual «conceiving», whereby there proceeds in us an intellectual word that is merely similar to the thing understood, and the «generating» in God, whereby the processing and the processed are not distinct in nature or perfection<sup>64</sup>.

The weight of Thomas' argument can be seen in his refutation of the Arian error. By clearly distinguishing these processions from acts outside the divine nature and from those pertaining to divine power, Thomas eliminates the possibility of distinctions according to nature. In the *Summa*, he qualifies the divine processions by distinguishing its proper meaning from any outer (*ad extra*) denotation and from any causal connotation. The resulting definition is limited to acts remaining within (*ad intra*) that distinguish only the *principium* from the *principiatum*. Thomas aims at this last distinction in earlier texts but manages only to distinguish the more general term of «principium» from the less general term of «cause» as he less adroitly addressed inner and outer processions at the same time<sup>65</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> «Sed intellectu nostro utimur nomine *conceptionis*, secundum quod in verbo nostri intellectus invenitur similitudo rei intellectae, licet non inveniatur naturae identitas» (ST 1, q. 27 a. 2 ad 2).

<sup>65</sup> In *De potentia*, Thomas discussed together divine acts *ad extra* and *ad intra* with respect to the divine wisdom and goodness. The resulting confusion of the operation of intellect and will in these acts detracted from the force of the acts *ad intra* and gave an air of plausibility to the position of Arius. The argument against the positions of Arius and Sabellius consists in showing the reality of intellectual life in God. That there are acts of understanding and willing in God demonstrates the «co-essentiality» of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This argument, however, implicitly separates the processions *ad intra* from *ad extra*. The divine wisdom and goodness pertain to the latter while the divine intellectual life is the *ratio* of the former. Several organizational difficulties in this text diminish the quality and weight of the argument: 1) it implies that creation is a necessary act following from divine goodness and that creation is actually a perfection of God; 2) it identifies the procession of the Son with divine understanding bringing once again to center stage the problem of whether the Father understands only by means of the Son or whether the Father and the Son *each* understand; 3) it reduces the processions in God to the level of processions within our minds portraying God as «a» mind. These consequences or problems implicit in Thomas' argument are not, on the other hand, left unqualified in the *De potentia* text. Thomas uses the



Processions within God cannot be interpreted according to cause and effect and must be accordingly distinguished from any causality or priority. Understood causally, a divine procession would result in a creature not a divine Person, as Arius in fact concluded. Similarly, procession cannot be understood according to what is *ad aliquid extra*. Sabellius erred by supposing that the divine processions were not within but outside the divine nature. It is for the sake of refuting more decisively these two errors that Thomas clarifies and corrects this argument from earlier texts as he attempts a better presentation in the *Summa*. In the *De potentia*, for example, he discusses processions *ad intra* and *ad extra* at the same time, which makes it difficult but not impossible to avoid complications. In the *Summa*, Thomas is more careful in clarifying his subject by locating these processions within the agent.

«Procession should be regarded as an action that remains in the agent. This action is most clearly seen in the intellect where its action of understanding remains in the intellect itself [...] Procession is therefore not to be understood according to what is in bodies either as local motion or as the action of some cause leading to an exterior effect [...] but according to an intelligible emanation just as an intelligible word proceeds from and remains in the one speaking»<sup>66</sup>.

Thomas realized in writing the *Summa* that the key to characterizing properly the divine procession is the «remaining-within-ness» that allows no causal distinction. Having already located the perfection of divine life in the identity of understanding and being, the subsequent discussion of a distinction or processing in that understanding does not detract from the divine unity. Moreover, he postpones the consideration of intellect and will with respect to creation until q. 43, thereby separating the necessary and perfect being of God from the free acts of creation and the contingent being of what is created. Hence, another consequence of the clarification in the *Summa* is the elimination of the term «natural» from the discussion of processions. To identify the intelligible or intellectual procession as «natural» implies a unnatural and even temporal act of will in every other procession both *intra* and *extra*<sup>67</sup>.

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qualifying phrase «in the manner of» in the response to the first objection. Yet his comparison remains between processions as «operations passing into something extrinsic» and processions «remaining in the agent». The processions of divine Persons are then very closely linked with the processions remaining within the human agent. Hence, his further qualification in the fifth response is that the processed word and love in intellectual substances are simply not subsistent as they are in God. Moreover, the twelfth response adds to the fuzziness of the presentation by positing essence as what is common and relation as the means of distinction. The statements are acceptable in their own right, to be sure, but the overall portrait is less than clear. In fact, the implication of the twelfth response continues that of the earlier responses in this article; namely, that the processions are from the essence and that the resulting relations are simply the basis of distinction. The causal nature of processions is left intact. Although these problems do not for the most part rise to the surface of explicit presentation, the structure of this text represents a danger for the careless interpreter as well as the basis for misdirected criticism. See Thomas' *De Potentia* q. 10 a. 1.

<sup>66</sup> «[S]ecundum actionem quae manet in ipso agente, attenditur processio quaedam ad intra. Et hoc maxime patet in intellectu, cuius actio, scilicet intelligere, manet in intelligente [...] Non ergo accipienda est processio secundum quod est in corporalibus, vel per motum localem, vel per actionem alicuius causae in exteriorem effectum [...] sed secundum emanationem intelligibilem, utpote verbi intelligibilis a dicente, quod manet in ipso» (*ST* I, q. 27 a. 1c).

<sup>67</sup> The second procession is similar to our willing love and can be considered according to the *ratio* of the will, although not necessarily as a willful procession. Yet unlike our willed love, this second

The limit of two processions in God is, however, not an argument from reason but from revelation. The evidence for the limit of two processions in God is the revelation of the two proceeding, the Son and the Holy Spirit<sup>68</sup>. The dissimilarity between our intellectual processions and the divine processions does not eliminate the possibility of multiple processions in God. It is merely illustrative of the limit of two processions in God. In the end, the unity and perfection of operation in God severely qualifies anything that might be gained from the creaturely analogy. That we know only two intelligible processions that remain in an agent does not in any way limit such processions remaining within the agent who is God.

One must be careful then in reading these articles in order to avoid confusion about what follows from revelation and what follows from analogy. The delineation of the two categories of conclusions is a way of bypassing modern assumptions about Thomas' methodology. Thomas is much more reserved in his attitude toward analogical arguments with respect to this doctrine than is usually assumed. The conclusion of the discussion is that the term «procession» is in some way suitable for speaking about plurality with respect to God. We do not know exactly what it means for there to be a procession in God, only that it is unlike processions known to us in so many ways. One must then maintain the proper lines of the analogy between the *manner* of understanding and loving in us and the *manner* of the two processions in God. They are understood according to the *manner* of knowing and loving because these are the two processive acts (known to us) remaining in an agent, namely, the human soul. In God, however, such processions involve an identity of nature as well as an identity of act, for being and intellect are not distinct in God, nor is intellect and will.

The basis for speaking of relations with respect to God is the very relationality of the names of the divine Persons. «*Father* is not said except by means of paternity and *Son* by means of sonship»<sup>69</sup>. The names of the Persons are indicative of relations. Moreover, such relations must be real if we affirm the reality of the Persons themselves. To question the reality of relations is to question the reality of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is not to say that we understand such relations, but only that the personal names include them. The discussion of relations in q. 28 is primarily a meditation of sorts upon this datum. The relevant principles of interpretation are those noted above in the discussion of processions together with the demonstrations

procession shares in the identity of (divine) nature; it is not distinguished from the first procession by the difference between intellect and will because the two are really one in God, nor by any proper reason because of the unity of God (aa. 3-4). The two processions are distinguished only by reason of order not nature. Such order can be understood in terms of the order of knowing and willing in us. First there is something conceived by the intellect and then loved by the will. «Processio autem quae attenditur secundum rationem voluntatis [...] magis secundum rationem impellentis et moventis in aliquid. Et ideo quod procedit in divinis per modum amoris, non procedit ut genitum vel ut filius, sed magis procedit ut spiritus» (ST I, q. 27 a. 4c). Note that the phrase is not «the love that proceeds» but «that which proceeds in the manner of love». Thomas' emphasis is always upon the action posited in God and found analogously in our faculties: «Huiusmodi autem processiones sunt duae tantum [...] alia secundum actionem voluntatis, quae est processio amoris» (ST I, q. 28 a. 4c).

<sup>68</sup> «Sed contra est quod in Deo non sunt nisi duo procedentes, scilicet Filius et Spiritus Sanctus. Ergo sunt ibi tantum duae processiones» (ST I, q. 27 a. 4 sc).

<sup>69</sup> «[P]ater non dicitur nisi a paternitate, et Filius a filiatione» (ST I, q. 28 a. 1 sc).

of the absolute distinction between what is of God and what is created and the rule of predication *secundum substantiam* [only].

Thomas' discussion of relation is based upon the Augustinian insight that everything that is said of God must be said substantially of God. To posit relations in God means that these relations are subsistent, not accidental. The central problem is how one is to understand a plurality of subsistent relations without offending the doctrine of divine unity. Having posited in aa. 2 and 3 that there are relations in God by reason of the revealed names and that such relations must be real for Father and Son to be distinct, Thomas goes on to investigate the way in which relation multiplies or posits multiplicity in God. According to Thomas, this plurality is not said *secundum rem absolutam* but only *secundum rem relativam*<sup>70</sup>. The meaning of the term «relation», he states, «involves some respect of one to another according to which something is opposed relatively to another [...] Relative opposition includes in its *ratio* distinction. Hence, there must be a real distinction in God»<sup>71</sup>. To the objection that the identity of relation and essence precludes the possibility of distinctions between relations, Thomas again can only refer to the *rationes* of sonship and paternity as «conveying» opposition<sup>72</sup>. Thomas has then not offered an answer as much as restated the previous article's position on predicating relation of God<sup>73</sup>.

He has, on the other hand, clarified some essential points left unsuitably delineated in his other discussions. In *De potentia*, for instance, Thomas allowed the implication of causality to stand. «There is a real relation in God following upon an action remaining within God»<sup>74</sup>. Instead of considering processions alone (and only according to acts remaining within), he addressed processions and relations together thereby implying that the divine relations are «consequent upon» the processions. The argument in *De potentia* distinguishes between the divine essence and the «word» processed, yet the reality of the relation seems dependent upon an action, or founded upon some action.

Thomas' attempt to coordinate the processions and relations in *De potentia* q. 8, was met with difficulty as the many relevant distinctions clouded the issue and even unbalanced the presentation of the doctrine. This problem can be seen in the text of a. 1 where Thomas introduces most every distinction that he would later spread over four articles in the *Summa*.

«Because the divine Persons are considered only according to a relative distinction, it is necessary to posit in God such relation as following upon [some] action [...] A real relation

<sup>70</sup> ST I, q. 28 a. 3c.

<sup>71</sup> «De ratione autem relationis est respectus unius ad alterum, secundum quem aliquid alteri opponitur relative. Cum igitur in Deo realiter sit relatio, ut dictum est (a. 1), oportet quod realiter sit ibi oppositio. Relativa autem oppositio in sui ratione includit distinctionem. Unde oportet quod in Deo sit realis distinctio, non quidem secundum rem absolutam, quae est essentia, in quae est summa unitas et simplicitas; sed secundum rem relativam» (ST I, a. 28 a. 3c).

<sup>72</sup> «Et similiter, licet paternitas sit idem secundum rem cum essentia divina, et similiter filio, tamen haec duo in suis propriis rationibus important oppositos respectus» (ST I, q. 28 a. 3 ad 1).

<sup>73</sup> «[R]elatio quae est in Deo, secundum esse suum non sit idem quod divina essentia; sed quod non praedicatur secundum modum substantiae, ut existens in eo de quo dicitur, set ut ad alterum se habens» (ST I, q. 28 a. 2 ad 1).

<sup>74</sup> «Relinquitur ergo quod consequatur relatio realis in Deo actionem manentem in agente: cujusmodi actiones sunt intelligere et velle in Deo» (*De Potentia*, q. 8 a. 1c).

in God is consequent upon an action remaining within him such as the acts of understanding and willing if for some intellect it may be the same thing to understand and to be, it will be necessary that the word is not extrinsic to the being of the intellect itself. Thus, there is in God a real relation both according to the word and according to the one proffering the word<sup>75</sup>.

The question of the reality of the relations then quickly becomes one of the reality of an act *ad intra*, a procession of a word. Taken in itself, this argument may not seem problematic, and indeed most of its individual parts are found in the *Summa* with much the same wording. The basis of the discussion, however, lies in the production of relatedness, the constitution of the Persons. The early introduction of the problem of the constitution of the Persons pushes the force of the arguments to the processions as the productive aspect of divine being. In the *Summa* Thomas saves this issue, the basis for real distinction in God, for a much later question in his treatise<sup>76</sup>. By that time, he will have carefully defined each term as well as the rules of signification and predication in order to move from the reality of distinction to the constitution of such distinction in God. In the *Summa*, Thomas saw the extreme difficulty of denoting non-causal processions and uncaused, subsistent relations as a way of illuminating the reality of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, One God in three Persons. He realized that the real distinction of the Persons and their constitution are two separate questions. Consequently, he left the latter, more complex problem until the end of his treatise.

Comparing Thomas' various discussions of these issues, we can see that when Thomas returns to the manner of acts *ad intra* at the end of the question on relations as a way of understanding such distinction, the nature of the argument is much clearer. Instead of using the analogy of intellectual subsistence to demonstrate a distinction between the principle of intelligible procession (the Father) and the processed word (the Son), Thomas uses the analogy to describe the relation between the two, that is, the way in which paternity and filiation are related by generation.

«For every procession, there are two opposing relations: one is of the one proceeding from a principle, and the other is of the principle itself. The procession of a word is called "generation" [...] The relation of the principle of generation in living things is called "paternity", but the relation of the one proceeding from a principle of generation is called, "filiation"»<sup>77</sup>.

The *Summa* presentation is then much clearer due to the careful and isolated exposition of each term in the discussion.

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<sup>75</sup> «Relinquitur ergo quod per sola relativa distinctio in divinis personis attenditur [...] oportet in eo ponere relationem actionem consequentem [...] consequatur relatio realis in Deo actionem manentem in agente: cujusmodi actiones sunt intelligere et velle in Deo [...] Si ergo aliquis intellectus sit cujus intelligere sit suum esse, oportebit quod illud verbum non sit extrinsecum ab esse ipsius intellectus [...] Relinquitur ergo quod in divinis sit realis relatio et ex parte verbi et ex parte proferentis verbum» (*De Potentia*, q. 8 a. 1c).

<sup>76</sup> *ST* I, q. 40 aa. 2-3.

<sup>77</sup> «Secundum quamlibet autem processionem oportet duas accipere relaciones oppositas, quarum una sit procedentis a principio, et alia ipsius principia. Processio autem verbi dicitur generatio [...] Relatio autem principia generationis in viventibus perfectas dicitur paternitas: relatio vero procedentis a principio dicitur filio» (*ST* I, q. 28 a. 4c).

Relations can be real or merely dependent upon a reasoning mind<sup>78</sup>. When some respect or aspect is in the nature of the things so that it is ordered to another according to its nature, the relation is said to be real. A relational ordering to another such as position does not involve a thing's nature. To posit a relation on the part of one thing does not entail a relation on the part of the other. Because relation is a tendency to another (*ad aliquid*) and not a «thing between», the fact of a real relation of Creation to God does not imply such relation from God to Creation. Creation is really related to God in the sense of «being ordered to and dependent upon» God, but God is in no way defined by or ordered to creation, thus not related to it<sup>79</sup>. The relational «respect» must be in the very nature of the thing in order to be real. Really related things are «according to their nature ordered to another, and have such inclination to one another»<sup>80</sup>. The Father and the Son are really (mutually) related because such ordering or inclination is a part of their identity. In fact, paternity IS the identity of the Father as sonship IS the identity of the Son.

With regards to things of the same nature, what proceeds and that from which it proceeds must necessarily be really related. The conceived intellectual word that proceeds from the intellectual faculty are really related by the unity of their nature, the knowing mind. The being of the intellect is ordered to the word being conceived just as the conceived word is ordered to the intellect from which it comes. The difference between the intellectual procession in our mind and the processions in God is that with God there is no causing or producing.

The divine relations and processions share the same level of distinction and are ordered to one another. Thomas' argument for the reality of distinct relations includes the argument for a real distinction of divine processions. «Father» and «Son» cannot be said except according to relations which are ordered to the processions in a real sense<sup>81</sup>. Yet the processions only «give evidence of» the distinct relations. They are considered neither as effects from a cause nor as a cause expressing an effect but as a principle of proceeding who shares the very same nature with the one who proceeds.

Having shown that divine processions are really communicating one and the same nature and that relations are really ordered to the processions as that by which the

<sup>78</sup> For a fuller discussion of Thomas' theory of relation, see A. KREMPEL, *La doctrine de la relation chez saint Thomas: Exposé historique et systématique* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1952), especially pp. 537-53 on the term's use in its Trinitarian context; H. MEYER, *Thomas von Aquin* (Paderborn, Ferdinand-Schöningh-Verlag 1961), pp. 158-164; E. MULLER, S. J., «Real Relations and the Divine: Issues in Thomas' Understanding of God's Relation to the World»: *Theological Studies* LVI (1995) pp. 673-95.

<sup>79</sup> The use of «really» to describe the relatedness of creation to God is, on Liske's analysis, somewhat inappropriate due to its one-sidedness. Our common use of the term, though not blameworthy in itself, must be corrected by a more accurate notion of its referent to avoid the pitfall of modern systematics in which any relationality posited on the part of creation is automatically assumed to be applicable to God. See M. LISKE, «Die sprachliche Richtigkeit bei Thomas von Aquin»: *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* XXXII (1985) 373-390.

<sup>80</sup> «Qui quidem respectus aliquando est in ipsa natura rerum; utpote quando aliquae res secundum suam naturam ad invicem ordinatae sunt, et invicem inclinationem habent» (ST I, q. 28 a. 1c).

<sup>81</sup> «[S]ecundum Philosophum, in V Metaphysics, relatio omnis fundatur vel supra quantitatem, ut duplum et dimidium; vel supra actionem et passionem, ut faciens et factum, pater et filius, dominus et servus, et huiusmodi» (ST I, q. 28 q. 4c).

nature proceeds, the identity of relation and nature must be addressed. The error Thomas wished to avoid was that of allowing processions to come between the divine nature and the divine relations. On the basis of the teaching in q. 27, it is possible to conclude that the nature processes and produces the divine Persons who are related and distinct yet one by the divine nature which is itself other than the relations<sup>82</sup>. This error was in Thomas' day associated with Gilbert de Poitiers who used the terms «*assistantes*» and «*extrinsecus affixae*» to describe the ordering of relation to essence in God<sup>83</sup>. The simplicity of God demands that everything in God be one with the divine essence. But in what way can two things (relations), for instance, be really distinct from one another yet identical to a third (divine essence)?

### 3. *Defining theological terms.*

#### a) Relation.

«Relations» are unlike other accidents. Quantity and quality, for instance, signify a measurement of the thing itself and are determined from within. A ball alone in the universe possesses the same quantity and quality as it does with a world around it. «Relation», on the other hand, depicts a tendency to another<sup>84</sup>. Relation signifies something *ad aliquid*, but as an accident it also signifies an inherence in the subject.

However, as Thomas points out (from Boethius) there can be no accidental predication in God. All that God is, is of the divine essence and predicated substantially. This manner of speaking demands that the being of the relation be equated with or dependent upon the act. Thomas then accounts for the unique linguistic situation of speech about God as well as accounting for the complexities of relation as a predicament which both inheres and tends to another. It is important that a father is such not by virtue of his son but by virtue of begetting. Thus, the reason we say relation signifies an inherence and that such inherence remains with the death of the other, is that the relation itself is produced by the activity. The act of begetting makes a person a parent and a (new) person a son or daughter. A mutual relation, however, cannot be understood only by means of the act linking them. This kind of strict definition denies that a foster or step-father could be considered to be the «father» of the child. Identifying parent and child by means of the productive act that makes the two to be «related» detracts from the significance of the «being» of that relationship as it is made evident in some manner or another for the child's entire life.

What does it mean to say accidents are predicated substantially of God? Have the terms lost their meaning as human language is stretched to the breaking point in order to accommodate the uniqueness of God? Thomas attempts an answer to this problem by examining the fundamental denotation of «relation». A relation has existence in a manner very different from substance. Relation has two kinds of being:

<sup>82</sup> [A]liud a relationibus» (ST I, q. 28 a. 4 ob. 2).

<sup>83</sup> Cf. ST I, q. 28 a. 2c.

<sup>84</sup> «Ea vero quae dicuntur ad aliquid, significant secundum propriam rationem solum respectum ad aliud» (ST I, q. 28 a. 1c).

*esse in* and *esse ad*. The being of this accident is first understood as a being in the substance in which it inheres. One can say then that it does not have a being of its own but only from the substance. The other kind of being is a tendency or respect or comparison<sup>85</sup>. Relation refers to the host substance only but does not merely signify something about the substance in which it is. "The proper meaning of a relation is not considered according to that in which it is, but according to something outside"<sup>86</sup>. Relation is peculiar among accidents in that it goes beyond the bearing substance and brings that one to a something exterior, or at least "something else". Another way of understanding this distinction is to consider the *esse ad* as the "fundamental intelligibility of relation"<sup>87</sup>. Relations in God then share this intelligibility with relations elsewhere. What makes the divine relations different from other relations is that the *esse in* is actually identical to the host substance, the divine essence, by reason of the divine simplicity and perfection. This "extra-mental foundation" in the divine essence is the basis for positing these relations as "real"<sup>88</sup>.

Thomas explains the realness of the divine relations by describing their "respectus". That is, the tendency to another and the reality of such respect, as opposed to the mere existence of such respect in the knowing mind. What is said *ad aliquid* signifies something extra. Thomas' explanation of these terms is not exactly original to him. According to Schmidbaur, Thomas unabashedly borrowed from Gilbert, the supposed opponent in the discussion of relations<sup>89</sup>. Indeed, one familiar with Gilbert of Poitiers may well question in what way Thomas' formulation actually refutes and corrects Gilbert's "error"<sup>90</sup>. While Gilbert referred to the divine relations as "*non intrinsecus affixae*", Thomas chose to use "*respect ad suum oppositum*"<sup>91</sup>. Both expressions are ways of distinguishing the divine essence from the relatedness of the Persons.

"Therefore, if we consider relations according to what they are in themselves, they are found to be "assistentes" or not intrinsic to the subject itself. They signify a certain contingent respect to some related thing just as one thing tends to another. But if relation is considered as an accident, it inheres in a subject and has being accidentally in itself. But Gilbert considered relation only in the first manner"<sup>92</sup>.

<sup>85</sup> "Et in aliis quidem generibus a relatione, utpote quantitate et qualitate, etiam propria ratio generis accipitur secundum comparisonem ad subjectum: nam quantitas dicitur mensura substantiae, qualitas vero dispositio substantiae" (ST I, q. 28 a. 2c). See also *De Potentia*, q. 8 a. 2c and q. 7 a. 8.

<sup>86</sup> "Sed ratio propria relationis non accipitur secundum comparisonem ad illud in quo est, sed secundum comparisonem ad aliquid extra" (ST I, q. 28 a. 2c).

<sup>87</sup> E. MULLER, "Real Relations...", 675.

<sup>88</sup> M. HENNIGER, S. J., *Relations: Medieval Theories 1250-1325* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), p. 17.

<sup>89</sup> SCHMIDBAUR, *Personarum Trinitas*, p. 394.

<sup>90</sup> M. E. Williams contends that Thomas and Gilbert differ very little on this issue. See his *The Teaching of Gilbert Porreta on the Trinity as Found in His Commentaries on Boethius*, in *Analecta Gregoriana*, vol. 56 (Rome: Gregorian University, 1951), p. 104.

<sup>91</sup> ST I, q. 28 a. 2c.

<sup>92</sup> "Si igitur consideremos, etiam in rebus creatis, relationes secundum id quod relationes sunt, sic inveniuntur esse assistentes, non intrinsecus affixae; quasi significantes respectum quodammodo contingentem ipsam rem relatam, prout ab ea tendit in alterum. Si vero consideretur relatio secundum quod est accidens, sic est inherens subjecto, et habens esse accidentale in ipso. Sed Gilbertus Porretanus consideravit relationem primo modo tantum" (ST I, q. 28 a. 2c).

The effect of Thomas' formulation, however, is only to distinguish the divine *esse* (nature) from the *esse ad alterum* (Persons) without denying the identity of divine *esse* and relational *esse in*. Gilbert argued for no less. With both theologians, the reality of the relations cannot be other than a being to another. Otherwise the unity of divine substance is endangered<sup>93</sup>.

Relation multiplies into trinity because relation retains its "*respectus unius ad alterum*". That is, the term changes in its mode of signifying or use with reference to God but retains its *ratio*. Relation said accidentally or substantially must still be said according to an opposite. Relative opposition includes distinction; therefore the relations which are subsistent are distinct. What Thomas has been careful to do is to show how terms are to be understood with reference to God without destroying or negating the *ratio* of each term. Thus, the predication of relation in God has the same elements as in creatures, but those elements or *ratio propria* are understood in different ways corresponding to the demands of the unique linguistic situation which is speech about God.

At the end of the question on relations, Thomas once again sets aside the kind of relation that is founded upon an extrinsic act. Relations in God are understood according to intrinsic acts, processions *ad intra*. The beginning of the last article seems to repeat the question on processions (q. 27), but such repetition is perhaps indicative of the importance of the point, surely not the dullness of Thomas' memory. The point Thomas insists upon is the unique character of relations in God. The reality of these relations consists in the identity of their nature such that the nature of one IS the nature of the other. Their identity is then wholly ordered to one another: the one processing and the one from whom it processes. These two are related because they are "ordered to one another" and such ordering is in the nature, namely, in the one common nature.

On the other hand, the act of being that is the subsistent divine relation is not other than the act of processing by reason of the divine simplicity. Hence, Thomas can more easily describe the processions by reason of the similitude of (intellectual) processions in our intellectual nature. We are then limited to describing what relation in God is not. Procession and relation can be employed to discuss the reality of multiplicity but such terms are limited in their epistemological value. Why? These terms seem to treat multiplicity within or in light of the whole. The problem then arises of the way in which this multiplicity is real. That is, it is somewhat difficult to provide a sufficient answer to the 12th century problem of viewing the Trinity as "*extrinsecus*" or implying that processing is an act of essence instead of Persons. Hence, at the end of qq. 27-28, Thomas has still not addressed the question of the constitution of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The almost unavoidable concluding implication of both questions is the causing of two if not all three. On the other hand, Thomas is not here attempting an answer of how there are three but only the fact of threeness. Q. 29 is then merely an investigation of what or who are these three.

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<sup>93</sup> The proximity of these two theologians' positions can be more evidently seen in Thomas' *De Potentia*, where he actually uses Gilbert's own term "*assistentes*" as well as his intended meaning. See *De Potentia* q. 7.



## b. Person.

The portion of our text concerning the term «person» occupies the remaining questions (29-43) of the treatise on the Trinity. We now move into that part of the discussion in which Thomas attempts to explore more fruitful ways of discussing these Three who are subsistent relations. The following outline of this section indicates the major divisions.

1. «person» considered absolutely (qq. 29-38)<sup>94</sup>.
  - a) considered in common (qq. 29-32).
    - defining of «person» (q. 29).
    - number of Persons (qq. 30-31).
    - our knowledge of the Persons (q. 32).
  - b) Persons considered singly (qq. 33-38).
    - Father (q. 33).
    - Son (qq. 34-35).
    - Holy Spirit (qq. 36-38).
2. Persons considered comparatively (qq. 39-42).
  - a) Persons and essence (q. 39).
  - b) Persons and relations or properties (q. 40).
  - c) Persons and notional acts (q. 41).
  - d) Persons with one another (q. 42).
3. Missions (q. 43).

It is evident that Thomas first defines his term and all that follows from it before discussing the individual «Persons» and before coordinating this term with other terms already established in the text. One can surmise that the term's practical value is not due to any assumption of a subsequent epistemological treasure. Its immediate application here is to facilitate the discussion of the proper names of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But what need is there for a term designating those who are better known by their proper terms? Do not the generic terms signifying God as one suffice for common and abstract words? More importantly, is it possible or even advisable to use an extra-biblical term to discuss what is known only by revelation?

Thomas makes clear as did Augustine eight centuries before him that «person» is needed to give an account to heretics, or to those who ask, «three what?»

«The name «person» is not found in reference to God in the Old Testament or New Testament, nevertheless the sacred scriptures indicate in many places what that name signifies in God, i. e., that he is supreme self-existence and that he is perfect understanding [...] The use of new terms for signifying the ancient belief about God is necessary in order to dispute with heretics»<sup>95</sup>.

<sup>94</sup> ST I, q. 29, prol.

<sup>95</sup> «[L]icet nomen *personae* in Scriptura veteris vel novi Testamentis non inveniatur dictum de Deo, tamen id quod nomen significat, multipliciter in sacra Scriptura invenitur assertum de Deo; scilicet quod est maxime per se ens, et perfectissime intelligens [...] Ad inveniendum autem nova nomina, antiquam fidem de Deo significantia, coegit necessitas disputandi cum haereticis» (ST I, q. 29 a. 3 ad 1).

After all, Thomas states, if we were to limit ourselves strictly to biblical terms, we would be limited to the actual Hebrew and Greek words found in the Scriptures. The very endeavor of translating the text into other languages is one of using «non-biblical» terms. Hence, his argument that «person» signifies what is found in the Scripture is tantamount to saying that he is merely translating the text into a contemporary idiom. That God is «supreme self-existence and perfect understanding» means that God is «a person». And yet God is not «a person» but «three Persons». Hence, there is something more than mere translation present in Thomas' use of this term. Augustine pointed in this direction but was unable to make much use of the term due to its problematic connotations and its semantic proximity to substance. His primarily exegetical approach virtually precluded such redefinition of a term based on what it should mean in a theological context<sup>96</sup>.

Thomas' use of the terms, however, is heavily dependent upon the scholastic method of definition and distinction, specifically Boethius' definition in his *De duabus naturis*<sup>97</sup>. Boethius defines «person» as «an individual substance of a rational nature»<sup>98</sup>. «Substance» by itself, according to Thomas, signifies something individuated by itself and is similar to hypostasis. The importance of «individual» lies in its distinguishing this substance as a subsisting particular<sup>99</sup>. Also, «individual» excludes from the definition something assumable such as human nature<sup>100</sup>. The adjective «rational» defines specifically the kind of nature and excludes non-intelligent hypostases. The choice of «nature» rather than «essence» is due to the desire to signify a «specific difference» denominating the thing. Essence is less formal and too common to things in general.

Besides defining the term, Thomas must also demonstrate the way in which «person» is distinguished from other theological terms. «Person» is needed to signify something with respect to God that «hypostasis», «subsistence» and «essence» fail to denote with sufficient precision. Thomas for the most part affirms that «hypostasis», «subsistence» and «person» are synonymous yet argues that only «person» is specific to rational beings. The Greeks' use of «hypostasis» in referring to the three is appropriate in that it signifies an individual substance. On the other hand, it is only by the habit of use that the term «hypostasis» has come to signify an individual of a *rational* nature<sup>101</sup>. That is, «hypostasis» has been employed for specifying «three what?» only through customary usage. Because of its ability to signify other things

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<sup>96</sup> Cf. his *De Trinitate*, Bk. VII. 7-111. Augustine's theological method also did not extend to the kind of careful, scholastic qualification Thomas pursues.

<sup>97</sup> Boethius' definition was formulated in reference to the explanation of the union of divine and human nature in Christ, yet Thomas finds this definition to be also the most appropriate one for Trinitarian use.

<sup>98</sup> «Persona est rationalis naturae individua substantia» (ST I, q. 29 a. 1).

<sup>99</sup> «Et sic hoc nomen *individuum* ponitur in definitione personae, ad designandum modum subsistendi qui competit substantiis particularibus» (ST I, q. 29 a. 1 ad 3).

<sup>100</sup> ST I, q. 29 a. 1 ad 2. Cf. Thomas' discussion of the Incarnation as the assumption of human nature on the part of a divine Person in ST III, q. 2 a. 2. This aspect of «not being assumable» indicates the dignity of having personality.

<sup>101</sup> «[S]ed ex usu loquendi habet quod sumatur pro individuo rationalis naturae, ratione suae excellentiae» (ST I, q. 29 a. 2 ad 1).

such as non-rational substances or inanimate natures, it lacks the appropriate dignity for the unique and most excellent subject of linguistic expression, God<sup>102</sup>. «Person», on the other hand, has of itself the specificity of the highest, i. e. rational, nature.

The third possible synonym for «person», «essentia», is a different sort of problem. It signifies not an individual *per se* but by means of definition. Essence can signify the composition of matter and form as the principle of a species or of the nature of things themselves. It does not, however, connote individuality in the sense of signifying «this matter» and «this form»<sup>103</sup>. Moreover, the implication of matter/form composition means that it is a much more general term than either «hypostasis» or «subsistence». «Person» is most appropriate by means of its naturally specific denotation of individual and, most importantly, of rational nature. Of course, the Trinitarian usage of «person» is not its fundamental import, but the excellence and specificity of the term require that it be clarified the least of these other terms in order to signify in the best way. «Person» naturally signifies in a manner most suitable to Trinitarian discourse, provided, of course, that one understands the term according to Boethius' definition as explained by Thomas.

But does the term naturally or customarily, possess the dignity needed for Trinitarian discourse? Hypostasis and subsistence may lack the precision, but their specific and technical use in the sciences gives them a certain dignity. Person, on the other hand, as Boethius himself pointed out in his *De duabus naturis*, was used to signify the representation of other people by an actor. The wearing of a mask to represent a public or mythic figure was called by the word «person». Thus, its use in Greek comedies and tragedies with the implied artifice would seem to detract from the dignity of the word. Thomas deftly turns this potentially serious objection on its head noting that only the most excellent and famous men were represented. The manner of signifying, by means of actors putting on masks, is not appropriate for speaking of God. On the other hand,

«This name «person» is used to signify those having dignity. Hence, it is customary to call those having dignity in the church, «persons» [...] And to subsist in a rational nature is the greatest of dignity, so every individual of a rational natural is called «person». The dignity of divine nature, however, exceeds all dignity and merits most highly the term «person»»<sup>104</sup>.

One need only remove the distance between the mask and figure to see that «person» was a title of great dignity. The employment of «person» was due to the merit of the one signified. One could say then that it was a loosening of the constraints of meaning for this term to be employed in signifying all rational creatures. Hence, we are elevated in dignity by our inclusion in its significatum. Most importantly, however, the term is appropriate to God because of what it signifies, dignity.

<sup>102</sup> ST I, q. 29 a. 2c.

<sup>103</sup> ST I, q. 29 a. 2 ad 3. Cf also a. 1 ad 4 on the indeterminateness of essence.

<sup>104</sup> «[I]mpositum est hoc nomen *persona* ad significandum aliquos dignitatem habentes. Unde consequenter dici *personae* in ecclesiis, quae habent aliquam dignitatem [...] Et quia magnae dignitatis est in rationali natura subsistere, ideo omne individuum rationalis naturae dicitur persona, ut dictum est (a. 1). Sed dignitas divinae naturae excedit omnem dignitatem: et secundum hoc maxime competit Deo nomen *personae*» (ST I, q. 29 a. 3 ad 2).

In light of Thomas' organization, it is evident that he structures his discussion of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit upon this term rather than upon procession or relation *per se*<sup>105</sup>. He does not argue from procession to relation and then to person but rather clarifies the first two before settling on the third as the more useful and fundamental. Perhaps it is due to the lack of radical alteration that must be performed on the term to make it useful. The term «relation», for example, had to be turned on its head to fit into trinitarian grammar. After q. 28, the term «relation» as a basis for distinction in God by its subsistent character is all but left behind (to be brought up again only in q. 40). Procession likewise threatened to imply a priority and succession in the divine that would destroy notions of equality and eternity. The use of «person» is then justified by its suitability in signification and its necessity for disputation. Thomas does not make the easy argument that the term was already part of the theological tradition being used by many authoritative figures and councils. Thomas wanted to justify the use of «person» in the abstract without recourse to the habit of theologians. The habit itself had to be defended.

The modern assumption that Thomas' discussion was facilitated by the common currency of this term is mistaken. Thomas' work was greatly complicated by the elasticity of the term. He had to clarify his use of «person» against other definitions and improper connotations. One need only read the objections in qq. 29 and 30 to see the obstacles Thomas had to overcome and counter in order to clear the table for his explanation<sup>106</sup>. According to the scholastics, it is the theologian's task to clarify and even redirect linguistic usage. One rarely finds ready-made terms for inclusion in theological discourse. Words must be altered and reshaped to fit the demands of theological grammar; and their theological meaning must be clearly explained against the backdrop of inevitable changes in ordinary usage. This linguistic work is especially important in Trinitarian theology where words are stretched to their limit. Consequently, the modern psychological and existential connotations of «person» do not render it unusable but merely in need of clarification and correction<sup>107</sup>. Thomas

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<sup>105</sup> The category of «persona» dominates all but the first two questions of the text from qq. 27-43.

<sup>106</sup> Such objections include the term's implicit singularity, superficiality, artifice, inaccuracy as well as its redundancy with other theological terms.

<sup>107</sup> There are two identifiable strains in the modern debate surrounding the use of «person» in Trinitarian theology. First, there are those who reject the term either due to its modern connotations or because of a desire to reject the substance metaphysics of the older tradition along with its «non-biblical» terminology (Barth and Rahner); second, there are those who wish to retain the traditional terms yet adjust their meaning to bring them in line with modern thought (Kasper and Moltmann). Following the suggestion of K. Barth (*Church Dogmatics*, I/1, transl. G. Bromiley [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957], 408-415) that a substitution be found for the term, K. Rahner (concerned with tritheism) argued at length in several of his works for the use of «distinct manner of subsistence» instead of person. He believed that this formula captured the ante-Nicene understanding of the Trinity better and that it avoided the tritheistic implications of the modern sense of «person». He contends that «person» and «subject» actually refer more appropriately to the unity and oneness of God as an absolute subject in an absolute person. K. RAHNER, *The Trinity*, transl. J. Donceel (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), p. 75. J. Moltmann, on the other hand, concerned with the unavoidable modalism of Rahner's language, prefers to retain and reinterpret the traditional language. He (re)defines «person» as an individual center of consciousness in terms of relationality. Moltmann avoids what he sees as the tritheism of intrarelatedness by turning that relationality outward. The identity of each divine person is then defined

uses «person» as opposed to the terms «relation» and «procession» because the latter two terms require much more finesse and clarification in order to make them apply to God in some analogous manner. «Person», on the other hand, can be applied to God almost as easily as the transcendental terms. Not that God is in the same way the «source» of personhood as the source of goodness, but that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit can be called «Persons» in answer to the question, «three what?». The term applies first and foremost to the divine subsistences by reason of their most perfect being (*maxime per se ens*) and most perfect intellectual life. And regarding dignity, «person» is «most fittingly used of God» because divine nature exceeds every dignity<sup>108</sup>.

In the remainder of this section (through q. 43), Thomas builds upon the material in q. 29. What it means to be person and in what way God is three persons profoundly informs the next 14 questions. There are two identifiable sections. First Thomas discusses the nature of person (qq. 29-32) and then the divine persons themselves (qq. 33-38). QQ. 30-31 represent a preliminary approach to discussing the equality of persons and the fullness of divinity of each. Having defined the subsistences of divine nature as «persons» Thomas must immediately qualify what it means to posit a plurality of persons in God. It cannot imply the division or multiplication of the nature such as the term individual implies<sup>109</sup>. There are no parts of a whole for each is no less than all. The Father is no less than the «*totum Trinitas*». This idea of equality may very well be the most difficult aspect of trinitarian theology to explain. One can state it but not explain it except in terms of negations. One Person is not less than two or all three, yet the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Father or the Holy Spirit. Augustine had approached the problem of equality through a discussion of essential attributes<sup>110</sup>. The problem was how Christ could be the wisdom and power of God yet without three wisdoms and powers. Thus, the Father is wise by his own wisdom and powerful by his own power although the wisdom of the Son is identical to the wisdom of the Father. No differences or divisions are permissible with regards to the divine nature or the absolute perfections.

Thomas recognized the extreme difficulty of explaining the equality of the divine Persons and consequently placed it at the end of his discussion of distinctions in

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more in terms of a relation to creation than to one another. Moltmann affirms with Rahner that the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity by subsuming the history of the world, salvation history, into the history of God, or indeed by actually equating the two. J. MOLTSMANN, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, pp. 22-30; 57; 160-161. The activity of each divine Person in the world is part of that Person's identity. Hence, he agrees with Rahner that the Incarnation of the Second Person is entirely meaningful. It cannot be a matter of indifference which Person became incarnate, because that specific act is revelatory of that particular Person. We can know something not only of God in general, but also of the second Person, the Son, the Word by this event and the acts which follow from it. The Word of God is then eternally spoken into the void, that is, as a Word directed *ad extra*. Moltmann solves the problem of oneness by preferring a perichoretic union to unity. J. MOLTSMANN, *Ibid.*, p. 95. See also W. KASPER, *The God of Jesus Christ*, transl. M. J. O'Connell (New York: Crossroad, 1984).

<sup>108</sup> «Sed dignitas divinae naturae excedit omnem dignitatem: et secundum hoc maxime competit Deo nomen personae» (ST I, q. 29 a. 3 ad 2).

<sup>109</sup> ST I, q. 30 a. 1 ad 4.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. AUGUSTINE, *De Trinitate*, Bks. 5-6.

God. In a sense, one would argue that Thomas chose not to attempt an explanation, for he offers there only a series of grammatical rules about the implications of the doctrine for our speech. Also, Thomas separated the issue of equality from that of the appropriations. Hence, he treats the rules governing essential predication with respect to persons three questions before addressing equality directly. On the other hand, as noted above, Thomas does use the fact of equality in earlier articles. Hence, the full scope of trinitarian doctrine is in play at least implicitly from the beginning. The order of direct introduction is a matter of pedagogy not demonstration, much less derivation. Hence, it is quite appropriate that Thomas waits until q. 32, the middle of his discussion of divine persons and their distinctions, to address the questions of how we may know these Persons.

Thomas uses the term «person» from q. 30 onward as a short formula for discussing the Three who are One God. The discussion is not an attempt to penetrate into the meaning of divine Persons, but of the plurality of what we call Person in God. Hence, q. 32 on «our knowledge of the divine Persons» concerns our knowledge of these Persons not by any inductive grammatical-linguistic study of the term but from what defines these particular Persons. The revealed fact of their identity. Hence the investigation of «person» as being suitable for speaking of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is limited to the way in which it encapsulates what is revealed of these Three. We know from revelation that these three are distinct in one divine nature. Therefore, it is neither a negation of communicability nor an intention of individuality in the same way that «*aliquis homo*» signifies an instance of that nature. «Person» signifies in God the subsisting thing in such nature<sup>111</sup>.

The way in which Thomas uses these terms to facilitate discussion (and not analysis) is seen in his treatment of the group of terms known as «notions» or properties. Notions are the abstract terms by which one may signify the relations. There are five notions corresponding to the five relational aspects of God: paternity, filiation, spiration, innascibility and procession<sup>112</sup>. The Father is known properly by means of innascibility and paternity. The Son is known by his filiation, or being from another by way of generation, and by common spiration with the Father. The Holy Spirit is known as the procession from the other two. Abstract and concrete terms were readily available for signifying divine unity but not the divine distinctions. Notions or properties fill the role of abstract terms for the distinction while «Person» remains a concrete term for the distinction of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

As Thomas stated in q. 13, we name things as we understand them. We apprehend and name simple things by means of abstract terms. Hence, we use Father or «divine Person» to signify the subsistent divine nature and «paternity» to signify the «form» of the Father. Paternity answers the question «quo?»

«We confess the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit to be one God and three Persons. In answer to those asking by what manner are they one God, one may respond that they are one essence and one deity. To those asking by what manner are they three Persons, one must respond with some abstract name that distinguishes the Persons. For example, we can use the properties or notions signified abstractly such as paternity and filiation. Therefore,

<sup>111</sup> ST 1, q. 30 a. 4c.

<sup>112</sup> ST 1, q. 32 a. 3c.

the essence is signified in God as "what", Person as "who" and property as "how" (by what means)<sup>113</sup>.

And there are two reasons we must answer this question: First, to give an account to heretics, and secondly, to distinguish the two relations of the Father, one to the Son and one to the Holy Spirit. In the first case, the notions provide a way of discussing the means of distinction. The Father is not the Son by means of his paternity though the Father and Son are God by means of one divine nature. In the second case, we must find a reason for distinguishing the Spirit and Son, for if they have the same relation to the Father, then they would not be two Persons. The occasion for this second point is the importance of the *Filioque* which the Greeks rejected. The notions are a way by which the Son and Holy Spirit can be distinguished according to the Roman Church. Since the Council of Constantinople of 381, Latins have upheld the common spiration or procession of the Holy Spirit from both the Father and the Son. According to Thomas without such teaching, there is no way to distinguish these two. The relations of the Father to the Son and the Father to the Holy Spirit must be distinguishable in some way for the Son and Holy Spirit to be distinct. The notions of paternity and common spiration are the ways by which we can mark these distinctions. On the other hand, this formulation of the notions is not an article of faith<sup>114</sup>. Different opinions are permitted. What cannot be denied without heresy is the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son. The exact manner with which we express this procession and distinguish it from the generation of the Son is another matter.

We can see in this question in particular Thomas' understanding of theological language. There are teachings of the faith and there are ways of discussing that teaching. The latter allows for flexibility in its aim for coherence and the need to complete the vocabulary for a given doctrine. Given a revealed teaching, we must find further terms to signify according to the manner in which we apprehend and understand it both concretely and abstractly. But we should not make the mistake of positing extra-mental realities corresponding to every way in which we know something. One of these notions, innascibility, is not a relation at all but only the denial of being from another. Also, one of these notions, common spiration, is not a property per se since two Persons are signified by it. The last two notions mentioned are also not personal and, therefore, do not constitute subsistent relations.

#### 4. *The Divine Persons* per se.

The next section of Thomas' treatise (qq. 33-38) can be seen as the basis of Tinitarian doctrine and a bridge between Thomas' discussion of theological terms

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<sup>113</sup> «Cum enim confiteamur Patrem et Filium et Spiritum Sanctum esse unum Deum et tres Personas, quaerentibus quo sunt unus Deus, et quo sunt tres personae, sicut respondetur quod sunt essentia vel deitate unum, ita oportuit esse aliqua nomina abstracta, quibus responderi possit personas distingui. Et huiusmodi sunt proprietates vel notiones in abstracto significatae, ut paternitas et filiatio. Et ideo essentia significatur in divinis ut quid, persona vero ut quis, proprietas autem ut quo» (ST I, q. 32 a. 2c).

<sup>114</sup> «Sed contra, articuli fidei non sunt de notionibus. Ergo circa notiones licet sic vel aliter opinari» (ST I, q. 32 a. 4 sc).

and their coordination into a coherent grammar. These questions are the basis for trinitarian discussions in so far as the revelation of the Trinity consists in the revelation of the proper names. Augustine, for instance, discussed each Person in terms of their proper identity in the first four books of his *De Trinitate*. For him, the divine missions, and the proper identity of the divine Persons were intimately related. In fact, the foundation for positing distinction is the knowledge of the divine missions, or the «sending» of the Son and Spirit. In his *Summa*, Thomas separated the issue of missions from that of the proper identity of the Persons. His reasoning will become evident later. What is evident at this point in the text is that Thomas wishes to contextualize the exposition of the proper names with more general discussions of unity and distinctions.

But one might ask, what is gained by not beginning with the quite biblical and more common method of discussing the distinct Persons according to their names? The proper names do not reveal the divine identities in a meaningful way. They reveal distinctions about which we can reason but not penetrate. This point may seem a bit counter-intuitive seeing that the identity of the Second Person of the Trinity as the «Son» is far more obvious than the fact that we may describe that same Person as one processing from the First Person; or that this Second Person processes in an intellective manner such that it is more accurately called a «generation»; or that this Person is actually the subsistent relation of «filiation» or sonship. Yet we cannot describe the Son *in se* as a Son, for he is not brought into being nor caused, but is eternal. This «Son» is not subordinated in any way to the other Two. Nor is this one only a part of the One God, but is totally God such that this Son alone is not less than all Three together. It would be quite convenient at this point to turn to Thomas' discussion of «Son» as the proper name of the Second Person of the Trinity. Unfortunately, it is nowhere to be found. This name has virtually no epistemological value except as it is indicative of the mutual distinctions within the Trinity. Who or what this Son is properly and distinctively, we cannot say except with reference to intra-divine distinctions, or relations and processions.

Thomas does, on the other hand, consider the proper names of Father and Holy Spirit. Consider for a moment the way in which he treats the former:

«The proper name of a person signifies that through which that person is distinguished from all other persons [...] That through which the Person of the Father is distinguished from the others is paternity. Hence, the proper name of the Person of the Father is this name, «Father», that signifies paternity»<sup>115</sup>.

Thomas can only repeat what he has already said in q. 28 on the mutual distinctions of relations. That is, to answer the question as to the propriety of the name «Father», Thomas turns to the relation the subsistence of which is constitutive of the First Person. Among creatures, such relations may be informative. To posit one as the mother and the other as the child is to imply, among other things, differences in age, the causal role of the first and the subordination of the second to the first. But what does such relation mean if subordination, causality and material

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<sup>115</sup> «[N]omen proprium cuiuslibet personae significat id per quod illa persona distinguitur ab omnibus aliis [...] Id autem per quod distinguitur persona Patris ab omnibus aliis, est paternitas. Unde proprium nomen personae Patris est hoc nomen Pater, quod significat paternitatem» (ST I, q. 33 a. 2c).



dependency as well as temporality are eliminated? Merely, that one is from the other without beginning or difference in nature<sup>116</sup>. Augustine discovered this same limit of speech about the Persons. The quality of being «from» another without being «from» in any sense we can imagine empties such statements of any semantic value<sup>117</sup>. Consider the following argument which in fact begins with the revealed fact of the Holy Spirit as the Third Person of the Trinity (I John 5:7).

«This name «Holy Spirit» is not said relatively. Nevertheless, it stands for as far as it is accommodated to signify a person distinct from others only by a relation. One can indeed understand in this name some relation if «Spirit» is understood according to «spirated»»<sup>118</sup>.

The argument is entirely circular. The Holy Spirit is called the «Holy Spirit» because that one is the Holy Spirit (or that one is the Third Person of the Trinity). Thomas cannot say anything about the relatedness or the proper identity, only that it is the Spirit Himself. We are back to the mutual distinctions. In other words, it is easier to describe how the three are mutually distinct than to describe who or what each one is.

On the other hand, if we remember the first twenty-six questions of the *Summa*, we can say a great deal about who each divine Person is. Only, what we say about one applies equally to all Three. We do know «who» the Father is. He is fully God: eternal, simple, perfect, good, infinite, etc. What more is there to be said? Does the Father who is God and the Son who is God have different attitudes or do they differ in will or intellect or action? No, they are all one in the same divine nature; yet the Father is not the Son, because the Father is properly named by reason of paternity while the Son is properly named by reason of filiation. So when we seek further clarification of the distinction between the two, can it be anything more than doubt concerning the truthfulness or completeness of what is said above?

There is one more set of names that are proper, though not with a capital «P». They are proper simply by reason of being specific to one Person. Names such as «Unbegotten [...] «Word», «Image», «Gift», and «Love» are in this group. «Unbegotten» is a name of negation, signifying merely the property of «not being from another»<sup>119</sup>. «Image» denotes the property of being a similitude. The Son is called «Image» because He is the perfect likeness of the Father<sup>120</sup>. And yet are not all Persons perfectly like one another in being of the same divine nature—one in will, intellect, power, etc.? The term «Image» is used of the Son by reason of the generative procession. The Son proceeds as a generated Word who is the image of the one from whom he proceeds. We do not thereby know anything more about the Son *per se*—only that the Son is the image of the Father, being the perfect similitude. To know, for instance, that Bill and Mark are twins does not involve any knowledge of Bill or Mark *per se*, only that they are very much like each other in many ways.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. ST I, qq. 27-28.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. AUGUSTINE, *De Trinitate*, Bks. 2, 7-11.

<sup>118</sup> «[L]icet hoc quod dico *Spiritus Sanctus*, relative non dicatur, tamen pro relativo ponitur, inquantum est accommodatum ad significandum personam sola relatione ab aliis distinctam. Potest tamen intelligi etiam in nomine aliqua relatio, si *Spiritus* intelligatur quasi *spiratus*» (ST I, q. 36 a. 1 ad 2).

<sup>119</sup> ST I, q. 33 a. 4c.

<sup>120</sup> ST I, q. 35 a. 2c.

Knowing their relation does not impart a knowledge of either one. Knowing something about one, however, does suggest a knowledge of the other by reason of their relation of similarity. The term «image» does not add to our understanding of Father or Son individually, but only of their unity and perfect similarity. This epistemological rule is not changed by our assertion that each divine Person is a subsistent relation. Each divine Person's identity remains defined in terms of another because their personal names are relational and said *ad aliud*, not *in se*.

Likewise the names «gift» and «love» indicate something relational. The Holy Spirit is «Love» because this one proceeds in the manner of love. Not that the Son and the Father love only through the Holy Spirit, but that the Holy Spirit is especially called «Love». Yet such love can be essential or personal. Only with reference to the one proceeding in the manner of love is the term personal and proper. Understood notionally, this love that is the Holy Spirit is the love by which the Father and the Son love one another. Yet because love and loving are also said essentially, this term as a proper name for the Third Person has only negligible semantic import. The name «Gift» falls into the same category in so far as it is a synonym for love. Properly speaking a gift is given without «intention of retribution», and love is the very basis for gratuitous giving<sup>121</sup>. Hence, love is the first gift.

With the term «Word», on the other hand, we have something verging on being meaningful in itself. This name does appear to describe the Son in some way. «Word» properly and personally speaking is the one expressive of creatures and the one who became incarnate<sup>122</sup>. «Word» renames what proceeds in the manner of intellection and pertains more to the procession than to the subsistence of the Second Person. The question is whether the Son is personally defined as «Word» apart from these acts and therefore necessarily acts as Word in creation and salvation history; or whether the Son only acts as Word in these acts. Not a few theologians have assumed that the Son's role in salvation history reveals a great deal about this one called «Word». They suppose that while another divine Person could have become incarnate, only the Word could become incarnate in this way. Hence, the manner of the Word becoming flesh helps us to understand who this Person is in contradistinction to the other two<sup>123</sup>.

An integral corollary of Trinitarian doctrine, however, is the assertion that divine works *ad extra* are indivisible. The doctrine of the unity of divine works *ad extra* denies that such acts are performed by one divine Persons alone without the other two and, therefore, also denies that such acts offer any insight into the proper identity of any one of the divine Persons. This doctrine does not deny that one divine Person has a particular role in divine works but that one Persons acts alone or necessarily in a certain way. God's freedom to act and essential unity of being cannot be impinged

<sup>121</sup> «[S]ciendum est quod donum proprie est *datio irreddibilis*, secundum Philosophum, idest quod non datur intentione retributionis: et sic importat gratuitam donationem» (ST I, q. 38 a. 2c).

<sup>122</sup> ST I, q. 34 a. 3 ad 3.

<sup>123</sup> Cf. PHILLIP CARY, «On Behalf of Classical Trinitarianism: A Critique of Rahner on the Trinity»: *The Thomist* LVI (1992), pp. 365-406. Cary demonstrates Rahner's misunderstanding of the various aspects of classical Trinitarian doctrine, especially Augustine's rule (the indivisibility of divine works *ad extra*).

in any way even in our efforts to grasp the truth of divine revelation. The Son and Holy Spirit are sent, and such sendings do seem to correspond to their proper names, Word and Gift/Love. Yet an act such as creation, for example, cannot be portrayed as a necessary consequence of the Word processing. The processions are causal with respect to creation only by means of the common divine essence<sup>124</sup>. We have then plumbed the applicability of terms, not the identity of the divine Persons.

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<sup>124</sup> Cf. *ST* I, q. 45 a. 6.