

# THE TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY OF ST THOMAS AQUINAS

GILLES EMERY, OP



OXFORD

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SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS

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GILLES EMERY OP

Translated by

FRANCESCA ARAN MURPHY

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## Abbreviations

ACO	<i>Acta Conciliorum Œcumenicorum</i> , Berlin and Leipzig.
AFP	<i>Archivum fratrum praedicatorum</i> , Rome.
AHDLMA	<i>Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge</i> , Paris.
BA	Bibliothèque augustinienne (Œuvres de saint Augustin), Paris.
BT	<i>Bulletin thomiste</i> , Kain / Etiolles.
CCCM	Corpus christianorum - continuatio mediaevalis, Turnhout.
CCSL	Corpus christianorum - series latina, Turnhout.
CSEL	Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum, Vienna.
EThL	<i>Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses</i> , Louvain.
FZPT	<i>Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie</i> , Fribourg.
MM	<i>Miscellanea mediaevalia</i> , Berlin.
NRT	<i>Nouvelle Revue théologique</i> , Louvain.
PG	Patrologia graeca (ed. J.-P. Migne), Paris.
PL	Patrologia latina (ed. J.-P. Migne), Paris.
RSPT	<i>Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques</i> , Paris.
RT	<i>Revue thomiste</i> , Toulouse.
RTAM	<i>Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale</i> , Louvain.
SC	Sources chrétiennes, Paris.
SE	<i>Sciences ecclésiastiques / Science et Esprit</i> , Montreal.
CEG	Thomas Aquinas, <i>Contra errores Graecorum</i> .
CT	Thomas Aquinas, <i>Compendium of Theology</i> .
SCG	Thomas Aquinas, <i>Summa contra Gentiles</i> .
ST	Thomas Aquinas, <i>Summa Theologiae</i> .
Sent.	Thomas Aquinas / Albert the Great / Bonaventure: <i>Scriptum super libros Sententiarum</i> (commentary on the <i>Sentences</i> ).
a.	article
arg.	argument (objection)
ch.	chapter

d.	distinction
div. text	divisio textus
exp. text.	expositio textus
lect.	lectio
lib.	liber
prol.	prologue
q.	question
qla	quaestiuncula

# Introduction

There is no subject where a mistake is more dangerous, or the search more laborious, or discovery more advantageous than the unity of the Trinity: of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Augustine's remark, which Peter Lombard put on the first page of his study of the Trinity in the *Sentences*,<sup>1</sup> gives us the flavour of Trinitarian reflection in the golden age of scholasticism. As St Thomas' Master, Albert the Great saw the matter, precisely because it belongs to this field, to show the goal of human existence—making mistakes here will divest faith and theology of their purpose: 'The whole of human knowledge comes to fruition in knowledge of the Trinity. For every science and every thing to which the mind applies itself is looking for that which gives us happiness. Speaking about other things is only worthwhile when it derives from and guides us to this search.'<sup>2</sup> St Thomas would follow that up by saying that, 'The whole of our life bears fruit (*fructus*) and comes to achievement (*finis*) in the knowledge of the Trinity.'<sup>3</sup>

This 'knowledge of the Trinity' is supplied by Christian faith, and so paves the way for the vision of the Trinity. It is the way to happiness: 'The Lord taught that the knowledge that makes us happy consists in knowing two things: the divinity of the Trinity and the humanity of Christ.'<sup>4</sup> Faith in the mystery of Christ enshrines and implies faith in the Trinity.<sup>5</sup> Within the pilgrimage of faith made in the hope of happiness, the theologian's vocation consists in giving an account of the mystery which he has received, after the pattern of 1 Peter 3.15, a verse which St Thomas loved to quote in order to describe the task to which he dedicated his life within the Order of St Dominic: 'Always be prepared to satisfy everyone that asketh a reason for the hope and faith which are in you.'<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Augustine, *De Trinitate* I.III.5; Peter Lombard, *I Sent.* dist. 2, ch. 1 (vol. I/2, ed. PP. Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, Grottaferrata, 1971, p. 62).

<sup>2</sup> Albert, *I Sent.* d. 2, a. 6–7.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas, *I Sent.* d. 2, exp. text.

<sup>4</sup> *CT* I, ch. 2. See *De rationibus fidei*, ch. 1; *De articulis fidei* I.

<sup>5</sup> *ST* II–II, q. 2, a. 8.

<sup>6</sup> St Thomas usually cites a version of this verse which refers to faith (hope and faith); see *De rationibus fidei*, ch. 1; *ST* II–II, q. 2, a. 10, sed contra; q. 10, a. 7, ad 3; etc. On the history of this theological emblem, see J. De Ghellinck, *Le Mouvement théologique du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Brussels and Paris, 1948, pp. 279–284.

Reflecting on the Trinitarian faith is thus the theologian's primary task and this is where the heart of St Thomas' teaching rests.<sup>7</sup>

A fresco in the Dominican monastery of St Anne in Nocera Inferiore in Campania bears witness to the central role which Trinitarian faith played in Thomas' life. St Thomas is pictured in this icon as one who has received the gift which the Trinity makes of itself to the saints. Images like this are not common within the iconography of the Dominican saint, which usually displays different motifs, like his triumph, his meditation on the Blessed Sacrament, his prayer before the crucifix, his composing the office of the Blessed Sacrament, and so on, along with various insignia, like the chair, the dove, and the lily. In a collection of frescos dating from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, in the monastery of St Anne, Thomas is set between St Paul and St Lucy, and pictured with a pen and a book, two recurrent figures in his iconography.<sup>8</sup> The book pictured here is not the *Summa Theologiae*, but the 'Writing on the *Sentences*', and we can see its first lines, taken from Ecclesiasticus, I, *Wisdom have poured out rivers* (Eccli. 24.40, in the Vulgate). St Thomas' prologue to the 'Writing' explains that Wisdom refers to the person of the Son: Wisdom who reveals the Trinity in its intimate mystery and in its works, Wisdom who creates, Wisdom who saves the world through his incarnation, and leads humankind to the Father's glory.<sup>9</sup> When the believer looks at the Son–Wisdom, he is engaged in contemplation of the creative and saving Trinity. And the artist at Nocera has depicted the Trinity as dwelling in the heart of the Dominican master. This icon represents a Trinity as 'two heads with the dove between them', an iconographic type which is fairly infrequent and of which one finds almost no trace after the fifteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Here it suggests the Pauline and Johannine idea of the indwelling of the divine persons: 'We will make our abode in him' (Jn 14.23).<sup>11</sup> It was also

<sup>7</sup> See the magisterial discussion by J.-P. Torrell, *Thomas Aquinas: Spiritual Master*, trans. Robert Royal, Washington DC, 2003, pp. 23–224.

<sup>8</sup> On these frescos, see G. Ruggiero, 'Il monastero di Sant' Anna di Nocera. Dalla fondazione al concilio di Trento', *Memorie Domenicane* n.s. 20 (1989), 5–166, esp. pp. 114–131 (including 24 plates alongside the text). This essay was also published in book form in the same year and with the same title, by the Centro Riviste della Provincia Romana in Pistoia.

<sup>9</sup> This text is translated in our book, *La Trinité créatrice*, Paris, 1995, pp. 531–535.

<sup>10</sup> See F. Boespflug, *Dieu dans l'art, Sollicitudini nostrae de Benoît XV (1745) et l'affaire Crescence de Kaufbeuren*, Paris, 1984, p. 285. In the wake of theologians like Bellarmine, who jumped into linking this figure with the 'Three-headed Trinity' and so criticized this way of representing the Trinity, Benedict XV prohibited it (*ibid.*, p. 41). This kind of iconography does not bear the hallmarks of the 'monstrosity' which Bellarmine ascribed to it: it hints at the communion of Father and Son who, as distinct persons, are united in their common nature and in the Holy Spirit, their mutual bond.

<sup>11</sup> Perhaps because they are dubious about this kind of iconography of the Trinity, some people have wanted to see the Nocera Fresco as picturing the humanity and the divinity of

in his 'Writing on the *Sentences*' that St Thomas created his most expansive treatise on the missions of the divine persons; this was the work which medieval commentators pored over most minutely. The artist's message is transparent: what St Thomas taught in his theology, he had received and channelled into his own life experience through living faith and charity, remaining constantly open to the gift of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: 'The whole of our life bears fruit (*fructus*) and comes to achievement (*finis*) in the knowledge of the Trinity.'

St Thomas was happy to speak of the topic of his enquiry as 'the mystery of the Trinity' (*mysterium Trinitatis*). Those who follow his steps often encounter this turn of phrase, used to signify the three distinct persons in the unity of their identical divinity.<sup>12</sup> We can take it as read that for Thomas, 'mystery' means God in his revelation, seen from the outlines of creation and salvation, moving through its different scenes down to the summative restoration of the creation at the end of time, and with the advent of the Son in the flesh and the gift of the Holy Spirit at its centre. For St Thomas, 'Mystery is the secret of Wisdom, the Word of God insofar as He manifests God, and reveals the cosmic dimensions of salvation.'<sup>13</sup> 'The mystery of the Trinity' is a two-sided expression: it refers to God himself, as he reveals himself in the economy of the Son and Holy Spirit,<sup>14</sup> making a free gift of himself that surpasses anything at which human reason could arrive by its own devices.<sup>15</sup> What was veiled under the Old Covenant is exhibited to the eyes of faith under the New: the mystery of Christ.<sup>16</sup>

When he reflects on the lines of Augustine cited at the beginning, St Thomas comments that 'disordered' explanations, or ones which 'make light of the matter', lead straight to the recreation of the ancient errors, especially Arianism and Sabellianism. Since it transcends our reason, reflection on the Trinitarian mystery can only be achieved along the 'modest and prudent' path of the minute analysis of our own thinking and language. A singular kind of care has to be taken in the patient weighing and evaluation of the import of all the sources: Scripture first of all, then the tradition of the Fathers, and also metaphysics, anthropology, logic, and the other human disciplines.

Christ as two heads. We have taken the Trinitarian interpretation from the well-documented study of Santo Pagnotta, *La figura di San Tommaso d'Aquino nell'arte: Tentativo di analisi storico-teologica dell'iconografia tommasiana*, Fribourg, 1995, pp. 55–57.

<sup>12</sup> See for instance *ST I*, q. 46, a. 2.

<sup>13</sup> M.-J. Le Guillou, *Christ and Church: A Theology of the Mystery*, preface by M. D. Chenu, trans. Charles E. Schaldenbrand, New York, 1966 p. 214.

<sup>14</sup> See *ST II–II*, q. 174, a. 6.

<sup>15</sup> *ST II–II*, q. 180, a. 4, arg. 3.

<sup>16</sup> *III Sent.* d. 25, q. 2, a. 2, q1a 4, ad 3.

‘Modesty’ and ‘prudence’ keep us going on an investigative journey whose complexity discourages even the most ardent applicants. Thomistic studies of the Trinitarian mystery often contain the steepest ascents. Most of these are simply specialist research. Bear it in mind that St Thomas’ Trinitarian theology is demanding. This has put some readers in such a hurry to get through it that they want to shrug it off as a logical or metaphysical disquisition detached from revelation and the history of salvation or as an abstract exercise which only the most highfalutin intellects should attempt to scale. But the *Summa Theologiae* was not written for professors: it was addressed to students, in order to help them take the first steps in understanding revelation.

To help people to understand the wealth of Thomas Aquinas’ Trinitarian doctrine, without making a secret of the complexity of some questions, this book hopes to offer an introduction to the reading of the Trinitarian treatise in the *Summa*. It is written for students and for those who want to take an overview of the main questions and the issues they raise, and to get an idea of the lie of the land before they commence their study of the articles of the treatise.

So this book does not comment on the Trinitarian treatise as a whole, and nor does it analyse every single question in this part of the *Summa*. Even though Trinitarian research has made much progress since the 1960s, Father Hyacinthe Dondaine’s wonderful set of comments have yet to be replaced.<sup>17</sup> Even though we will not refer to Father Dondaine’s notes, the reader could learn a great deal from them.

But the *Summa*’s treatise lends itself to being read as an organic whole and this book seeks to show this way into it. Finding our way to this opening must begin by getting a feel for the foundations of Trinitarian thought, and thus of the driving aim or intention behind the theologian’s quest for an understanding of the mystery of the Trinity. Reading the treatise also calls for a sense of the way that St Thomas structured his meditation. Our first three chapters attempt to set out these preliminary elements. They can stand as a general introduction to the *Summa*’s Trinitarian treatise.

The twelve following chapters travel the roads which Trinitarian theology takes. The first and foremost of these are the three basic routes of the doctrine of the processions, that of relations, and that of the persons (Chapters 4, 5, and 6). No one could call these easy questions. They take up all the resources and the capacity for complexity which theology has to offer. But it is through

<sup>17</sup> H.-F. Dondaine, ‘Notes explicatives’ and ‘Renseignements techniques’, in Thomas Aquinas, *Somme théologique, La Trinité*, vol. 1: 1a, *Questions 27–32*, Paris, Tournai and Rome, 1943, 1950; vol. 2: 1a, *Questions 33–43*, Paris, Tournai and Rome, 1946, 1950. The two volumes were reissued by Cerf in 1997.

these questions that the issue of whether one can lay out an authentically Trinitarian monotheism is decided (Chapter 7). These questions pave the way for the enquiry into Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as grasped in each of their unique, distinguishing properties (Chapters 8–11) and within the reciprocal interiority of their communion (Chapter 12). We attempt to disclose the properties of the persons within the eternal Trinity, but also to show how these properties shed light on the persons' action in the economy of creation and of grace. The last three chapters (13–15) will indicate, finally, St Thomas' teaching on the creative and salvific action of the Trinity, since this is the overall theme and end of the revelation of the Trinity: to give us a fair idea of the creation and salvation which the divine persons bring about.

Our reading of St Thomas' Trinitarian doctrine often remarks upon the deepening scope or progress which one can find amongst his synthetic works, showing also how his biblical commentaries illuminate the doctrine; and it does not neglect to note the sources which enable one better to see where it is innovative, and where traditional. This historical moment is not at the forefront of this work, but it is not without importance. Without leading the reader into the thickets of historical research, we have sought to indicate the key issues, pointing out the works which take these matters further. The historical development of St Thomas' own Trinitarian thought and where it fits into the thirteenth-century Trinitarian debates must not be neglected, because we cannot fully understand Thomas' speculative thought without knowing something of them. The fact that we think it necessary to attend to the history of doctrines does not mean that St Thomas can be tucked away into the past, but it does enable us to disengage the circumstances and the motivations which helped to concentrate his attention during his speculative journey. It is our profound conviction that a truly speculative understanding of Thomas' thought can benefit from grasping the historical state of play at the time of his writing. We cannot show St Thomas' relevance for today without paying the price of historical research.

To pin down what the *Summa* means, or to illustrate particular aspects of its Trinitarian treatise, we refer to other works by St Thomas, but we have no intention of mentioning every text that is related to the questions with which we deal. The bibliographical references are likewise restricted. Referring to a greater diversity of works would have led us into refinements and critical discussions that are way beyond the purview of this book. Although we do not make detailed references to them we have tried to take on board up-to-date research and the contemporary debates over the interpretation of St Thomas' thought. The notes will indicate some reference works for further study. The reader can also consult the bibliography at the back of this book.

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# 1

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## The Revelation of the Trinity

Trinitarian faith rests on receiving God's revelation within salvation history. This means that we have to consider what the revelatory action of the Trinity is, before we can begin a theological reflection on the Trinitarian mystery. In making this first step with St Thomas, we will have already entered upon an important theological reflection about our knowledge of the Trinity.

### 1. REVELATION, CREATION, AND SALVATION

St Thomas explains in the first article of the *Summa Theologiae* that the philosophical sciences, which provide knowledge of God through human reason, are not sufficient for human salvation. Salvation requires a sacred doctrine (*sacra doctrina*), in which God is known through revelation. The necessity (*necessarium*) of this doctrine is founded on the end of human life:

man is directed to God, as to an end that surpasses the grasp of his reason: *The eye hath not seen, O God, besides Thee, what things Thou hast prepared for them that love* (Isa. 56.4). But the end must first be known by men who are to direct their thoughts and actions to the end. Hence it was necessary for the salvation of man that certain truths which exceed human reason should be made known to him by divine revelation.<sup>1</sup>

The 'necessity' which is in question here is not conceived as an absolute necessity which imposes itself on God himself, as if God had to reveal himself—God is free and his self-revelation is gratuitous—but as a necessity relative to the end which is sought.<sup>2</sup> Since God freely wishes that humanity be saved, God also wills the means required to that end: the revelation which makes known to man his transcendent end, from beyond our natural

<sup>1</sup> *ST*I, q. 1, a. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *ST*III, q. 46, a. 1; on the distinction between absolute and relative necessity (*necessitas ex suppositione finis*), see J.-P. Torrell, *Le Christ en ses mystères: La vie et l'oeuvre de Jésus selon St Thomas d'Aquin*, vol. 2, Paris, 1999, pp. 310–322.

resources. St Thomas puts this same reason first when he explains the ‘necessity’ of the revelation of the Trinity:

There are two reasons why the knowledge of the divine persons was necessary for us. It was necessary for the right idea of creation. The fact of saying that God made all things by His Word excludes the error of those who say that God produced things by necessity. When we say that in Him there is a procession of love, we show that God produced things not because He needed them, but on account of the love of His own goodness. . . . In another way, and chiefly, the knowledge of the divine persons was necessary so that we may think rightly concerning the salvation of the human race, accomplished by the Incarnate Son, and by the gift of the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

Trinitarian faith is required for a firm grasp on God’s creative activity, and, by extension, on the whole of God’s activity in the world (in other words, the exercise of divine providence). Knowledge of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, that is, of the Word and of Love, give the best perspective on the gratuity and freedom of creation: so we cannot understand creation well without receiving knowledge of the Trinitarian mystery. Philosophical reflection on creation can appreciate that God’s creative activity is free, since it can work out that God does not act without wisdom or volition; but it is Trinitarian faith which gives us God’s deep personhood. Moreover, the Trinitarian character of creation lays the foundation of that Trinitarian reality which is salvation. The Trinitarian mode of divine action is not restricted to salvation: one and the same God creates and saves us through his Trinitarian action.

St Thomas effectively makes the soteriological dimension of Trinitarian doctrine its primary dimension (*principalis*). This soteriological dimension concerns the action of the persons, and, more precisely, our *knowledge* of the divine persons, given by revelation. That faith in Christ which brings about salvation is inseparable from faith in the Trinity:

It is not possible to believe explicitly in the mystery of Christ, without faith in the Trinity, since the mystery of Christ includes that the Son of God took flesh; that he renewed the world through the grace of the Holy Spirit; and again, that he was conceived by the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup>

To grasp the salvation which is accomplished through the mysteries of the incarnate Son, one also has to know by faith the mystery of the Trinity. This soteriological dimension does not imply either that Trinitarian doctrine should be reduced to its ‘practical’ aspects, or that St Thomas limited his investigations to what today is called the ‘economic Trinity’. In effect, to know who the ‘Word’, or the ‘Son’, is, and to know who ‘Love’, or the ‘Holy Spirit’, is, it is necessary to consider the persons in their relations and subsistence at the

<sup>3</sup> *ST I*, q. 32, a. 1, ad 3.

<sup>4</sup> *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 8.

heart of the eternal Trinity. It is on this basis that Christian theology is able to illuminate the economy of salvation: understanding creation and salvation requires knowledge of the divine persons, and it is this knowledge which revelation offers.<sup>5</sup> And it is this knowledge that Trinitarian theology endeavours to disclose.

## 2. THE REVELATION OF THE TRINITY THROUGH ITS WORKS

We must distinguish the pathway by which we discover the Trinity (the Trinity's self-revelation by acting in the world) from the way in which theological understanding lays out the revealed mystery (the processions and the eternal properties of the persons), illuminating their action in the world. On the path giving us access to the Trinitarian mystery, the manifestation of the Trinity through the action of the Son and the Holy Spirit takes precedence. According to the Apostolic witness, the Trinity reveals itself in the words and actions of Jesus and also in the gift of the Spirit. More precisely, the recognition of a Trinity of persons in God unfolds from that of the divinity of the Son and Holy Spirit, and of their distinction.<sup>6</sup> St Thomas follows this path in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*: wanting to explain the biblical passages in relation to their interpretation by the ancient Christian heretics, he examines here the biblical testimonies to the divinity of the Son and the Holy Spirit.<sup>7</sup> Thomas' New Testament commentaries (on Matthew, John, and the Pauline Epistles) pay attention to the same question.

For St Thomas, the divinity of Christ is manifested in many ways. First one finds the revelation which is Christ's very person. Christ manifested his own divinity in two ways: through his *teaching* and by his *actions*.<sup>8</sup> As Thomas explains it, these are bound together. The Father's presence in Christ accounts for the unique revelatory value of Christ's words and deeds.<sup>9</sup> Such is what one

<sup>5</sup> Creation and salvation nonetheless imply this central difference: salvation itself (and not only the theologians' understanding of it!) requires that men and women know the Trinity; cf. *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 8. *CTI*, ch. 1: love, through which we turn toward our ultimate end, requires hope in this end, 'and this cannot exist if one does not have knowledge of the truth [that is to say, faith].'

<sup>6</sup> See B. Rey, *A la découverte de Dieu: Les origines de la foi trinitaire*, Paris, 1982; A. W. Wainwright, *The Trinity in the New Testament*, London, 1962.

<sup>7</sup> *SCG* IV, chs. 2–9; chs. 15–18. See our study, 'Le traité de St Thomas sur la Trinité dans la *Somme contre les Gentils*', *Revue Thomiste* 96 (1996), 11–21; ET 'The Treatise of St. Thomas on the Trinity in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*', in *Trinity in Aquinas*, Michigan, 2003, pp. 33–70.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *In Ioan.* 14.10 (no. 1893). <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

may call the sacramental structure of revelation, composed of words and of acts. St Thomas next finds the expression of the divinity of Christ in the Apostles' teaching (the titles which they attributed to Christ, the expressions concerning the unity of Christ with his Father, and so forth), and then in the activity of the Church (especially in the worship rendered to Christ). The passages are so numerous that we will limit ourselves to a few examples.

Thomas begins by reflecting on the words of Christ, because his 'words . . . show the power of the divinity in Christ'.<sup>10</sup> For example, when, in the Gospel of John, Jesus explains to Philip: *Who sees me, sees the Father . . . I am in the Father and the Father is in me* (14.9–10), St Thomas regards this as the expression of the consubstantial divinity of the Father and the Son; this interpretation is based on many patristic authors.<sup>11</sup> When Christ declares: *The Father and I are one* (Jn 10.30), Thomas explains that this unity is not limited to the union which their mutual affection creates, nor to a vague similarity in power, but, rather, invites us to acknowledge the unity of essence of the Father and the Son.<sup>12</sup> The same divinity of Christ appears in the sayings of Jesus which express his intimacy of knowledge and love with the Father, an intimacy and unity in which St Thomas finds the sign of the eternal procession of the Son within the one God.<sup>13</sup> One could multiply similar examples; they are very numerous because St Thomas pays minute attention to these expressions whenever he meets them in his reading of the Gospels.

St Thomas observes that Christ gives himself the most significant divine name: *I am* (Jn 8.24, 28, 58; 13.19). In applying this name to himself, Christ 'recalls that which was said to Moses in Exodus 3.14: *I am who am*, for being itself [*ipsium esse*] is the property of God';<sup>14</sup> this name expresses Jesus' eternity and divinity: 'that *I am*, that is, that I have in me the nature of God, and that it is I who spoke to Moses, saying [Exodus 3.14]: *I am who I am*'.<sup>15</sup> Christ does not 'become,' as do worldly realities (Jn 1.3); in giving the divine name to himself, he shows 'that he was not made as a creature is, but was eternally

<sup>10</sup> *In Ioan.* 14.12 (no. 1898). Thomas' exegesis, which, like the Fathers and the medieval writers takes the Gospels literally, attributes to Christ himself sayings which modern exegetes interpret as an expression of the Easter faith of the evangelists and of their community.

<sup>11</sup> *In Ioan.* 14.9–10 (nos. 1885–1891).

<sup>12</sup> *In Ioan.* 10.30 (nos. 1450–1451).

<sup>13</sup> *In Ioan.* 17.24 (no. 2262).

<sup>14</sup> *In Ioan.* 8.24 (no. 1179).

<sup>15</sup> *In Ioan.* 8.28 (no. 1192); cf. 8.58 (no. 1290). Thomas here takes up a very ancient tradition which, at the least since Justin Martyr, recognized the person of the Son in the angel which spoke to Moses from the burning bush; cf. Justin, *Apology* I.63, (ed. Ch. Munier, Fribourg, 1995, pp. 116–119). The words 'I am that I am', as pronounced by the Son, manifest that the Son is God, that he possesses the fullness of being and eternity belonging to God alone (Basil of Caesaria, *Against Eunomius* II.18; SC 305, pp. 70–75).

begotten from the essence of the Father.<sup>16</sup> Trinitarian faith is born out of the recognition of the divine unity of Jesus and his Father, with which the Holy Spirit is immediately associated.

Alongside the sayings of Jesus, St Thomas pays a great deal of attention to the revelatory value of those of Jesus' actions which disclose his divine unity with the Father. Commenting on St John, Thomas particularly considers judgement, the giving of life, and forgiveness: these properly divine works can only be exercised by God, and Christ effectively carries them out. Thomas notes the relation which the action observes with the nature in which it is founded and which it manifests. Because of the human mode of knowledge, 'it is natural to man to know the power and the nature of things from their actions; and therefore our Lord fittingly says that the sort of person he is can be learned from the work he does. So since he performs divine works by his own power, we should believe that he has divine power within him.'<sup>17</sup> One can see from this last passage that, if St Thomas often associates operation and nature, he also connects them to a consideration of power.<sup>18</sup> This is why, since *everything was made by him* (Jn 1.3), believers acknowledge that the Word has the totality of divine power. St Thomas conceives power as the principle of action, and he explains it as follows: 'To be the principle of all things that have been made is the property of the great all powerful God: *All that the Lord wills, he has done, on heaven and on earth*' (Ps. 134.6 (135.6)). Thus, the Word through whom all things have been made is the great God and co-equal with the Father.<sup>19</sup>

Concerning the life-giving power of the Son, St Thomas observes: 'Here we should point out that in the Old Testament the divine power is particularly emphasized by the fact that God is the author of life.'<sup>20</sup> In related passages, Thomas notes that 'the clearest indication of the nature of a being is taken from its works.'<sup>21</sup> If one applies this to Christ, 'the fact that he does the works of God' entails that 'it can be clearly known and believed that Christ is God'.<sup>22</sup> Conversely, in the realities in which one observes different actions, one must

<sup>16</sup> *In Ioan.* 8.58 (no. 1290). Thomas rests his position here on Augustine's interpretation. For an evaluation of these interpretations, see A. Feuillet, 'Les *ego eimi* christologiques du quatrième évangile', *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 54 (1966), 5–22 and 213–40; M.-E. Boismard, *Moïse ou Jésus: Essai de christologie johannique*, Leuven, 1988, pp. 127–130.

<sup>17</sup> *In Ioan.* 5.36 (no. 817).

<sup>18</sup> On the patristic argument from power (and on operation), see M. R. Barnes, *The Power of God: Dunamis in Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology*, Washington DC, 2001.

<sup>19</sup> *In Ioan.* 1.3 (no. 69).

<sup>20</sup> *In Ioan.* 5.21 (no. 761).

<sup>21</sup> *In Ioan.* 10.38 (no. 1466).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

recognize a diversity of substance because ‘different actions indicate different natures’.<sup>23</sup> St Thomas explains:

when we want to know if a certain thing is true, we can determine it from two things: its nature and its power. For true gold is that which has the species of true gold; and we determine this if it acts like true gold. Therefore, if we maintain that the Son has the true nature of God, because the Son exercises the true activities of divinity, it is clear that the Son is authentically God. Now the Son does perform true works of divinity, for we read, ‘*Whatever he [the Father] does, that the Son does likewise* (5.19); and again he said, ‘*For as the Father has life in himself,*’ which is not a participated life, ‘*so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself*’ (Jn 5.26); ‘*That we may be in his true Son, Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life*’ (1 Jn 5.20).<sup>24</sup>

These actions are not restricted to the miracles which Christ once performed, but extend to the whole of his activity; he continues to act on believers’ behalf today, as Scripture attests. For this reason, the experience of salvation which we receive from Christ leads us to recognize his divinity and his eternal unity with the Father:

a person participating in the word of God becomes god by participation. But a thing does not become this or that by participation unless it participates in what is this or that by its essence. . . . Therefore, one does not become god by participation unless he participates in what is God by essence. Therefore, the Word of God, that is the Son, by participation in whom we become gods, is God by essence.<sup>25</sup>

One recognizes here the soteriological argument that Athanasius liked, as did many other Fathers of the Church.<sup>26</sup> Thomas takes it over not only from St Hilary, but also from St John Chrysostom and palpably from St Augustine (as the *Catena aurea* on the passages which we have indicated here shows): if Christ is not God, he could not save, for he could not renew the faithful in the grace of the new creation, which is adoptive Sonship (meaning divinization). The reality of salvation rests on the divinity of Christ who, because he is God, enables us to participate in what he really is.

Alongside Christ’s own words and actions, Thomas examines the titles and the names given to Christ by others (such as Son of God, Son, the Son, Word): they express the divine intimacy of the Son with His Father, the divine relationship which the Son has with the Father.<sup>27</sup> St Thomas also considers the New

<sup>23</sup> *In Ioan.* 14.16 (no. 1912). Taken to its logical conclusion, this would mean that, if the works of the divine persons are different, the persons would not be of the same nature. But, according to Thomas, the action of persons is identical: only the mode of this common action is distinct (see below, in Chapter 14, ‘The Persons’ Distinct Modes of Action and their Unity in Action’).

<sup>24</sup> *In Ioan.* 17.3 (no. 2187).

<sup>25</sup> *In Ioan.* 10.35 (no. 1460). On this theme, see L.-B. Geiger, *La participation dans la philosophie de St Thomas d’Aquin*, Paris, 1953, pp. 238–258.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. for example Athanasius, *De synodis* 51 (PG 26.784).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. SCG IV, chs. 2–3.

Testament passages which explicitly attribute the name *God* to the person of Christ: Jn 1.1 (*And the Word was God*); Jn 20.28 (*My Lord and my God*); Rom. 9.5 (*Christ... who is over all, God blessed for ever*), or Titus 2.13 (*the glorious appearing of our great God and saviour, Jesus Christ*), etc.<sup>28</sup> In applying the name *God* to Christ, Christian revelation enriches the meaning of this word: as signifying 'that which has the divine nature', the name *God* can designate each and all of the persons who commune in one and the same divine nature.<sup>29</sup>

In his reading of Scripture, St Thomas also meditates on the way in which Jesus is addressed in the liturgy: Jesus is glorified in the same way as the Father is. For example, commenting on Romans 16.27, he explains that glory and honour are rendered to Christ 'by every creature's worship of his full divinity'.<sup>30</sup> In honouring the Son alongside the Father, the faithful offer a worship of 'latria' which expresses faith in the Father and the Son in their common divinity and their distinct persons.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the adoration of Christ is a practical recognition of his personal divinity.<sup>32</sup>

These considerations, for which one could easily multiply examples, affect how we should enter into Thomas' Trinitarian theology. His practice in the *Summa Theologiae* is to explain the secondary reality (our salvation) from the primary reality (the divinity of the Son and the Spirit): the Son deifies and the Spirit gives life, because the Son and the Spirit are God; such is the order of doctrinal exposition which one habitually encounters in Thomas' synthesizing texts. But his biblical commentaries, in close contact with his patristic sources, also follow the opposite order: Thomas establishes the primary reality (the divinity of the persons) *on the basis of* the secondary reality (our salvation). He starts off from the faith-experience of salvation, that is, the authentic re-creation (divinization) of believers, to show the divinity of the persons: only the true God can divinize and re-create. Here he follows the order in which we discover the mystery: the action of the persons in the economy leads to the discovery and disclosure of a truth concerning the Trinity itself. This shows that, behind the *ordo disciplinae* of the *Summa*, Thomas was seriously concerned to recapture the patristic roots of Trinitarian doctrines and their foundation in the economy of salvation.

He takes the same approach when he reflects on the Holy Spirit. St Thomas focuses on the biblical passages witnessing to the divinity of the Holy Spirit

<sup>28</sup> SCG IV, ch. 3; *In Ioan.* 1.1 (no. 59). For an introduction to the exegetical discussion of these passages, see especially Raymond Brown, *Jésus dans les quatre évangiles*, Paris, 1996, pp. 237–273; M. J. Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Relation to God*, Grand Rapids, 1992.

<sup>29</sup> *ST I*, q. 39, a. 5; *In Ioan.* 1.1 (no. 44). See below, in Chapter 7, 'The Word God'.

<sup>30</sup> *In Rom.* 16.27 (no. 1228).

<sup>31</sup> *In Ioan.* 5.23 (nos. 768–769).

<sup>32</sup> *ST III*, q. 25, a. 1–2.

and to the Spirit's subsisting as a person. Even though Scripture does not directly ascribe the name *God* to the Holy Spirit—as it does to the Son—Thomas' biblical reading here is like his practice of exegesis in relation to the Son. Once again we find the soteriological argument which Thomas developed in relation to the Son, this time for the Holy Spirit. The divinity of the Holy Spirit sets the scene for one of Thomas' best formulations of the soteriological argument:

It is clear that the Holy Spirit is God, since he says, *unless one is born again of water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God*. . . . From this we can form the following argument: He from whom men are spiritually reborn is God; but men are spiritually reborn through the Holy Spirit . . . therefore, the Holy Spirit is God.<sup>33</sup>

St Thomas presents this reflection as an argument (*ratio*) which believers, working from scriptural teaching, can use their reason to formulate. The divine action of the Holy Spirit manifests the Spirit's divinity. In the same way, the unity of action of the Holy Spirit and of Christ discloses their consubstantiality: although his action has a different modality, the Spirit does not accomplish something different from what Christ does; thus, his nature, the principle of his action, is not different from that of the Son of God.<sup>34</sup> When Thomas approaches the subject in this way, he is drawing out the legacy of the fourth-century Church Fathers.<sup>35</sup> On this issue, one can look at many chapters in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* which focus on the patristic exegesis springing from the anti-pneumatological controversy (the *Pneumatomachai*, or 'fighters against the Spirit').<sup>36</sup> Thomas presents the works of the Holy Spirit in detail. This is a matter of works which God alone can perform, so the witness of Scripture induces one to acknowledge the divinity of the Spirit: the Holy Spirit creates, gives life to the dead, observes, instructs and inhabits human hearts, brings about justice, receives divine glory, speaks through the prophets, reveals the mysteries of God, and is the source of sanctification (one can hear the echoes of the Creed of Constantinople). This is one example of Thomas' soteriological reflection, chosen from amongst many:

<sup>33</sup> *In Ioan.* 3.5 (no. 444).

<sup>34</sup> *In Ioan.* 14.15 (no. 1912). On the strict parallelism of the actions of the Spirit and of Christ in St John and St Paul, see especially Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit, vol. 1: The Holy Spirit in the 'Economy'*, trans. David Smith, London, 1983, pp. 55–59 and 84–86; cf. Congar, *The Word and the Spirit*, trans. David Smith, San Francisco, 1986. On Thomas' idea of the mutual work of the Son and Spirit, see the beautiful collection of texts, brought together, translated and annotated by L. Somme: *Thomas d'Aquin: La divinisation dans le Christ*, Geneva, 1988.

<sup>35</sup> For instance, Athanasius of Alexandria explains: 'If [the Holy Spirit] divinizes, there is no doubt that his nature is that of God' (*Letter to Serapion* I.24; SC 15, p. 126); cf. *Letter to Serapion* I.23; I.27; I.29 (SC 15, pp. 124, 132, 135). Basil of Caesarea mines the same vein (see especially Basil, Letter 159, in *Lettres*, ed. and trans. Y. Courtonne, in SC 17, 2nd edn, pp. 132–133).

<sup>36</sup> SCG IV, chs. 15–17.

to sanctify men is the proper work of God, for Leviticus (22.32) says: *I am the Lord who sanctify you*. It is of course the Holy Spirit who sanctifies, as the Apostle says: *You are washed, you are sanctified through the name of Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God* (1 Cor. 6.11). And in 2 Thessalonians (2.13) one reads: *God has chosen you from the beginning to be saved by the Spirit which sanctifies and by faith in the truth*. It is thus necessary that the Holy Spirit be God.<sup>37</sup>

The discussion thus far has been about the manifestation of the *divinity* of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. But Thomas pays as much attention to the *distinction* of the persons: One with the Father, the Son is nonetheless distinct from Him; and for all that the Holy Spirit is of the same nature as the Father and the Son, the Spirit is yet distinct from them. St Thomas shows this when he presents the standard set of biblical quotations, drawn together because of the Sabellian controversy, and which he knew through its patristic documentation.<sup>38</sup> He also uses it to show that the New Testament does not present the Holy Spirit as just a ‘force’, like an attribute of God, but really as a *person*. He brings the biblical witness to the action of the Spirit: into focus the Spirit proceeds, he teaches, he witnesses, he intercedes, he reveals, he knows, he inhabits the faithful. Thomas concludes: ‘One could not say that if the Holy Spirit were not a subsistent person’; ‘Scripture speaks to us of the Spirit as a divine person which subsists.’<sup>39</sup> Faith in the divinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in their personal subsistence and in their distinction, rests on the historical manifestation of the divine persons, and above all on recognizing their action, following the witness of Scripture received in the Church.

Special witnesses to the unity and the distinction of the persons include the disclosure of the Trinity in Christ’s conception and nativity,<sup>40</sup> his baptism (‘the Son is present in his flesh, the Father in the voice which speaks, and the Holy Spirit under the appearance of a dove’<sup>41</sup>), and his transfiguration (‘the whole Trinity appears: the Father in the voice, the Son in the humanity, the Holy Spirit in the luminous cloud’<sup>42</sup>). According to Thomas, the sending of the Son and Holy Spirit into our world discloses their personal properties.<sup>43</sup> The passion of Christ also discloses the Trinity: far from seeing in the passion the separation of the three divine persons—how could one do that?—St Thomas finds in it the expression of their unity and their relations: ‘by infusing him with charity, the Father inspires Christ with the will to die for us,’<sup>44</sup> charity in which we recognize the Holy Spirit, with which Christ’s humanity is filled. He looks at the resurrection from the

<sup>37</sup> SCG IV, ch. 17 (no. 3528).

<sup>39</sup> SCG IV, ch. 18 (no. 3553).

<sup>41</sup> *In Matt.* 3.16–17 (no. 305).

<sup>43</sup> On this see below, Chapter 15.

<sup>38</sup> SCG IV, chs. 5 and 9.

<sup>40</sup> *In Matt.* 1.18 (no. 112).

<sup>42</sup> *ST III*, q. 45, a. 4, ad 2.

<sup>44</sup> *ST III*, q. 47, a. 3.

same perspective: living with the Father, the Son is exalted ‘according to the Spirit of sanctification’, in that he pours forth the Holy Spirit.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, of all the New Testament sayings, the locus to which we particularly return is the Trinitarian baptismal formula in the last chapter of Matthew’s Gospel: *Go and baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit* (Mt. 28.19). This baptismal formula, which was the source of the ‘rule of faith’, played a central role in the development of the patristic doctrine of the Trinity in the fourth-century Trinitarian controversies; St Basil especially used it to show the order and the equal divinity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is just the same in St Thomas’ writings. In the Matthean formula and in the Creed, the Holy Spirit is placed on the same level as the Father and the Son (the name of the Holy Spirit is ‘numbered together’ with that of the Father and the Son, the Spirit is ‘counted with’ the Father and the Son), following an order which discloses his personality at the heart of the Triune God:

Since the Father and the Son are subsistent persons and divine in nature, the Holy Spirit would not be ‘counted with’ them if he were not also a divine, subsistent person. And this is very well shown when the Lord says to his disciples (Mt. 28.19): *Go and teach all nations, baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.*<sup>46</sup>

Thomas explains that,

The reason [for this formula] is as follows. Regeneration [which baptism brings about] involves three things: that *in view of which* it is done, that *through which* it is done, and that *whereby* it is achieved. In view of what [is one baptized]? In view of God the Father, as the Apostle says in Romans 8.29: *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestine to be conformed to the image of his Son...* *Through what* [are we baptized]? *Through the Son: God has sent his Son... so that we may receive adoption as sons of God* (Gal. 4.4–5), for it is by adoption to the image of the one who is Son by nature that we are made sons. *Whereby* [are we baptized]? In the gift of the Holy Spirit, which we receive: *You have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father* (Rom. 8.15). So it is suitable to mention the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.<sup>47</sup>

Thomas concludes his exegesis of the Trinitarian baptismal formula by observing that it discloses the Trinity and excludes heresies, such as Sabellianism, which conflates the persons, and Arianism, which separates them.<sup>48</sup> The baptismal formula thus bears witness to the *order* of the persons, and to their *consubstantiality*. This is precisely what speculative theology will attempt to account for.

<sup>45</sup> *In Rom.* 1.4 (no. 58).

<sup>47</sup> *In Matt.* 28.19 (no. 2465).

<sup>46</sup> SCG IV, ch. 18 (no. 3554).

<sup>48</sup> *In Matt.* 28.19 (no. 2466).

So, in the same way that, as St Thomas explains them, the mission of the Son and the gift of the Holy Spirit reveal to us their *divine unity* with the Father, these missions reveal the mutual relations which the divine persons engender. ‘Everything that the Son does is directed to the glory of the Father’:<sup>49</sup> the Son ‘relates everything to the Father because he derives everything he has from the Father’.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, the Holy Spirit glorifies the Son and brings human beings together with the Son, because of his relation with the Son: ‘Just as the effect of the mission of the Son was to lead us to the Father, so the effect of the mission of the Holy Spirit is to lead the faithful to the Son.’<sup>51</sup> The missions of the Son and Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation provide believers with knowledge of the eternal origin of the persons: ‘a mission . . . indicates an origin’.<sup>52</sup> The expression of the Father through the Son, and the manifestation of the Son through the Holy Spirit thus enables us to recognise the eternal processions of the persons: this is the pathway of our discovery of the Triune mystery, within faith. But, conversely, knowing the eternal processions gives us a better perspective on the foundation (the ‘reason’) of the action of the Son and the Holy Spirit in the world.<sup>53</sup> And this will be the precise task of speculative Trinitarian theology.

In sum, Thomas finds in the action of the Trinity, as brought into focus by Scripture and received by faith, the revelation of the *divinity* of the three persons, their *personal existence*, and their relations. This rapid survey shows us the path on which Thomas will lead us through Trinitarian theology. The spring of Trinitarian theology is the reception of the revelation of the Trinity in the economic actions of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Trinitarian teaching in the *Summa Theologiae* will seek to present this same reality which the action of the persons discloses: their unity and their distinction. And, in studying the eternal mystery of the three persons who are one God, speculative theology will equally seek to show the depth of the creative and salvific action of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

<sup>49</sup> *In Ioan.* 14.14 (no. 1906).

<sup>50</sup> *SCG IV*, ch. 24 (no. 3622).

<sup>51</sup> *In Ioan.* 14.26 (no. 1958).

<sup>52</sup> *In Ioan.* 5.23 (no. 769); 15.26 (nos. 2061–2062). See below, in Chapter 15, ‘The “Visible” Missions of the Son and Holy Spirit’.

<sup>53</sup> *In Ioan.* 16.14 (no. 2107): ‘For everything which is from another manifests that from which it is. Thus the Son manifests the Father because he is from the Father. And so because the Holy Spirit is from the Son, it is appropriate (*proprium*) that the Spirit glorify the Son’; cf. *In Ioan.* 14.17 (no. 1916); *In Ioan.* 17.2 (no. 2185): ‘whatever the Son has he has from the Father; and thus it is necessary that what the Son does manifests the Father’. On this theme, see A. Cirillo, *Cristo Rivelatore del Padre nel Vangelo di S. Giovanni secondo il commento di S. Tommaso d’Aquino*, Rome, 1988.

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## Thomas' Exposition of Speculative Trinitarian Theology

In order correctly to understand Thomas' treatise on Trinitarian theology in the *Summa Theologiae*, one has to begin by paying attention to the broad underlying intention in his presentation of the treatise. Thomas does not launch his treatise with epistemological and methodological prologues, describing his intention. He refines it in the course of his research, when particular questions come up, following the procedure which one can see in other parts of the *Summa*: the epistemological elements appear in the main body of the theological investigation.<sup>1</sup> In practice, our knowledge of a reality does not just depend on our own faculties, but on the reality itself: so one needs to clarify what the object of study is before one can adequately assess the knowledge we can have of it.

One cannot get a true idea of the Trinitarian teaching in Thomas' synthesizing texts without perceiving their animating intention. Some popular misconceptions can set the interpretation of the treatise off on the wrong track. This is why, without proposing to reverse the order of the questions which Thomas adopted, we will take the opportunity to tackle some of these topics at the beginning. To read the treatise on the Trinity in the *Summa Theologiae* correctly, it is not enough to raise the question of the method and content of Trinitarian theology; one also has to answer the question: What does speculative study of the Trinity intend to achieve? This question will make us reflect on how theology draws on revelation when, with the help of human intelligence, it seeks to present our faith.

### 1. BIBLICAL EXEGESIS AND TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

The previous chapter brought to our attention some fundamental features of Thomas' reading of Scripture: Written in the faith of the Church, Scripture

<sup>1</sup> Thus, for instance, the question of our knowledge of God ('How can we know God?') and that of our language for God (the 'divine names') are not placed at the beginning of the treatise on God, but in the middle of it (*ST I*, qq. 12–13), after the discussions of the existence of God and of the attributes of God's being.

directs us to the divinity of the three Persons, their personal existence, their distinction. But what is the difference, for Thomas, between scriptural exegesis and biblical theology? We have elsewhere compared St Thomas' Trinitarian theology in his biblical exegesis with that in his *Summa Theologiae*.<sup>2</sup> Without labouring the details of the comparison here, one can mention some of its consequences, which tell us a lot. One can see that Thomas' Commentary on John contains the essential core of the Trinitarian doctrine taught by the *Summa Theologiae*: the notion of procession, the immanent modes of procession of the Son and the Holy Spirit (the intellectual mode and the mode of volition or love), the theory of relations and of relative opposition, personal subsistence, the conception of the Word, the eternal origin of the Spirit, the eternal property of the Father, the unity of the Father and the Son as the principle of the Holy Spirit, the personal properties, the connections between the persons and the divine essence and the relations, the 'order of nature' in God, the connections of the divine persons with creatures, the persons' missions, not forgetting the many problems of Trinitarian language. The biblical commentary exhibits these points of doctrine with a striking luxury of detail and refinement. On some points, especially on the speculative doctrine of the Word (set out in the Commentary on John 1.1–3), the *Lectura* on St John is more complete than the *Summa Theologiae*.

Within the main features of Thomas' doctrine of the Trinity, we found two which are deficient in the John Commentary, in comparison with the *Summa*: the investigation of the word 'person', which makes use of Boethius, and the deepened reflection on the 'imprint of love' which permits one to grasp the personal property of the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup> The other differences relate to academic issues whose absence is not surprising in a biblical commentary.<sup>4</sup> As regards essentials, the John Commentary is a striking demonstration that St Thomas does not separate biblical Trinitarian theology from speculative Trinitarian theology: it is the same theology. Both the biblical commentary and the synthesizing text have the same purpose, the reflective explanation of Scripture. The doctrinal resources are similar. Nonetheless, the biblical commentary develops some themes more fully which, without being

<sup>2</sup> G. Emery, 'Biblical Exegesis and the Speculative Doctrine of the Trinity in St. Thomas Aquinas' Commentary on St. John', in id., *Trinity in Aquinas*, Ypsilanti, MI, 2003, pp. 271–319.

<sup>3</sup> See below, in Chapter 6, 'What is a Person?' and in Chapter 10, 'The Holy Spirit is Love in Person'.

<sup>4</sup> The John Commentary does not stretch either to questions which touch on the 'reasons' for the number of processions, of persons, and of real relations in God, or to some problems about the notional acts and notional power in God. In the same way, the Commentary on John does not discuss some linguistic questions, like the meaning of the word 'Trinitas', the attribution of essential names to the persons, or the attribution of personal names to the essential terms (questions which are dealt with in the *Summa Theologiae*).

completely absent from the treatise on the Trinity in the *Summa*, are touched on briefly there: the unity of knowledge and will of the Father and the Son, the action of the divine persons in the world, and the soteriological dimension of Trinitarian reflection.

How does St Thomas bring speculative reflection into effect in his reading of the Fourth Gospel? His way of reading the Bible uses the three levels of literal exposition described by Hugh of St Victor: the *littera* in the strict sense (textual analysis with reference to grammar and linguistics, an overview of the words' meaning in their immediate context), the *sensus* (the analysis of the signification of each member), and the *sententia* (a genuine understanding of the text, which draws out its theological and philosophical meaning).<sup>5</sup> This *sententia*, that is, the development of the theological themes constituting the teaching in the finished exposition, exhibits two modalities which are at work in the John Commentary. It engages either in commentary following upon the biblical pericope (this is what it does most often), or in questions, objections or digressions raised by the reading of the text (this occurs more rarely).<sup>6</sup> In every case, speculative theology is not superimposed on or juxtaposed with the biblical text, but is part and parcel of the biblical reading: it aims at disclosing the doctrinal meaning of the 'letter', the literal sense, of the Gospel.

As to the theological resources, one must observe that the John Commentary (like the *Summa Contra Gentiles*) pays much attention to Trinitarian heresies; this flows from Thomas' exegesis being rooted in the theology of the Church Fathers. One example of this is the equality in power of the Father and the Son. In the *Summa Theologiae*, the article on this (Ia, q. 42, a. 6) mentions many Johannine texts in the objections (Jn 5.19; 5.20; 5.30; 14.31) and in the *sed contra* (Jn 5.19). Thomas' professorial reply does not indicate any patristic authority, even though one can see a reference to Saint Hilary's *De Trinitate* (Bk. IX) in the reply to the first objection.

The John Commentary tells us much more about Thomas' patristic sources for the equality in power of the Father and the Son. The patristic sources themselves also illuminate our perception of his doctrinal exegesis. On John 5.19 (*The Son can do nothing of himself, only that which he sees the Father doing*), the Commentary presents in near-entirety the anti-Arian reading

<sup>5</sup> See G. Dahan, *L'exégèse chrétienne de la Bible en Occident médiéval XII<sup>e</sup>–XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, 1999, pp. 239–297; M.-D. Chenu, *Toward Understanding St Thomas*, trans. A.-M. Landry and D. Hughes, Chicago, 1963, pp. 83–86 and 221–222. Cf. Hugh of St Victor, *Didascalicon* VI. 8: 'Expositio tria continet: Litteram, sensum, sententiam' (ed. Ch. H. Buttimer, Washington, 1939, p. 125).

<sup>6</sup> One can see the detail of these types of exegesis, including many examples, in the article mentioned above ('Biblical Exegesis and the Speculative Doctrine of the Trinity').

given by Hilary's *De Trinitate* (Bk. VII); by relating power to nature, this text shows that the Son receives power from the Father as he receives nature, being and operation, without incurring inequality by so doing.<sup>7</sup> The Commentary also cites Augustine's interpretation, which synthesizes Hilary and John Chrysostom's differing approaches to the text.<sup>8</sup> The Commentary on John enables one to see that, in the *Summa*, Thomas' reply to the objections drawn from John 5.20 and 5.30 largely come from St Augustine (mainly, his *Homilies on John*); when it is said that the Son has received a command from the Father or that the Son listens to the Father and so receives knowledge of Him, this refers to Christ's human nature, or to the eternal generation through which the Father communicates divine knowledge and will to the Son.<sup>9</sup> As to the incommunicable relations or personal properties (the Son receives his essence from the Father but not the property of paternity), the John Commentary (like the *Catena aurea*) shows that the reply in the *Summa* is taken from Didymus' *Treatise on the Holy Spirit*.<sup>10</sup> In this way, one can see that the *Summa* organizes and summarizes the patristic teachings which the John Commentary presents in greater detail. One could multiply similar instances: the exegesis in the Commentary is guided by the legacy of the Fathers (and by their concern to avoid heresy), so it helps us to rediscover the way in which the *Summa's* Trinitarian doctrine is rooted in patristic theology.

Ultimately, the main difference between the biblical Commentary and the *Summa Theologiae* concerns the order of exposition, the organization of the material: whilst the *Summa Theologiae* follows the teaching order (*ordo disciplinae*) which guides us through Trinitarian doctrine as laid out according to the coherence and internal organization of its elements, the biblical Commentary puts its development of doctrinal points into the hands of the text, although the speculative perspective becomes apparent in some specific explanations.

Comparison of the Commentary on St John and the *Summa Theologiae* enables us to see the unity which *Sacra doctrina* has for Thomas. The aim which he pursues in explaining Scripture is identical to the goal of Scripture itself and to that of Christian theology: to teach revealed truth, to distance it from error, in order to perceive that which we hope one day to contemplate in broad daylight. In the John Commentary and in the *Summa*, speculative reflection is engaged in disclosing the truth taught by revelation (that is to

<sup>7</sup> In *Ioan.* 5.19 (no. 749); cf. *Catena in Ioan.* 5.19 (ed. A. Guarienti, Turin, 1953, vol. 2, pp. 401–403). This throws light on the reply in *ST I*, q. 42, a. 6, ad 1.

<sup>8</sup> In *Ioan.* 5.19 (nos. 747 and 751).

<sup>9</sup> In *Ioan.* 5.20 (no. 754) and 5.30 (nos. 795–797): cf. *Catena in Ioan.* 5.20 and 5.30 (ed. Guarienti, pp. 402–403 and 407–408). This illuminates the reply in *ST I*, q. 42, a. 6, ad 2.

<sup>10</sup> In *Ioan.* 16.15 (no. 2111, cf. no. 2114); cf. *Catena in Ioan.* 16.15 (ed. Guarienti, p. 541).

say: in *making it more articulate* for us). The most speculative reflection on the properties and Trinitarian relations is inscribed in his biblical teaching, for its purpose is to disengage the deep meaning of the scriptural text, using reason within faith. In the light of these observations, it is doubtless necessary to advise people not to read the *Summa Theologiae* without Thomas' biblical commentaries.

## 2. THE AIM OF SPECULATIVE TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

The John commentary shows the intention of Trinitarian theology: to disclose revealed truth and distance it from errors in order to account for the faith. This requires some fine-tunings.

### (a) The Prerogatives of the Faith

Only faith, the reception of revelation, gives us access to knowledge of the Trinity. St Thomas rules out the idea that natural human reason working on its own resources could realize that there are three divine persons. The exclusive role given to faith, as opposed to natural reason, was a common feature of Trinitarian theology from its origins, but in the Middle Ages, discussion of it was reopened by Peter Abelard. Abelard effectively attempted to identify the properties of the three divine persons with the attributes of, respectively, power (the Father), wisdom (the Son), and goodness (the Holy Spirit): 'God is thus three Persons, Father, Son, Holy Spirit—which comes down to saying that the divine substance is powerful, wise, good.'<sup>11</sup> As a result, Abelard claimed, philosophers and all men of good will who could know the power, wisdom, and goodness of God, had borne witness to the Trinity—above all, Plato, 'the greatest of the philosophers'; according to Abelard, Plato had 'taught a summary of the whole Trinity'.<sup>12</sup>

Like all his contemporaries, St Thomas taught that the existence of the divine persons cannot be known by natural reason: faith alone can know the Trinity. But when he explains why philosophers could not achieve

<sup>11</sup> Abelard, *Theologia Summi Boni* I.II (CCCM 13, pp. 86–88).

<sup>12</sup> Abelard, 'Theology of the Supreme Good', I.V (CCCM 13, pp. 98–99). For a more complete discussion, with the references to Abelard's works and bibliographical notes, see our article, 'Trinité et Unité de Dieu dans la scolastique, XII<sup>e</sup>–XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles', in *Le christianisme est-il un monothéisme?*, ed. P. Gisel and G. Emery, Geneva, 2001, pp. 196–201. See also below, Chapter 13, 'The Origin of the Doctrine of Appropriations'.

knowledge of the Trinity by natural reason, Thomas relates it neither to original sin, as Alexander of Hales did,<sup>13</sup> nor to the ‘opposition’ between Trinitarian faith and the principles of natural reason, as with Albert the Great.<sup>14</sup> Thomas’ response is based on two principles: the proper mode of human knowledge, and the nature of divine causality:

Using natural reason, man can know God only from creatures. Now, creatures lead us to the knowledge of God as effects do to their cause. Accordingly, by natural reason we can know of God that only which of necessity belongs to Him as the principle of all things, and we have cited this fundamental principle in treating of God as above (q. 12, a. 12). Now, the creative power of God is common to the whole Trinity; and hence it belongs to the unity of the essence, and not to the distinction of the persons. Therefore, by natural reason we can know what belongs to the unity of the essence, but not what belongs to the distinction of the persons.<sup>15</sup>

A ‘nature’ is an inner principle of action. God acts by virtue of his nature, which is common to the three persons (otherwise one undermines the divine unity: one person does not create ‘more’ than another, or to the exclusion of the others), and this is why creatures can enable us to demonstrate what their creative cause is, its nature, but not the distinct properties of the persons. St Thomas works out a remarkable Trinitarian doctrine of creation in the light of the faith which makes us know the Trinity, but this Trinitarian dimension cannot be achieved by natural human reason. He is very firm about this: knowledge of the Trinity rests exclusively on the faithful reception of revelation in the history of salvation. Philosophical reason can know the essential attributes of God, but no more than that.

### (b) The Rejection of Rationalism

St Thomas also sets aside the ‘necessary reasons’ through which some theologians tried to show that reason is compelled to acknowledge the Trinity. This idea of ‘necessary reasons’ was brought into play in the eleventh century by Anselm’s *Monologium*. St Anselm chose a method which drew on ‘necessary reasons’ over one which made direct use of sacred Scripture, and which proposed rational arguments leading to ‘quasi-necessary conclusions’;<sup>16</sup> this

<sup>13</sup> *Summa fratris Alexandri*, Book I, no. 10, (ed. Collegii S. Bonaventure, vol. 1, Quaracchi, 1924, p. 19).

<sup>14</sup> Albert, *I Sent.* d. 3, a. 18, sol. (*Opera omnia*, vol. 25, ed. Auguste Borgnet, Paris, 1893, p. 113).

<sup>15</sup> Thomas, *ST I*, q. 32, a. 1; cf. *De veritate*, q. 10, a. 13. On the originality of this response, see G. Emery, *La Trinité créatrice*, Paris, 1995, pp. 345–351.

<sup>16</sup> For the references to St Anselm and Richard of St Victor, see our study, ‘Trinité et Unité de Dieu dans la scolastique XII<sup>e</sup>–XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles’, pp. 207–213.

enabled him to see in God both Word (the Son) and Love (the Holy Spirit). The track which Anselm had opened up was explored in an original way by Richard of St-Victor, in his *De Trinitate* (c.1170). At the heart of knowledge by faith, Richard wanted to present ‘necessary reasons’ supporting the Trinity, that is to say, ‘to understand through reason that which we believe’; since the Trinity is not a contingent, but a necessary reality, one can establish it through ‘arguments which are not only plausible or probable, but necessary’. Richard wants to show that the plenitude of the goodness of God, God’s plenitude of happiness, and of glory, like the plenitude of divine charity, all require that there is in God a plurality of persons amongst whom goodness, happiness, and charity are communicated. This project of demonstrating the Trinity, by an exercise which is simultaneously logical, metaphysical, contemplative, and aesthetic, will exert a lasting fascination in the history of theology.

St Bonaventure (+1274) brought together the legacy of Anselm and Richard of St-Victor with that of Pseudo-Dionysius. Prior to his work, the first Franciscan masters put forward the notion of the Good to account for the plurality of the divine persons: it belongs to goodness to communicate itself (*bonum diffusivum sui*). Since the divine goodness is perfect, its communication must be perfect, and that requires an alterity of persons within God: the perfect goodness of God implies the communication of the divine substance in God himself by the generation of the Son and the spiration of the Holy Spirit.<sup>17</sup> Bonaventure develops this teaching when he elaborates the ‘necessary reasons’ with the following motifs:

- It is natural for the good to diffuse itself; so if God did not communicate himself through a perfect diffusion of the entirety of the divine substance, he would not be sovereign and perfect Good;
- the beatitude, charity, liberality, and joy of God require that one posit a plurality of persons in God, since their perfection cannot exist in solitary confinement;
- the primacy (*primitas*) in God entails a plurality of persons, since when one reality is first, it is the principle of another; in virtue of his primacy, one must recognize that God has a sovereign fecundity and ‘Sourceness’ (*fontalitas*), according to the two modes which pertain to God: an emanation of nature (generation of the Son) and an emanation of will (the procession of the Holy Spirit);
- the perfect actuality of God demands that this communication be not only possible but necessary, for in God no state of potentiality exists: God’s

<sup>17</sup> Alexander of Hales, *Summa theologica*, Book I, no. 317 (ed. Collegii S. Bonaventurae, vol. 1, Quaracchi, 1924, pp. 465–466).

entire existence is in a state of perfect actuality. 'It is thus necessary to affirm a plurality of persons.'<sup>18</sup>

Thus, according to Bonaventure, affirmation of the Trinity necessarily follows from balanced consideration of the unity of God: the recognition of the Trinity is 'included' in the affirmation of divine unity, and the reasons he gives enable one to explain this inclusion in a way that imposes itself with the force of necessity. So, for Bonaventure, the believing mind can rise to the contemplation of the Trinity on the basis of the perfection which reason must necessarily recognize in God.

Many other writers embarked on the quest for necessary reasons. So, for instance, Henry of Ghent (+1293) acknowledged that we can only know the Trinity by faith; but at the same time, after faith has given us access to the Trinity, we can 'prove its necessity' by rational argument. Henry held that the perfection of intellectual activity in God necessarily requires the fruitful production of a personal Word; likewise, God's perfect voluntative and loving activity demands the spiration of the Holy Spirit. Reason can prove this. Henry of Ghent concluded that, if God were not Triune, he could not have created the world with wisdom and freedom. The person of the Word (wisdom) and the person of the Spirit (love, freedom), are thus necessarily required to think through the act of creation.<sup>19</sup>

St Thomas was vigorously opposed to this apologetic project in Trinitarian theology. Neither the goodness nor the happiness of God, nor his intelligence, are arguments capable of proving that the existence of a plurality of divine persons imposes itself by rational necessity.<sup>20</sup> Only the 'truth of faith', to the exclusion of any other reason, leads us to acknowledge God's tripersonality.<sup>21</sup> This thesis is a fundamental and characteristic feature of his Trinitarian theology. For Thomas, Bonaventure's reasons could be probable arguments, but they do not have the force of necessity. And, in Thomas' judgement, the attempt to give necessary reasons in Trinitarian theology jeopardizes the faith: 'this undermines the faith'.<sup>22</sup> Such a project ignores the dignity of faith—because faith deals with realities that are beyond reason—and it makes the faith liable to ridicule by non-believers, by indicating to them that Christians profess the Trinity on very shaky grounds.<sup>23</sup> St Thomas' stance implies

<sup>18</sup> Bonaventure, *I Sent.* d. 2, a. un., q. 2; *I Sent.* d. 27, p. 1, a. un., q. 2, ad 3; *Quaestiones disputatae de Mystero Trinitatis*, qq. 1–8; *Hexaemeron* XI. 11; *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, ch. 6.

<sup>19</sup> Henri of Ghent, *Quodlibet* VI, q. 2 (*Opera omnia*, vol. 10, Leuven and Leiden, 1987, pp. 33–40); cf. q. 1 (pp. 2–31). In a completely different spirit to the medievals, modern philosophers have discussed the Trinity in a more rigorously rationalist vein (see on this, in particular, S. M. Powell, *The Trinity in German Thought*, Cambridge, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> *ST I*, q. 32, a. 1, ad 2.

<sup>21</sup> *I Sent.* d. 2, q. un., a. 4; cf. *ST I*, q. 32, a. 1.

<sup>22</sup> *ST I*, q. 32, a. 1.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

a clear-cut divide between the domain of faith and that of natural reason: this straightforward distinction is one of Thomas' most outstanding features, particularly by comparison with Bonaventure. This means that the reasons which theology uses to exhibit the Trinitarian mystery will never be demonstrative proofs. Rather they will be one of two things: either 'approximations' or 'probable arguments'<sup>24</sup> that is, arguments which show that what the faith proposes is not impossible, or arguments drawn only from faith.<sup>25</sup>

In his approach to the Trinity, Thomas' epistemic method is thus characterized by two constant features: First, the strict exclusion of the idea that Trinitarian faith can be established by necessary reasons,<sup>26</sup> and second, taking it to be impossible either to conceive the Trinity by deducing it from the divine unity or to think of the plurality of persons as deriving from the essential attributes.<sup>27</sup> This second thesis, which is too often neglected, is one of the fundamental features of Thomas' Trinitarian theology. Thomas was a more rigorous thinker than most of his contemporaries, and he wields that rigour in his barring any confusion between our knowledge of the divine essence and our knowledge of personal plurality in God; he strictly refuses to consider God's personal plurality as the fruit of an essential fecundity of the divine being. Hence it is necessary to pin down what we mean by the role of human reason in Trinitarian theology.

### (c) Understanding the Faith

We are now in a position to understand the problem which presents itself to Trinitarian theology: if, on the one hand, natural human intelligence has no access to the existence of a Trinity of persons in God (since only faith gives knowledge of it), and if, on the other hand, the speculative reasons advanced by Christian theology are not demonstrations, what could be the value of a speculative discussion which makes use of 'reason', and what is the discussion for?

The treatise on the Trinity develops many themes which are applied to God by the use of analogy (person, relation, order, origin, procession, etc.); the properties of the persons are also set out by means of analogies derived from

<sup>24</sup> *I Sent.* d. 3, q. 1, a. 4, ad 3 (*adaptationes quaedam*); *SCG I*, chs. 8–9.

<sup>25</sup> *ST II–II*, q. 1, a. 5, ad 2.

<sup>26</sup> See R. L. Richard, *The Problem of an Apologetic Perspective in the Trinitarian Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Rome, 1963.

<sup>27</sup> See our study: 'Essentialisme ou personnalisme dans le traité de Dieu chez St Thomas d'Aquin?' *RT* 98 (1998), 5–38; cf. H. C. Schmidbauer, *Personarum Trinitas: Die trinitarische Gotteslehre des heiligen Thomas von Aquin*, St Ottilien, 1995.

anthropology (word, love). The use of these analogies enables St Thomas to say precisely what the purpose of his Trinitarian theology is. Thus, in reference to the notion of *person* in the Trinity, he explains:

The plurality of persons in God belongs to those realities which are held by faith and which human reason can neither explore nor sufficiently understand; but we hope to know them when we reach our Mother Country, when the essence of God will be seen, when faith will give way to sight. Nonetheless, when they were pressed by those who denied the faith, the holy Fathers were compelled to discuss this and other matters of faith, yet they did so humbly and reverently, avoiding any pretence to comprehension. Nor is such a discussion useless, since it gives the mind enough of a glimpse of the truth to steer clear of error.<sup>28</sup>

This observation in the *Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia Dei*, which is echoed in the *Summa Theologiae*,<sup>29</sup> summarizes the purpose of speculative understanding of the mystery of the Trinity. We will come upon other remarks akin to these in the course of the discussion. This is the project which St Thomas puts to work in all of his writings: driven by the ultimate purpose of contemplation, Trinitarian theology supplies believers with ways to defend the faith.<sup>30</sup> The expression of truth and the critique of error are the two facets of a single theological project. To eliminate error, it is not enough to produce Bible quotes; one has also to show the conformity of Catholic faith with Scripture, and to reply to arguments opposing the Church's faith. The truth is not fully disclosed until it has been distinguished from the errors set against it. To disclose the truth and to separate out errors: such is the twofold task of the Sage as Thomas formulates and works it out in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*.<sup>31</sup>

The purpose of defending the faith is more tacit in the *Summa Theologiae*, but it is in fact present. Thomas evokes the double task of the Sage when, in the first question of the *Summa*, he explains that sacred doctrine is an argumentative science: sacred doctrine 'does not argue to prove its principles' because it receives them (i.e. the articles of faith), but 'it disputes with those who deny its principles'.<sup>32</sup> The treatise on the Trinity confirms this project: it begins precisely by showing the misjudgements which give rise to Arianism and Sabellianism, signposting the route away from the quicksand of such heresies.<sup>33</sup> This has two sides to it, historical and speculative.

<sup>28</sup> *De potentia*, q. 9, a. 5.      <sup>29</sup> *ST I*, q. 29, a. 3, ad 1.

<sup>30</sup> Trinitarian theology is thus woven into an extension of the ancient *Credos* which developed and refined the ecclesial expression of faith in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, against heresies (*ST II-II*, q. 1, a. 8, ad 3).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *SCGI*, ch. 1: one can find a very clear description of this topic in R.-A. Gauthier, *St Thomas d'Aquin, Somme contre les Gentils, Introduction*, Paris, 1993, pp. 143–163 ('le métier de sage').

<sup>32</sup> *ST I*, q. 1, a. 8.

<sup>33</sup> *ST I*, q. 27, a. 1; see below, in Chapter 4, 'The Problems of Arianism and of Sabellianism'.

On the historical side, as Thomas says, heresies gave the Fathers the opportunity to deepen their understanding of revelation and hence to refine the deposit which they passed on to others.<sup>34</sup> The main topics in question were adoptionism, Arianism, Sabellianism, and the heresy concerning the Holy Spirit attributed to Macedonius.<sup>35</sup> Taking this on board, Thomas connects up with an important feature of patristic theology, and finds it a stimulus to his own presentation of Trinitarian faith, which will occupy an eirenic genre. He also pays attention to the Islamic rejection of the Trinity, but, on this occasion his efforts at documentation were rather more limited.<sup>36</sup> The 'errors' which Thomas discussed were mainly Christian heresies of patristic times, those which occasioned the Fathers' elaborations of Trinitarian doctrine. The reasons for this preference should probably be sought in the interesting metaphysical themes found in Trinitarian errors: 'The only errors which interest the Christian sage are those which have contributed to the deepening of Christian truth.'<sup>37</sup> The manifestation of the faith is tied to the refutation of errors which are opposed to it. As Fr R.-A. Gauthier has very well shown, Thomas is interested in an error, not only because of the number of adherents it has or will attract, but rather, an error 'is more interesting in the degree that it is opposed to a deeper truth'.<sup>38</sup> St Thomas tries to discover these heresies' internal logic and their roots, so that, ultimately, by contrast, he can find a way to disclose the Catholic faith.

The construction of a speculative reflection on the Trinity, using analogies and philosophical resources, is thus guided by a double-sided theme: the contemplation of revealed truth, which makes it possible, secondly, to defend the faith against error. The goal of Trinitarian theology is to show the intelligibility of the faith, and thus that arguments against it are not compelling. Since the principles of human reason come from God, they cannot contradict the faith given by God. St Thomas firmly maintains that the principles of human reason 'cannot be contrary to the truth of Christian faith'.<sup>39</sup> For this reason, the arguments against Trinitarian faith 'do not have demonstrative force, but are either probable reasons or sophisms'.<sup>40</sup> In some

<sup>34</sup> *De potentia*, q. 9, a. 5; *ST I*, q. 29, a. 3, ad 1; cf. *CEG*, prol.

<sup>35</sup> For documentation on St Thomas and the Trinitarian heresies, see our articles, 'Le photinisme et ses précurseurs chez St Thomas', *RT 95* (1995), 371–398; 'Le Traité de St Thomas sur la Trinité dans la *Somme contre les Gentils*', *RT 96* (1996), pp. 14–18, in *Trinity in Aquinas*, pp. 71–120.

<sup>36</sup> See our note in *Thomas d'Aquin, Traités: Les raisons de la foi, les articles de la foi et les sacrements de l'Église*, trans. Gilles Emery, Paris, 1999, pp. 30–35. This is a translation of Thomas' *De rationibus fidei*.

<sup>37</sup> Gauthier, *St Thomas d'Aquin*, p. 127.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>39</sup> *SCGI*, ch. 7; cf. *Super Boetium de Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3; *ST I*, q. 1, a. 8.

<sup>40</sup> *SCGI*, ch. 7 (no. 47).

cases, one can refute the arguments against Trinitarian faith by establishing that they are erroneous (sophisms); but at other times, one cannot directly show that the argument is inherently false: ‘The realities belonging to faith cannot be proven in a demonstrative way; for this reason, the falsity of certain [statements] contrary to the faith eludes the possibility of demonstration, but one can show that they are not necessary proofs.’<sup>41</sup> In the latter case, one can only prove that the arguments against the faith are just ‘probable reasons’, which do not necessarily bind our thinking. And, to show that, one must establish an alternative, by making use of different ‘probable reasons’.

In effect, when St Thomas discloses the intelligibility of the faith through ‘likely arguments’, he shows—without *demonstrating* the faith—that the arguments of the heretics (Arianism, Sabellianism), and the arguments of those who reject the Trinity, do not have the force of necessity: he does this by indicating a different approach which establishes a *cogent* alternative. It is not a matter of showing the complete convergence of faith and reason, but rather their non-divergence or, still better: the fittingness of truth. If there is an apologetic dimension in Thomas’ Trinitarian theology, it will be a somewhat indirect one.<sup>42</sup> Thomas explains this in broad strokes in the first question of the *Summa Theologiae*:

Since it has no science above itself, Holy Scripture can dispute with one who denies its principles only if the opponent admits at least some of the truths obtained through divine revelation; thus we can argue with heretics from texts in Holy Writ, and against those who deny one article of faith we can argue from another. If our opponent believes nothing of divine revelation, there is no longer any means of proving the article of faith by reasoning, but only of answering his objections—if he has any—against faith. Since faith rests upon infallible truth, and since the contrary of a truth can never be demonstrated, it is clear that the arguments brought against faith are not demonstrations, but are arguments that can be solved.<sup>43</sup>

On the one hand, the theologian puts forward scriptural arguments, reasoning which is compelling for believers, and, on the other, he makes use of ‘similitudes’, that is, the analogies which allow one to give an account of faith in three divine persons, in the main, the Augustinian analogy of word and love.<sup>44</sup> These ‘similitudes’ constitute arguments from congruity or fittingness,<sup>45</sup> ‘persuasive arguments which show that what the faith proposes *is not*

<sup>41</sup> *Super Boetium de Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3.

<sup>42</sup> On the apologetic put forward by St Thomas, see our *Thomas d’Aquin. Traités*, pp. 24–30.

<sup>43</sup> *ST I*, q. 1, a. 8.

<sup>44</sup> *Super Boetium de Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3: ‘It is thus that Augustine, in his book on the Trinity, inserts numerous comparisons drawn from philosophical doctrines to manifest the Trinity’; cf. *SCG I*, chs. 7–9.

<sup>45</sup> *ST I*, q. 32, a. 1, ad 2.

*impossible*.<sup>46</sup> They do not aim either to give a rational demonstration of the faith or to convince those who do not share the Christian faith in the Trinity.<sup>47</sup> If one refuses to use speculative reason like this, one can *assert* that God is a Trinity, but one cannot *disclose* the truth of Trinitarian faith, or make its truth more visible to human eyes. The task of speculative theology is very well expressed in a celebrated *Quodlibet* in which Thomas explains that, if the master or professor is content to rest his case on ‘authorities’ (the texts which are authoritative within theology), his audience will doubtless know what is true and what is false, but they will not have any idea of what the truth proposed to them means:

So it is necessary to rest one’s case on reasons which seek out the roots of the truth and which enable people to see how what one proposes is true. Unless one does this, if the master’s response is based purely on authorities, the listener will know that things are so, but he will have achieved neither knowledge nor understanding and will go away with an empty head.<sup>48</sup>

This is what speculative theology aims to do: to seek out the root of truth, with the ultimate purpose of discovering how one can know the truth of the revealed texts and the teaching of the Church. The doctrine of Trinitarian processions, relations, persons, and so on, are very precisely engraved into this intention. In offering us understanding of the truth, Trinitarian theology provides believers with a foretaste of that which they hope to contemplate in the beatific vision of God: this is Trinitarian theology’s essential contemplative dimension. This goal, which Thomas takes over from Augustine, is thus simultaneously modest and high-reaching: ‘To disclose this kind of truth [truth which belongs to faith alone], it is necessary to propose likely arguments, for the *exercise and support of the faithful*.’<sup>49</sup>

As Thomas sees it, the seat of his vocation as a theologian is to perform a ‘contemplative’ exercise, the purpose of which is to take a ‘small sip’<sup>50</sup> of the divine knowledge which is communicated in revelation. In presenting ‘likely reasons’, the Christian theologian enters into the understanding of a mystery which loses none of its transcendence and which, for that reason, is a profound source of spiritual joy. Thomas states that,

<sup>46</sup> *ST* II–II, q. 1, a. 5, ad 2.      <sup>47</sup> *SCG* I, ch. 9; cf. *De rationibus fidei*, ch. 2.

<sup>48</sup> *Quodlibet* IV, q. 9, a. 3. See J.-P. Torrell, ‘Le savoir théologique chez S. Thomas’, *RT* 96 (1996), 355–396.

<sup>49</sup> *SCG* I, ch. 9 (no. 54): *ad fidelium quidem exercitium et solatium*. On Trinitarian theology as a ‘spiritual exercise’ for Christians, see Augustine, *De Trinitate* XIII. XX. 26; XV. I. 1; XV. VI. 10. St Thomas himself sets the study and teaching of Wisdom amongst the spiritual exercises [*spiritualia exercitia*]: see *SCG* III, ch. 132 (no. 3047); *ST* II–II, q. 122, a. 4, ad 3.

<sup>50</sup> *SCG* IV, ch. 1.

it is useful for the human reason to exercise itself in such arguments, however weak they may be, provided only that there is no presumption to comprehend or to demonstrate. For to be able to see something of the loftiest realities, however thin and weak the sight may be, is . . . a cause of the greatest joy. The testimony of Hilary agrees with this. Speaking of this same truth, he writes as follows in his *De Trinitate*: ‘Enter these truths by believing, press forward, persevere. And though I may know that you will not arrive at an end, yet I will congratulate you on your progress. For, though he who pursues the infinite with reverence will never finally reach the end, yet he will always progress by pressing forward. But do not intrude yourself into the divine secret, do not, presuming to comprehend the sum total of intelligence, plunge yourself into the mystery of the unending nativity [the begetting of the only begotten God by the only unbegotten God]; rather, understand that these things are incomprehensible.’<sup>51</sup>

For this reason, an accurate interpretation of the treatise on the Trinity in the *Summa* must distance itself from every sort of rationalism. It is by a serious misreading that some writers have believed they have found an attempt at a rational demonstration of the Trinity in St Thomas’ works. Those who can never stop contrasting the spiritual aims of the Fathers with Thomas’ scholastic theology make the same mistake. Thomas undertakes a speculative or contemplative<sup>52</sup> exercise which, addressing itself to believers, enables them to touch lightly upon ‘something of the truth’ (*aliquid veritatis*),<sup>53</sup> in developing ‘approximations’ and analogies which suffice to exclude errors, because they show that the Trinity fulfils our minds without violating them.

#### (d) Why Investigate Notions, Relations, and Properties?

In his treatise on the Trinity, Thomas seeks to clarify the *relations* of the persons, that is, the *properties* which, by distinguishing the persons in a way which accounts for their plurality, enables us to perceive the features proper to each person. Why did the Schoolmen and Thomas devote such painstaking attention to relations, properties, and notions? Was it necessary or wise? At first glance, it is tempting to see it as a brilliant logical exercise, a sort of theological Glass-Bead Game.

<sup>51</sup> SCG I, ch. 8 (nos. 49–50). Cf. Hilary, *De Trinitate* II. 10–11 (SC 443, pp. 294–297); as we noted, he is speaking about the eternal begetting of the Son.

<sup>52</sup> When they come from Thomas’ hand, the terms ‘contemplative’ and ‘speculative’ mean practically the same thing and designate the same reality (*speculativus* is more often used in the treatises that are inspired by Aristotelianism, whereas the word *contemplativus* appears more frequently in the treatises drawing on Christian sources; cf. S. Pinckaers, ‘Recherche de la signification véritable du terme spéculatif’, *NRT* 81 (1959), 673–695).

<sup>53</sup> *De potentia*, q. 9, a. 5.

This is not a new problem. St Thomas met and reflected on it, under a different guise. The opinions of Praepositinus of Cremona gave him his opportunity. Chancellor of the University of Paris at the outset of the thirteenth century, Praepositinus sparked off a great debate about the ‘notions’ (*notiones*) in God. This technical term in Trinitarian theology means the proper characteristics of the persons, enabling us to distinguish the persons. Since the three divine persons are distinct, it is necessary to recognize something which is proper to each of them, by which they distinguish themselves and through which we can know them. For Peter Lombard, whom most Masters had followed since William of Auxerre,<sup>54</sup> there are five *notions*: the Father’s *unbegottenness* and *paternity*, the *filiation* of the Son, the *procession* of the Spirit, and his *spiration* (the latter is common to Father and Son, who breathe or ‘spirate’ the Holy Spirit).<sup>55</sup> We will return to this much later in the investigation of the relations and persons.<sup>56</sup> In the twelfth century and even into the thirteenth century, there was an animated debate about this: some theologians computed that these ‘notions’ are infinite in number; others considered that there are six, others three, and still others refused to accept that there are any at all.<sup>57</sup>

Praepositinus of Cremona positioned himself with the latter solution: he found no place for such notions. He claimed that when we say that the Father characterizes himself through *paternity*, or that ‘The Father distinguishes himself from the Son through paternity,’ these propositions just mean ‘the Father is the Father.’ The persons’ relative properties (fatherhood, filiation, procession) are only ‘manners of speaking.’ Our concepts and our analogical language, in as much as they signify the truth of God himself, are therefore reduced to the common *essence* of the three persons and to the three *persons* themselves: all that we can properly say is that the three persons are distinct and that they are one God. All the rest of it can be eliminated: God has no ‘properties,’ and it is not for us to recognize ‘notions’ in God.<sup>58</sup>

Faced with this question, St Thomas began by recalling God’s *simplicity*. God is not composed of this and that element: in God, the person is really

<sup>54</sup> William of Auxerre, *Summa aurea* I, tr. 7, ch. 2 (ed. J. Ribailier, Paris and Grottaferrata, 1980, pp. 116–118). Cf. J. Schneider, *Die Lehre vom dreieinigen Gott in der Schule des Petrus Lombardus*, Munich, 1961, pp. 172–180.

<sup>55</sup> This was what the Masters commonly taught in Thomas’ time. See *ST I*, q. 32, a. 3.

<sup>56</sup> See below, in Chapter 5, ‘Relative Opposition: Paternity, Filiation, Spiration, Procession,’ and in Chapter 8, ‘Unbegottenness: the Unengendered Father.’

<sup>57</sup> Praepositinus of Cremona, *Summa ‘Qui producit ventos’*, Book I, ch. 12.2 (ed. G. Angelini, *L’ortodossia e la grammatica: Analisi di struttura e deduzione storica della Teologia Trinitaria di Praepositino*, Rome, 1972, p. 277). Praepositinus stood on the shoulders of earlier writers; cf. J. Schneider, *Die Lehre vom dreieinigen Gott*, pp. 172–180.

<sup>58</sup> Praepositinus of Cremona, *Summa* I, ch. 12 (ed. Angelini, pp. 275–280); see G. Angelini’s exposition, which discerns a certain ‘nominalist orientation’ in Praepositinus’ thought (pp. 154 ff., especially pp. 181–185).

identical to the divine essence and is not composed of a property. 'But our natural reason cannot know the divine simplicity as it is in itself: this is why our mind apprehends and names God according to its own mode, that is, from the milieu of sensible objects, whence its knowledge is derived.'<sup>59</sup> In our world, we employ concrete words to designate concrete realities (such as a flower or a bird), and abstract words to signify the principles or 'forms' of these realities (like the whiteness of the flower, or the animality of the bird): language parallels our knowledge of things, and this knowledge itself is based in the composition or the complexity of the bodily realities which we can observe. We cannot do otherwise when we speak of God, since we speak about God in our own human language: we speak of the *wisdom* or the *goodness* of God (abstract names) and even of *God* himself ('concrete' name), and in the same way we speak of the *Father* (concrete name) and of his *paternity* (abstract name). In so doing, we are not claiming that the *property* or the *relation* of paternity is really something different from the *person of the Father himself*, but our grasp of the mystery is affected by the double mode of our knowledge and our language. Why must one take this into account in reflecting on the mystery of the Trinity? Thomas' answer is that,

We are obliged to do so for two reasons. The first is at the insistence of heretics. For since we confess the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit to be one God, they demand to know: *How can they be one God, and how can they be three Persons?* And to the first question, we answer that: they are one through their essence or deity; so there must also be some abstract terms whereby we may show that the persons are distinguished: these are the 'properties' or 'notions', that is, abstract terms like 'paternity' or 'filiation'. Therefore, the divine essence is signified as *What* (quid), the person as *Who* (quis); and the property as *Whereby* (quo).<sup>60</sup>

These explanations are very instructive. They take us back to the questions which the Cappadocian Fathers met when they were dealing with Arianism and Sabellianism. The faith professes three hypostases or three persons in God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But how can one show that the Three, whilst being the same God, are not mixed up with each other? That is, how does one show that the Father is not the Son or the Holy Spirit? To disclose the true divinity of the three persons, it is necessary to draw on the concept of essence (*ousia*), through which each of the three persons is truly God; and in the same way, to show the genuine plurality and distinction of the persons, one must pick out the characteristic through which the Father is Father, the Son is Son, and the Spirit is Spirit. The theory of the properties, such as one finds in Gregory Nazianzus, for instance, comes from this question: in seeking out the

<sup>59</sup> ST I, q. 32, a. 2.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.