

The Threeness and Oneness of God in Twelfth- to Fourteenth-Century Scholasticism¹

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“THERE IS NO SUBJECT where error is more dangerous, research more laborious, and discovery more fruitful than the oneness of the Trinity (*unitas Trinitatis*) of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” This warning of Augustine, which Peter Lombard puts at the beginning of his inquiry on the Trinity in his *Sentences*² and which commentators have often repeated, sets the tone for Trinitarian research during the golden age of scholasticism: The theological explanation of faith in the Trinitarian oneness of God, as Albert the Great makes explicit, is made with the conviction that here lies the goal of human existence, but that a mistake in this area would entail the destruction of the whole edifice of the faith.³

¹ Translation by Robert Williams of “Trinité et unité de Dieu dans la scolastique. XIIe–XIVe siècle,” in *Le christianisme est-il un monothéisme?*, ed. P. Gisel and G. Emery (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2001), 195–220.

² Peter Lombard, *Sententiae* I, d. 2, c. 1 (*Sententiae in IV Libris distinctae*, ed. I. Brady, tom. 1/2 [Grottaferrata/Rome: Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, 1971], 62); Augustine, *De Trinitate* Book 1, ch. 1, no. 5.

³ In his commentary on the *Sentences*, Albert the Great devotes two articles to the discussion of Augustine’s warning quoted by Lombard. See Albert the Great, I *Sent.* d. 2, aa. 6–7 (*Opera Omnia*, ed. Auguste Borgnet, vol. 25 [Paris: Louis Vivès, 1893], 60); see also Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super Libros Sententiarum* Book I, d. 2 (ed. Pierre Mandonnet, vol. 1 [Paris: Lethielleux, 1929], 77).

There is more to these observations than mere convention. For the history of Trinitarian doctrine during the scholastic period demonstrates the often laborious search for balance, punctuated by ecclesiastical sanctions and giving rise to hardheaded divergences among theologians. Without writing a history of Trinitarian doctrine, this study will attempt to outline some of the salient aspects of the relationship between the Oneness and the Threeness of God in scholastic thought by pointing out the decisive stages in this thought from the twelfth century until the beginning of the fourteenth century in order to highlight the *loci* of the question and the main ways of answering it.

I. Threeness and Oneness in the Beginning of Scholasticism: Ecclesiastical Reactions and Interventions

The Trinitarian question constitutes the great theme of twelfth-century theology.⁴ Two tensions may be cited as characteristic of this blossoming of Trinitarian theology. The first has to do with the method of investigation. The initiators of the scholastic method, considering the content of the faith by means of the rational resources of language and philosophy, ran into opposition from those who held to a traditional theology in the patristic and contemplative vein. The second tension concerns the stress put either upon the divine Oneness or upon the plurality of Persons in the difficult search for balance. These difficulties are illustrated in Abelard's writings and the reactions they aroused.

A. Roscellinus, Anselm, and Abelard

One of Abelard's first masters, Roscellinus of Compiègne (ca. 1050–ca. 1120), created a lively controversy by his refusal to agree that the three divine Persons were a single reality (*una res*). For Roscellinus, affirming the single reality of the three divine Persons would no longer allow us to safeguard the deposit of faith since of these Persons only the Son became flesh. Consequently, for fear of Patripassianism, Roscellinus holds that the three divine Persons are three realities (*tres res*) that have, however, one same will and one

⁴ Antonio Terracciano, "Dibattito sulla Trinità e orientamenti teologici nel XII secolo," *Asprenas* 34 (1987): 284–303.

same power. He compares them to three angels or three souls, which are likewise *tres res*. Here we are at the beginnings of the scholastic problem to which the masters of the thirteenth century still bear witness: “Can the three Persons be called ‘three realities’ (*tres res*)?”⁵ In his *Epistola de Incarnatione Verbi*, Anselm of Canterbury addresses a sharp reply to Roscellinus’s thesis. Seeing Roscellinus as a nominalist dialectician, Anselm criticizes him for his tritheism: “Either he intends to profess three gods, or he does not understand what he is saying.”⁶ In Anselm’s opinion, the reason for such an error lies in a poor grasp of the relationship between individuals and universals: “For in what way can those who do not yet understand how several specifically human beings are one human being understand in the most hidden and highest nature how several Persons, each of whom is complete God, are one God?”⁷ According to Anselm, Roscellinus’s thesis introduces a breach in the one substance of God.⁸ Thus Anselm attacks “those contemporary dialecticians (*dialectici*) or, rather, the heretics of dialectics who consider universal essences to be merely vocal emanations.”⁹ The

⁵ Peter Lombard, who highlights the Augustinian sources, will bring the question into the twelfth century (Peter Lombard, *Sententiae* I, d. 25, c. 2, nos. 4–5); Lombard uses the expression “*tres res*,” and likewise affirms “*una summa res*” in the Trinity by distinguishing between the Essence (*una res*) and the Persons (*tres res*); his commentators will echo this; see in particular Bonaventure, I *Sent.* d. 25, *dub.* 3 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. 1 [Quaracchi: Editiones PP. Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, 1882], 446); Thomas Aquinas, I *Sent.* d. 25, q. 1, a. 4.

⁶ Anselm, *Epistola de Incarnatione Verbi*, ch. 2, in *Anselm of Canterbury, The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 238.

⁷ *Ibid.*, ch. 1, 237.

⁸ Roscellinus will vigorously deny affirming a substantial plurality in God and distances himself from the tritheism charge in a letter he sent to Abelard on this subject (*PL* 178, 357–72). For an overview of Roscellinus’s Trinitarian thought, see Johann Hofmeier, *Die Trinitätslehre des Hugo von St. Viktor* (Munich: Max Hueber Verlag, 1963), 9–26.

⁹ Anselm, *Epistola de incarnatione Verbi*, ch. 1, 237. This nominalism or “vocalism” of Roscellinus (only words or vocal sounds and individual things exist; nothing is made up of parts) is considered the historical starting point of the dispute over universals: cf. Alain de Libera, *La querelle des universaux de Platon à la fin du Moyen Âge* (Paris: Seuil, 1996), 142–46.

Abbot of Bec answers Roscellinus theologically with the distinction between what is common and one in God (the divine Essence) and what is distinct (the properties, the Persons). The three divine Persons are a single *res* (substance, essence); if we wish to speak of *tres res*, we must include under the word *res* the relations rather than the substance.¹⁰ Anselm retraces the main elements of his answer in a letter addressed to Foulques, Bishop of Beauvais, to be read before the assembly of the Council of Soissons (in about 1092), which rejected Roscellinus's Trinitarian error.¹¹ Thus the eleventh century ends with a clear affirmation of the divine Oneness (*una res*), with the intention of avoiding the danger of tritheism created by the new dialectics.

In the wake of Anselm, Abelard (1079–1142) likewise reacted against Roscellinus's thesis. In a letter that he addressed to the Bishop of Paris around 1120, the Master of Le Pallet explains that the main purpose of his writings on the Trinity was to refute Roscellinus's tritheistic heresy condemned at the Council of Soissons.¹² The aim of *Theologia Summi Boni* and its succeeding elaborations (*Theologia Christiana*, *Theologia Scholarium*) is to furnish a defense of the traditional Trinitarian doctrine against the new "dialecticians." However Abelard organizes this defense on the very grounds of dialectics.¹³ For our purpose (which is not to consider the whole of Trinitarian theology but only the Threeness–Oneness relationship), Abelard's central thesis consists in focusing on the three divine Persons starting with the triad of divine attributes: power, wisdom, kindness (*potentia*, *sapientia*, *benignitas*). The Father "is called Father by reason of this unique power of His majesty"; the Son is called Son "because we find in Him a particular wisdom"; as for the Holy Spirit, He is so called "in accordance with the grace of

¹⁰ Anselm, *Epistola de Incarnatione Verbi*, ch. 2, 239–40.

¹¹ See M. Corbin, ed., *L'oeuvre de S. Anselme de Cantorbéry*, vol. 1 (Paris : Cerf, 1988), 262–65.

¹² Constant J. Mews, "Introduction" to *Petri Abaelardi Theologia "Summi Boni"*, CCCM 13 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1987), 39; cf. *PL* 178, 355–58.

¹³ We should understand by dialectics the logical method of language analysis and rational study applied to the pronouncements of faith and the maxims of the Fathers; cf. Franz Courth, *Trinität in der Scholastik* (Freiburg: Herder, 1985), 30–50; Jean Jolivet, *La théologie d'Abélard* (Paris, Cerf, 1997).

His goodness.” Thus “the name Father designates power; the name Son, wisdom; and the name Holy Spirit, the sentiment that is favorable to creatures.” In a word: “To say then that God is three Persons is the same as saying that the divine substance is mighty, wise, and good.” This is the way Abelard envisions the Trinity, from a rational perspective starting with the notion of the highest good (*summum bonum, tota boni perfectio*), which consists in the three characteristics of power, wisdom, and goodness.¹⁴

Abelard has a clear-cut view of God’s oneness (one single and singular substance) as well as of the properties that distinguish the Persons.¹⁵ If he accurately grasps the Threeness in the Oneness by means of the relative properties and processions (generation and procession), nevertheless he does not give up explaining these properties in the threefold manner described above. The properties of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct “for the Father is called Father only by the fact that He is mighty (*potens*), the Son by the fact that He can know (*discretus, potens discernere*), and the Holy Spirit by the fact that He is good (*benignus*).”¹⁶ The problem raised by such reasoning, which Abelard was well aware

¹⁴ Abelard, *Theologia Summi Boni*, Book 1, ch. 2 (CCCM 13 [Turnhout: Brepols, 1987], 86–88). This is the thesis that opens Abelard’s Trinitarian reflection in his first *Theology*; the later *Theologies* develop and complete this starting point but they do not substantially modify this initial position.

¹⁵ “What is proper to the Father is to exist through Himself, not through another, and to beget from all eternity a Son who is co-eternal with Him; what is proper to the Son is to be begotten, and to have been begotten by the Father only, to be neither created nor made nor proceeding but only begotten. As for the Holy Spirit, what is proper to Him is to proceed from the Father and the Son both, to be neither created nor made nor begotten but only to proceed” (ibid., Book 2, ch. 1, 124–25). We recognize here the doctrine of the “four properties” formalized by the subsequent tradition of the Schools.

¹⁶ Ibid., Book 2, ch. 4, no. 103, 150–51. The end of the chapter takes up this thesis again: “For God the Father, who is a Person according to the very meaning of the name, must be defined in an exact way as divine Power, i.e., mighty God; God the Son, as divine Wisdom; the Spirit of God as divine Goodness. Thus the Father differs from the Son through His property or definition (*proprietas siue diffinitio*), i.e., He is other than Him; in the same way, the one and the other differ from the Holy Spirit” (ibid., 152; also see 152–53).

of, is the following: How do we distinguish the Persons by attributes that also designate what is one in God (common power, wisdom, and goodness)?

Abelard's answer makes recourse to the language and grammatical structure of our statements: "Words taken in themselves have exactly the same value, or are equivalent as to what they signify, but even so they do not keep this value if they enter into a construction."¹⁷ Thus, in the statements we form about God as Trinity, we must distinguish those that concern the identity of essence (power common to the three Persons) from those that concern the identity of the property (the Father is mighty, etc.; power, wisdom, kindness as personal properties). Elsewhere, Abelard will explain the threesome of wisdom–power–goodness by the famous "similitude" of the bronze seal: the bronze material, the seal made of this bronze, and this seal at the moment of actually sealing (identity of substance, diversity of properties).¹⁸ This construct allows Abelard to shed light on the Trinitarian dimension of creation and salvation history: We attribute to the Father that which has to do with power (creation *ex nihilo*, sending his Son); to the Son we assign whatever has to do with wisdom (to judge, perceive); and to the Holy Spirit what pertains to the actions of divine grace.¹⁹

Clearly Abelard had no intention of attributing to the Father an essential power superior to the Son's, and we may well believe that he himself understood the usage of the power attribute in accordance with the connection that associates essential power with what would later be called notional power (power to beget, power to breathe forth).²⁰ Abelard recognizes that the reasons he puts forth are adaptations drawn from what we know from creatures, which in no way allow us to "understand," but he finds these reasons to be sufficient in disproving the sophisms of the dialecticians.²¹ The fact

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Book 3, ch. 11 [38], 173.

¹⁸ See for example Abelard, *Theologia Scholarium* (CCCM 13), II, 112 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1987), 462–63; cf. Sergio Paolo Bonanni, *Palare della Trinità. Lettura della Theologia Scholarium di Abelardo* (Rome: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1996), 185–221.

¹⁹ Abelard, *Theologia Summi Boni*, Book 3, ch. 1, nos. 48–50, 177–79.

²⁰ Bonanni, *Parlare della Trinità*, 86–102, 184.

²¹ Abelard, *Theologia Summi Boni*, Book 2, ch. 3, 138–39.

remains that in his doctrine, Abelard, determined in particular by his polemic against the tritheism with which he reproaches Roscellinus, lays the stress clearly on the oneness of the divine substance. Thus, he does not accept without qualification the use of the words “three” or “several” (*multa*) in reference to God; God is “several Persons,” but he is not “several,” and there is not in God “three in and of itself” (*tria per se*). Adding the word “three” to the word “persons” in the expression “three Persons” is only accidental (*accidentaliter*). Here Abelard provides the historical source of the scholastic question on “numerical terms” in the discourse on God.²² He is clear that we cannot properly apply number to God. Since he only considers number insofar as it comes under quantity, Abelard rejects numerical plurality in God, thereby also excluding the possibility that plurality of Persons is plurality per se; there is a multiplicity of properties but there is no numerical diversity or plurality in God.²³

Furthermore, the use of the power-wisdom-goodness ternary leads Abelard to affirm that the philosophers, and above all Plato, “the greatest of philosophers,” bore witness to the Trinity (the Platonic doctrine of God the Father of the world, of the *Nous*, and of the world soul); Plato even “taught what is essential concerning the Trinity.”²⁴ This enthusiastic Christian Platonism, which will flower again in the “school” of Chartres, is expressed in flag-waving fashion at the end of the *Theologia Summi Boni*: All men (Christians, Jews, pagans) can have access to the Trinitarian faith through their natural reason, for “as we have said, the fact that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is equivalent to the fact that God is Power, Wisdom, and Goodness; since no man with common sense, be he Jew or gentile, doubts this, it seems that no one lacks this faith.”²⁵ Such an affirmation, taken out of the proper context of Abelard’s thought, could only reinforce the suspicion of modalism (the primacy of the divine One) that would be brought against him. The Master of Le Pallet provides the terms of the famous

²² See for example Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1, q. 30, a. 3.

²³ Abelard, *Theologia Summi Boni*, Book 3, ch. 1, nos. 5–6, 159–60.

²⁴ “Plato . . . totius trinitatis summam post prophetas patenter edocuit,” *ibid.*, Book I, ch. 5, no. 36, 98–99.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Book 3, ch. 5, 200–1.

scholastic question, repeated by so many bachelors and masters: Can the Trinity be known by natural reason?²⁶

Very early on, Abelard became the object of a twofold criticism: rationalism (he wants to make the Trinity understood, Gautier of Mortagne will say of him) and modalism (disappearance of the Trinity in the divine Oneness).²⁷ Bernard of Clairvaux, less cognizant of Abelard's original theses, will add an accusation of Arianism or subordinationism.²⁸ Abelard underwent a first censure (condemnation of his *Theologia*) at the provincial Council of Soissons in 1121, most certainly under the heading of Sabellianism. Then, consequent to the intervention of William of Saint-Thierry and Bernard of Clairvaux, his teaching suffered a second condemnation at the Council of Sens in 1140. The first error in the lists of "heretical chapters" imputed to him concerns about the Trinitarian use of the wisdom-power-goodness ternary, and targets the subordinationism that, in the judgment of the censors, this usage implies.²⁹ In spite of these *calamitates* (Abelard wrote an account of them), it is to his credit that in a sharp reaction to any tritheism he laid the foundations of the scholastic treatment of the problem: the use of logic in dealing with the Trinity; the connection between the essential attributes of God and the properties of the Persons; the reflection on the Trinity starting with the idea of the Good; the rough draft of a reflection on "number" in God; the question of the Trinity in the face of natural reason; and so on. We must note in particular that Abelard's theses will lead to the elaboration of the doctrine of "appropriations," that is, the assignment of a common attribute (power, wisdom, goodness) to a particular divine Person on account of a real affinity of this attribute with the property of the Person (for

²⁶ See for example Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1, q. 32, a. 1.

²⁷ See the letter of Roscellinus, which criticizes Abelard for a certain Sabellianism (*PL* 178, 368–9).

²⁸ For these accusations of heresy directed at Abelard, see J. Hofmeier, *Die Trinitätslehre des Hugo von St. Viktor*, 9–26.

²⁹ "Quod Pater sit plena potentia, Filius quaedam potentia, Spiritus Sanctus nulla potentia" (*Capitula haeresum* XIX, n. 1); cf. C. J. Mews, "The Lists of Heresies Imputed to Peter Abelard," *Revue Bénédictine* 95 (1985): 73–110, at 108.

example, the affinity between the common attribute of power and the property of the Father who is without principle). This however does not reserve an essential attribute to a particular Person in an exclusive way.³⁰

B. Gilbert de la Porrée

Gilbert de la Porrée (†1154) was Chancellor of Chartres, then professor at Paris before becoming Bishop of Poitiers in 1142. An eminent figure in twelfth-century theology and initiator of a movement in the Schools (the “Porretans”), he brings to the reflection on the Threeness and Oneness of God tools furnished by Boethius, on whose *opuscula sacra* he wrote a commentary. Like Abelard, he was attacked on several occasions for his teaching on the Trinity. Preoccupied with showing how the Trinity is reconcilable with the Oneness of God, he excited a huge debate on the divine simplicity.³¹

With Gilbert the problem shifts from the analysis of language to the theory of sciences and crystallizes around the doctrine of relation in God. To his inquiry on God, Gilbert applies the *rationes theologicae* (study of the principles of created reality, the realm of abstraction, centered on the oneness and simplicity of God) and the *rationes naturales* (study of physical realities, the realm of the concrete created reality, analogies to which theology appeals to show the distinction of Persons). In the realm of natural things, Gilbert

³⁰ For elaboration (12th–13th centuries), see Jean Châtillon, “*Unitas, aequalitas, concordia vel connexio*. Recherches sur les origines de la théorie thomiste des appropriations (*Sum. Theol.*, I, q. 39, art. 7–8),” in Armand A. Maurer, ed., *St. Thomas Aquinas 1274–1974, Commemorative Studies*, vol. 1 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1974), 337–379.

³¹ Martin A. Schmidt, *Gottheit und Trinität nach dem Kommentar des Gilbert Porreta zu Boethius De Trinitate* (Basel: Verlag für Recht und Gesellschaft, 1956); Michael E. Williams, *The Teaching of Gilbert Porreta on the Trinity as Found in his Commentaries on Boethius* (Rome: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1951); Michael Stickelbroeck, *Mysterium Venerandum, Der trinitarische Gedanke im Werk des Bernhard von Clairvaux* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1994), 39–63; Marcia L. Colish, “Gilbert, The Early Porretans, and Peter Lombard: Semantics and Theology,” in Jean Jolivet and Alain de Libera, eds., *Gilbert de Poitiers et ses contemporains aux origines de la “Logica modernorum”* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1987), 229–50.

highlights Boethius' distinction between abstract forms (*quo est*) and the concrete object (*quod est*); so, on this basis, he affirms an analogous distinction in God. Without introducing a veritable real difference in God, Gilbert tends to attribute a certain objective value to our modes of knowledge (grasping of the object, then knowledge of the form), or, rather, he fails to distinguish the divine reality from what comes under our knowledge of God (starting from created realities).

Such a "realism of knowledge," as one could call it and which closely associated the logical and ontological orders, provoked a vigorous reaction from numerous theologians, particularly St. Bernard; he does not really do justice to Gilbert's thought when he accuses him of dividing God, that is, of placing a difference between God and *the divine essence* (*Deus et divinitas*), and of introducing a similar difference between the divine Person and the property (for example: the Person of the Father and his relational property of Fatherhood). Such is the first error imputed to Gilbert and condemned by his adversaries at the Council of Reims (or at its end) in 1148; as a matter of fact, this censure concerns Gilbert's disciples more than the Master's own thought.³² Without condemning Gilbert, Pope Eugenius III nevertheless made a doctrinal decision: "As regards the first [chapter] only, the Roman Pontiff defined that no reasoning should make a division between nature and person in theology, and that God (*Deus*) should be called divine essence (*divina essentia*) not only according to the sense of the ablative but also according to the sense of the nominative."³³ Hence-

³² André Hayen, "Le concile de Reims et l'erreur théologique de Gilbert de la Porrée," *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Âge* 10–11 (1936): 29–102; cf. the profession of faith opposed by St. Bernard (*ibid.*, 44): "Credimus simplicem naturam diuinitatis esse Deum, nec aliquo sensu catholico posse negari, quin diuinitas sit Deus, et Deus diuinitas [. . .] Credimus solum Deum Patrem, Filium et Spiritum Sanctum eternum esse, nec aliquas omnino res siue relationes, siue proprietates, siue singularitates uel unitates dicantur, et huiusmodi alia, inesse Deo, et esse ab eterno, que non sint Deus." So Bernard affirms that whatever is in God is God himself. See also Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, no. 745.

³³ A. Hayen, "Le concile de Reims et l'erreur théologique de Gilbert de la Porrée," 40–41; H. Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum*, no. 746.

forth, the divine simplicity is imperative for all scholastic theologians: absolute identity of God and the divine essence; identity of the Person and the essence; identity of the Person (the Father) and the relational property of this Person (Fatherhood).

As regards relation, Gilbert continues the heritage of Boethius for whom in God “substance preserves the [unity], relation introduces a multiple element in the Trinity (*substantia continent unitatem, relatio multiplicat trinitatem*). Hence only terms belonging to relation may be applied singly to Each.”³⁴ In order to preserve the oneness of the divine essence, which is absolutely identical in each Person, Gilbert explains that relation is not attributed *secundum rem*: It does not modify the essence, it is not something (*aliquid*) but a rapport with something (*ad aliquid*). We do not contrast the divine Persons by reason of their essence, rather they are distinguished by relation, which Gilbert declares is “extrinsic” or “affixed from the outside” (*extrinsecus affixa*).³⁵ Here, the term “extrinsic” means that relation is not a matter of the essential nature, that is, oneness, but of the nature of the distinction among the Persons, which does not affect the essential oneness. This extrinsic character rests upon a comparison with the makeup of a natural individual (*rationes naturales*). Here again Gilbert is reproached for introducing a division in God by making a distinction between the divine essence and the personal relations, to the detriment of the Person’s simplicity. Whatever its historical relevance, this reproach sets up the scholastic form of “Porretanism” as the classic example of the Trinitarian theology that Peter Lombard characterizes as heretical in his *Sentences*.³⁶ It runs

³⁴ Boethius, *De Trinitate*, chs. 5–6; English translation in Boethius, *The Theological Tractates*, trans. H.F. Stewart and E. K. Rand, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973).

³⁵ Gilbert de la Porrée, *Expositio in Boecii de Trinitate* I, 5, no. 43 (in Nikolaus M. Häring, *The Commentaries on Boethius by Gilbert of Poitiers* [Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1966], 148); cf. *ibid.* II, 1, no. 37, 170–71; for a general survey and a commentary on the texts: M. E. Williams, *The Teaching of Gilbert Porreta on the Trinity as Found in his Commentaries on Boethius*, 64–72.

³⁶ Peter Lombard, *Sententiae* I, d. 33, c. 1, vol. I/2, 242–43. Peter Lombard seems to have taken part in a consistory that Eugenius III convoked at Paris in 1247 to examine Gilbert’s teaching; in a harsh judgment, he took the side of St. Bernard; cf. the *Prolegomena*, in *ibid.*, vol. I/1, 28*–30*.

through the whole of theological literature on the Trinity from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries and, consequently, determines almost without exception theological reflection on the relationship between essence and personal properties, that is, on Oneness and Threeness in God.

C. Peter Lombard and Joachim of Fiore

Another misunderstanding helped to clarify the relationship between the Threeness and the Oneness of God. It was the controversy surrounding Joachim of Fiore regarding the relationship of the three Persons with the substance of God, the divine *res*. The debate has to do with the accusations Joachim directs at Peter Lombard on this point. In his *Sententiae*, the definitive version of which dates from the years 1155–58, Peter Lombard adopts a position drastically different from Roscellinus's, which was explained above. Lombard affirms, no doubt against Gilbert de la Porrée, the absolute prerogatives of God's oneness: God the Trinity is "a single and unique supreme reality" (*una summa res*).³⁷ Since the divine essence is this *una et summa res*, Lombard refuses to accept formulas like: "the Father begets the divine essence," "the divine essence begets the Son." Since the divine essence or substance is the very reality of God the Trinity, Peter Lombard thinks that we cannot speak of this essence as generating or being generated or proceeding: that would mean that the essence begets Itself, that is, that God the Trinity begets himself. It does not belong to the essence or substance but to the Person to be the object of generation or proceeding.³⁸

This understanding of the three Persons as *una res* that does not beget and is not begotten aroused the profound incomprehension and opposition of Joachim of Fiore (†1202). Attached to other traditional formulas that use the word "substance" or "essence" to mean person or hypostasis, Joachim rejects the terminology that is the rule with Peter Lombard. Since Joachim does not grasp Lombard's analysis, which distinguishes the *modi loquendi* (generation is not attributed to the substance but to the Person of this substance), he cannot accept a "*summa res* that does not beget, is not begotten, and does not proceed"; in his eyes such a *summa res*

³⁷ *Sententiae* I, d. 25, c. 2, no. 5 (vol. I/2, 194, with the note on this no. 5).

³⁸ *Ibid.* d. 5, c. 1, 80–87.

would constitute a fourth reality next to the *res generans*, the *res genita*, and the *res procedens* (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). For Joachim, Lombard thus expounds a “quaternity” in God, in a synthesis of Sabellianism and Arianism together.³⁹ Witness to a monastic wisdom opposed to the new learning of the doctors, attached to traditional formulas, and not grasping the analysis of language that Peter Lombard made use of, Joachim did not understand Lombard. The Fourth Lateran Council vigorously challenged his interpretation of Peter Lombard: The Council condemned the opusculum in which Joachim formulated his accusation of heresy against Peter Lombard, and accuses Joachim—not without another misunderstanding—of conceiving the divine Oneness as a collective unity (“*unitatem . . . quasi collectivam*”), that is, in the way several men are a single people.⁴⁰

As a consequence, the Council proclaims a profession of faith *cum Petro* (that is, with Peter Lombard) in the unique divine *res* that does not beget, is not begotten, and does not proceed since each of the Persons is this divine reality. The intervention of Lateran IV bears witness to the acceptance of a very vivid expression of the divine oneness in which the three Persons are seen as a unique *res* to which we cannot attribute any distinct notional act since this *res* is the Trinity. In the wake of Lateran IV, most thirteenth-century theologians would adopt this conception of the oneness of the

³⁹ Joachim’s *libellus* or *tractatus* (*De unitate seu essentia trinitatis*), which the Fourth Lateran Council called into question, is lost or, rather, has never been found. A text certainly by Joachim explicitly mentions this accusation of “quaternity” directed at Peter Lombard; this occurs in the work *De vita Sancti Benedicti et de officio divino secundum eius doctrinam*; see the edition of Cipriano Baraut, “Analecta Sacra Tarraconensia 24” (Barcelona: Biblioteca Balmes, 1951), 76–77: “Abolita primo impietate Sabelii, qui personas negavit, secundo pravitate Arii, qui unitatem scidit, tertio blasphemia Petri, qui unitatem a Trinitate dividens, quaternitatem inducit.” We find the whole case history, with numerous texts and the aim of clarifying Joachim’s thought through use of the opusculum *Confessio trinitatis*, in Axel Mehlmann, *De unitate trinitatis. Forschungen und Dokumente zur Trinitätstheologie Joachims von Fiore im Zusammenhang mit seinem verschollenen Traktat gegen Petrus Lombardus*, Diss. Freiburg im Br., 1991.

⁴⁰ *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols., ed. Norman P. Tanner (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990), vol. 1, 231–33.

divine *res*,⁴¹ firmly putting aside the attempt to conceive of Trinitarian oneness through a social or collective representation.

D. The Rejection of Trinitarian Monotheism by the Cathars

We know of medieval Christianity's missionary debate with Islam, starting with Peter the Venerable. Faced with the accusation of "tritheism," Christian theologians in this debate were led to present the Trinitarian faith in the framework of a strict monotheism (the three Persons are not three gods but a single God), as, for example, Thomas Aquinas bears witness.⁴² The affirmation of the Trinitarian oneness is also at work within Christendom, with the Cathars' rejection of this doctrine in the background. As a rule, twelfth- and thirteenth-century Catharism diluted monotheism with dualism and rejected the consubstantiality or equality of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Trinitarian thought of the Catharist movement was complicated and diverse. The Dominican Moneta of Cremona distinguishes in his monumental *Summa against the Cathars and Waldensians*, written around 1241, two main doctrinal groups among the Cathars: the radical dualists, who thought of the Son and Holy Spirit as creatures; and the mitigated dualists, who held to the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but in a subordinating manner (the Son being inferior to the Father, and the Holy Spirit inferior to the Son).⁴³ The Catharist

⁴¹ As an exception, we find some authors who reject the position of Lateran IV: see F. Robb, "A Late Thirteenth Century Attack on the Fourth Lateran Council: The *Liber contra Lombardum* and Contemporary Debates on the Trinity," *Recherches de Théologie Ancienne et Médiévale* 62 (1995): 110–44. For thirteenth-century scholastic reactions regarding Joachim, see Giovanni Di Napoli, "Gioachino da Fiore e Pietro Lombardo," *Rivista di Filosofia Neoscolastica* 71 (1979): 621–85; cf. 661–74.

⁴² Thomas wrote a treatise addressed to a missionary confronted with Islam in Syria, who asked him for arguments for preaching: *Les raisons de la foi*. Introduction, translation and notes by Gilles Emery (Paris: Cerf, 1999). See also Joseph Kenny, "Saint Thomas Aquinas: Reasons for the Faith Against Muslim Objections (and one objection of the Greeks and Armenians) to the Cantor of Antioch," *Islamochristiana* 22 (1996): 31–52.

⁴³ Moneta Cremonensis, *Adversus Catharos et Valdenses libri quinque*, ed. Thomas Augustinus Ricchinius (Rome: Ex typographia Palladis, 1743 [Reprint: Ridgewood, Greg Riss, 1966]), Book 1, c. 1, 4, 6; Book 3, c. 3, pars I,

texts seem to reveal still other currents: denial of the Trinity and modalism (the Trinity begins with the birth of Jesus; the Son and the Holy Spirit will be reabsorbed into the divine oneness at the end of time). In any case, the oneness of essence of the three persons appears unthinkable for Catharism.⁴⁴

In this context, Catholic authors strive in particular to show-case the consubstantiality of the Father and of the Son, as well as the full divinity of the Person of the Holy Spirit. If we take into account the impact of the Catharist question on the mission of the Church and on the theology related to it, reflection in light of dualism and the denial of the Trinity (neo-Arianism or subordinationism) will lead to putting divine oneness at the forefront of Catholic doctrine, that is, the perfect consubstantiality of the three Persons who are a single God, *bona Trinitas*. We have a good example of this in the profession of faith, *Firmiter credimus*, of Lateran IV, which, reacting to Catharism, puts the accent clearly on the oneness of God the Creator (“the one principle of all things”), as well as on the oneness and consubstantiality of the Trinity (“three Persons but one absolutely simple essence, substance or nature”).⁴⁵

II. Threeness and Oneness: Paths of Knowledge

In twelfth- and thirteenth-century scholastic thinking, the relationship between Threeness and Oneness crystallizes around two main questions: first, our knowledge of the Trinity; and, second, the articulation of person and of divine essence around the notion of relation. Concerning the first question, we can distinguish three kinds of responses in scholastic theology.

234, 237–38; Book 3, c. 5, 265, 268. For the worth of Moneta’s oral and written documentation, see Gerhard Rottenwöhler, *Der Katharismus*, vol. I/1 (Bad Honnef: Bock und Herchen, 1982), 59–63. See also the *Summa de Catharis* of the convert, Rainier Sacconi, who, around 1250, recounts the history of the Cathars: Francis Sanjek, “Raynerius Sacconi, O. P., *Summa de Catharis*,” *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 44 (1974): 31–60, cf. 51.

⁴⁴ Georg Schmitz-Valckenberg, *Grundlehren katharischer Sekten des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Schönigh, 1971), 136–43 and 152–57.

⁴⁵ *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1, 230.

A. From Oneness to the Trinity: The “Necessary Reasons”

An important theological current that ran through twelfth- and thirteenth-century thinking sought to demonstrate the faith in the Trinity by means of arguments imposed by reason, starting from the divine oneness or from the attributes connected to the oneness of God. In his *Monologion* (1076), St. Anselm inaugurates the way of such “necessary reasons.” As we know, Anselm first establishes the necessary existence of God the Creator. However, his reflection does not stop at this theistic perspective. Beginning with chapters 9 through 12 of the *Monologion*, Anselm perceives an exemplary form (*forma*) of the things to be created, an archetypal form existing in the mind of the Creator: a word (*locutio*) in God’s mind. In this way, Anselm is led to detect the Person of the Word in a dialectical discovery within the *unum aliquid* of chapters 1 through 4. Reflection on the unique Creator thus leads to the elucidation of a *locutio rerum*, the eternal Word, in which God the Creator speaks himself and knows himself, and through which he speaks creatures (chapters 32 through 35). At a later stage, Anselm extends his reflection to include the Holy Spirit: in the supreme Spirit, where he notes the mutual relationship of Father and Son, he detects the love of self that, as reason rightly holds, this Spirit must have for himself and which appears as the mutual love of the Father and the Son (chapters 49 through 58).

Starting with a monotheistic affirmation in this fashion, Anselm elaborates an explanation of the Trinity on the basis of the properties of God-Spirit (Word and Love). This reflection, in conformity with the request that Anselm had received and which he recalls in his *Prologue*, intends “nothing whatsoever to be argued on the basis of the authority of Scripture, but the constraints of reason concisely to prove, and the clarity of truth clearly to show, in the plain style, with everyday arguments, and down-to-earth dialectic, the conclusions of distinct investigations.”⁴⁶ Anselm’s thinking works from within the faith, a thinking he views as a “meditation on the mean-

⁴⁶ Saint Anselm, *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 5.

ing of the faith”⁴⁷ rather than as a philosophical elaboration on the Trinity. Nevertheless, he gives an explanation of Trinitarian faith starting with a consideration of the divine oneness with reasons that “reach their conclusion necessarily, as it were (*quasi necessarium*).”⁴⁸ Thus Anselm transmits to the scholastics a theological plan of rational reflection that discovers the Threeness in the Oneness.

Above were mentioned Abelard’s theses, which, in another kind of reflection, attributes a discovery of the Trinity to philosophers, more precisely to the Platonists; Abelard recognizes in natural reason a capacity to raise itself toward the Trinitarian mystery. Before getting to the grand syntheses of the thirteenth century, we must highlight an important step in the history of doctrine: Richard of Saint Victor. In his *De Trinitate* (about 1170), whose major theme is the Trinity–Oneness relationship, the Master of Saint Victor takes a methodological approach that is comparable to Anselm’s. Within a knowledge derived from faith, Richard aims to present “not only plausible but necessary reasons (*necessarias rationes*)” in order to show the truth of the faith. His plan, which proceeds from faith to knowledge (*de fide ad cognitionem*), is summed up in the *Prologue*: “Let us try . . . to understand by reason what we believe (*comprehendere ratione quod tenemus ex fide*).”⁴⁹ The reasons brought forth are not detached from the mystery of faith (Richard escapes the accusation of rationalism); these reasons, however, do not merely constitute motives of “convenience”: They are rationally necessary because the truth they deal with is itself necessary.

In a search that joins the learning of the Schools with the contemplative wisdom of the cloister, Richard of Saint Victor is convinced of the validity of this theological approach concerning

⁴⁷ In the *Prooemium* of the *Proslogion*, Anselm describes the plan of the *Monologion* in this way: “Exemplum meditandi de ratione fidei;” correlatively, the *Proslogion* follows the proposition of “faith seeking understanding (*fides quaerens intellectum*);” *ibid.*, 82–83.

⁴⁸ *Monologion* 1; *ibid.*, 11. See Renato Perino, *La dottrina di S. Anselmo nel quadro nel suo metodo teologico e del suo concetto di Dio* (Rome: Herder, 1952); Olegario González, *Misterio trinitario y existencia humana* (Madrid: Rialp, 1966), 260–94; Paul Vignaux, “Nécessité des raisons dans le *Monologion*,” *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 64 (1980): 3–25.

⁴⁹ Richard of Saint Victor, *De Trinitate*, ed. Gaston Salet, “Sources chrétiennes 63” (Paris: Cerf, 1999), 55.

the Trinity: “Since we are dealing with the exposition of necessary realities, I am absolutely persuaded that there exist not only plausible but also necessary arguments (*necessaria argumenta*).”⁵⁰ The starting point of Richard’s thinking lies in the concept of God as perfect sovereign Good: eternal Being who is the unique primordial substance. The movement from Oneness to the Trinity is made by means of the notion of the good and, more precisely, by that of charity. Such are the grand theses of Book III of the *De Trinitate*: The fullness of bliss and the fullness of the divine glory likewise postulate a plurality of Persons, just as does the fullness of charity. It is in this construct that Richard lays out his conception of *condignus* and *condilectus*. With the same rigor, he strives to establish the necessary equality of the three Persons in oneness, and so shows that there can be but three Persons in the one divine nature (Book V). This plan of articulating the Oneness and the Threeness in a logical, metaphysical, contemplative, and aesthetic exercise of reason informed by faith will constitute a lasting fascination in scholastic thought, as St. Bonaventure magnificently illustrates.

Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (†1274) offers the first great synthesis of the elucidation of the Oneness–Threeness relationship in the tradition of Augustine, Anselm, and Richard, to which from now on the Dionysian heritage will be joined. Bonaventure’s Franciscan masters had already put forward the notion of the Good to account for Threeness in Oneness. In the *Summa Fratris Alexandri*, which Bonaventure draws on, sovereign goodness provides the reason for “number” in God: God’s goodness is the motive for the plurality of Persons insofar as it belongs to goodness to communicate itself (following the axiom developed in the *Divine Names* of Pseudo-Dionysius). Since God’s goodness is perfect, its communication will be perfect, and this perfection consists in transmitting

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Book 1, ch. 4, 70–71. For the exposition of the Trinitarian faith by means of the resources of reason in Richard (necessary reasons), see O. González, *Misterio trinitario y existencia humana*, 263–95; Nico Den Bok, *Communicating the Most High. A Systematic Study of Person and Trinity in the Theology of Richard of St. Victor (†1173)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996), 151–201. On the central place of charity in this Trinitarian elaboration, see Pierluigi Cacciapuoti, “*Deus existentia amoris*.” *Teologia della carità e teologia della Trinità negli scritti di Riccardo di San Vittore (†1173)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998).

the whole of the divine Substance by way of nature (the generation of the Son) and will (the spiration of the Holy Spirit).⁵¹ In his commentary on the *Sentences* (about 1250), Bonaventure combines the Dionysian medieval tradition with the legacy of Anselm and Richard by developing “necessary reasons” around the following themes.⁵²

First, there is the motif of beatitude, goodness, charity, and joy (themes stemming from Richard of Saint Victor). Each of these divine attributes leads us to suppose a plurality of Persons since their perfection or fullness cannot be realized in a solitary mode; the perfection of beatitude, etc. entails a communication and a plurality in God. The theme of goodness in particular runs through this work of Bonaventure, who explains in his homilies on the *Hexaemeron*, for example, that if the Father did not pour himself out fully by begetting a Son equal to himself, he would not be perfect for his goodness would not communicate itself in the highest mode of intrinsic diffusion (we could then conceive of something better and greater than the Father, which is an Anselmian argument).⁵³ If there were no Trinity of Persons, “God would not be the highest Good because He would not pour Himself out completely.”⁵⁴

Second, there is the theme of perfection. The highest perfection consists in producing a being of the same nature; this “multiplication” cannot take place through an otherness of essence in God since the divine essence is necessarily unique. Therefore it takes place through an otherness of consubstantial Persons.

⁵¹ *Summa Fratris Alexandri*, Book 1, 1, inq. 2, tract. 1, q. 3, c. 5 (Alexander of Hales, *Summa Theologica*, vol. 1 [Quaracchi: Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1924], no. 317).

⁵² Bonaventure, I *Sent.* d. 2, a. 1, q. 2, fund. 1–4 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. 1, 53); for these necessary reasons in Bonaventure’s Trinitarian theology, see O. González, *Misterio trinitario y existencia humana*, 99–505; for the Trinitarian theme of goodness and primacy, see Gilles Emery, *La Trinité créatrice* (Paris: Vrin, 1995), 173–84.

⁵³ Bonaventure, *Hexaemeron* XI, 11 (*Opera Omnia*, t. 5, 1891, 381–82).

⁵⁴ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, c. VI, 1–2 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. 5, 310–11); English translation: *St. Bonaventure’s Itinerarium mentis in Deum. With an Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, trans. Philotheus Boehner, “Works of St. Bonaventure 2” (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1956, reprinted 1998), 89–91.

The third theme is that of simplicity. It comes down to simplicity, observes Bonaventure, that one nature exists in several suppositis (the case with the universal); but it is through a fault in simplicity that nature multiplies these suppositis; therefore the perfection of the divine simplicity leads us to recognize in it a plurality of consubstantial suppositis.

Finally, there is the theme of primacy. For Bonaventure, who develops here a central insight of his metaphysics, primacy (*primitas*) designates the fullness of the source; if a reality is primary, it is because of this primacy that it is the source of other realities (*quia primum, ideo principium*).⁵⁵ Primacy designates the fecundity and the “wellspringness” (*fontalitas*) of primordial reality. For the Franciscan Master, it is in virtue of this principle that the unbegetability of the Father (the Father is “without principle”) designates in positive fashion his “fullness as source” (*plenitudo fontalis*). In the background of this principle, we recognize the Platonic theme of the universal exemplarity of the One, as well as Aristotle’s reflection on the cause of truth.⁵⁶ Bonaventure’s axiom of primacy gives rise to a two-stage reflection. First of all, this axiom concerns the essential oneness of God (being absolutely first, God is the Creator); Bonaventure then applies it to the Personal plurality around the Person of the Father: “[T]he divine essence, which is primary, is the principle of the other essences; thus, in the same way, the Person of the Father, since it is primary—the Father does not come forth from any other—is the principle and possesses fecundity towards the Persons.” Here Bonaventure’s thought introduces the idea of God’s supreme actuality (*summa actualitas*). In God there is nothing in a state of potency; what there is in God exists in a perfect state of act; there is no potentiality in God but a supereminent actualization of every perfection.⁵⁷ This allows him to conclude: “In God, this

⁵⁵ Bonaventure, I *Sent.* d. 7, a. 1, q. 2, concl.; d. 27, 1, a. 1, q. 2, ad 3 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. 1, 139, 470).

⁵⁶ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* A [II] I, 993b24–994a1; cf. Bonaventure, II *Sent.* d. 3, 1, a. 1, q. 2, fund. 2 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. 2, 94).

⁵⁷ On this theme: Klaus Obenauer, *Summa Actualitas, Zum Verhältnis von Einheit und Verschiedenheit in der Dreieinigkeitslehre des heiligen Bonaventura* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1996).

fecundity relative to God can only exist in act; it is therefore necessary (*necesse est*) to posit a plurality of Persons.”⁵⁸

The primacy theme, whose importance cannot be underestimated, runs through Bonaventure’s whole work. Together with goodness, primacy constitutes in Bonaventure the pivot of the Oneness–Threeness articulation. This characteristic trait of Bonaventuran metaphysics shows goodness, in the words of Théodore de Régnon, as the expansibility by virtue of which the supreme Oneness is a primacy. He likewise grounds God’s actions (creation and salvation) in the transcendent communication of the divine life: The intra-Trinitarian well-springness (*fontalitas*) is the source of God’s *fontalitas* toward His creatures.⁵⁹

So, for Bonaventure, the primacy of the supreme Principle (God) includes the Trinity (*primitas . . . includit trinitatem*): God is Threeness from the very fact that He is first. Bonaventure’s theological plan is not limited to establishing the non-contradiction or the harmony between Oneness and Threeness, but it aims at showing that a right consideration of the divine oneness necessarily entails the Trinitarian affirmation: The affirmation of the Trinity is “included” in the affirmation of the oneness, and it is theology’s task to do a kind of “disenvelopment” to bring out the richness of this Trinitarian oneness using the resources of reason. Such is the fundamental aim of his eight *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*. Thus, Bonaventure can explain: “We have to posit in God a plurality of Persons, as the Faith teaches and *as the reasons put forth show*.” Having evoked the simplicity and primacy of God, he concludes: “With these conditions in mind, it is necessary to posit a plurality of Persons.”⁶⁰ To be sure, Bonaventure excludes the possibility that philosophers could have known the Trinity through the resources of natural reason alone. He also acknowledges that for non-Christians the affirmation of a Trinitarian

⁵⁸ Bonaventure, I *Sent.* d. 2, a. 1., q. 2, fund. 4 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. 1, 53).

⁵⁹ Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, q. 8, ad 7 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. 5, 115); this q. 8 is entirely devoted to the Primacy–Trinity articulation. For the notion of *primitas*, see O. González, *Misterio trinitario y existencia humana*, 143–62; Luc Mathieu, *La Trinité créatrice d’après S. Bonaventure* (Paris: Ed. Franciscaines, 1992), 41–56 and 125–28.

⁶⁰ Bonaventure, I *Sent.* d. 2, a. 1, q. 2, sol. (*Opera Omnia*, vol. 1, 54).

oneness presents a contradiction.⁶¹ An understanding that discovers and posits the Trinity on the basis of unity is “an understanding elevated by faith.”⁶² It is therefore not a question of a philosophical demonstration of the Trinity, but rather of what we might call “reasons for the faith.” We should add that Bonaventure does not make the clear distinction between the order of faith and that of reason such as we see, for example, in Thomas Aquinas. Doubtless, we can characterize this approach, which initiated a whole school of thought, as a kind of rational knowledge at the heart of a mystical experience. Bonaventure bears witness to the persistence of a theology that puts forward a contemplative elevation of the mind, with its rational resources (necessity), toward the object of faith.

This search for necessary reasons postulating the Trinity in the name of a certain understanding of the divine oneness does not end with Bonaventure; other authors will pursue it at the end of the thirteenth century and into the fourteenth century. Here we can take by way of example the thought of Henry of Ghent (†1293). His Trinitarian theology, founded on the Thomistic doctrine of the Word and of Love, follows in the footsteps of Thomas Aquinas rather than in those of Bonaventure. Nonetheless, he succeeds in adapting Bonaventure’s thesis. For Henry, it is through faith that we affirm the generation of the Word and the procession of Love in God. Nevertheless, after faith has made the Trinity known to us, we can *prove its necessity* by rational arguments.⁶³ Indeed, Henry holds that the perfection of intellectual activity in God necessarily demands the fruitful “production” of a Word; likewise, the perfection of the willing and loving activity in God demands the spiration of the Holy Spirit. The perfection of

⁶¹ Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, q. 2, a. 2, sol. (*Opera Omnia*, vol. 5, 65).

⁶² Bonaventure, *Hexaemeron* XI, 5 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. 5, 381); cf. *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, q. 2, a. 2, sol.: “anima aliquatenus per fidem purgata et elevata” (*Opera Omnia*, vol. 5, 65).

⁶³ Henry of Ghent, *Quodlibet* VI, q. 2 (*Opera Omnia*, “Ancient and Medieval Philosophy, Series 2, 10,” vol. 10 [Louvain-Leiden: Leuven University Press-Brill, 1987], 36): “Postquam tamen ex fide tenemus istas emanationes in Deo, ipsarum necessitatem in se manuductione rationis possumus probare.”

God's spiritual activity necessarily entails the personal distinction of the Father, his Word, and his Love; this reason can establish.⁶⁴

Quite logically, Henry draws the following extraordinary conclusion: If there had only been the essential intelligence and will of the one God (i.e., Oneness without Threeness), God could not have created the world with wisdom and freedom. The Person of the Word, conceived as the manifestation and expression of the Father's knowledge, is required in order to grasp the creative act. In the same way, the Person of the Spirit, conceived as the fruit of a surge of fruitful love, is required in order to perceive the creative activity of the divine will. The procession of the Son and the Spirit must necessarily be presupposed before creative activity.⁶⁵ This argument is not new, but the concrete form of its elaboration is original: It combines the Trinitarian doctrine of Thomas (doctrine of the Word and Love, creative causality of the Trinitarian processions) with Bonaventure's articulation of the Oneness and Threeness (necessity). Here we perceive that necessity affects just as much the Oneness–Threeness relationship as the Trinity–creation relationship.

B. Threeness and Oneness: Two Distinct Orders of Knowledge

Faced with this flow of "necessary reasons," other theologians make a clearer distinction between what is of faith and what constitutes the realm of rational research. It is to their credit that they devised the thesis that most often won acceptance in subsequent theology. The most characteristic example is without a doubt Thomas Aquinas (†1274). For Aquinas, as for Bonaventure, philosophical reason ("natural reason") is incapable of arriving at a knowledge of the Trinity. Philosophical (metaphysical) reasoning succeeds in knowing God as the first cause of creatures; now, the creative action is common to the three Persons who act here in virtue of their common essence; consequently, philosophical reason can only attain to the attributes that belong to God by reason of his oneness of essence.⁶⁶ Correlatively, it is only through faith that the believer can

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, VI, q. 1, 2–31; cf. *ibid.*, VI, q. 2, 36.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, VI, q. 2, 33–40. In conclusion, Henry states: "Dicimus quod productio divinarum personarum necessario praecedit productionem creaturarum tamquam causa eorum," 37.

⁶⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, 1, q. 32, a. 1 (Rome: Ed. Paulinae, 1988).

perceive the way in which the divine Persons, in virtue of their properties, are distinctly involved in creative and salvific action.⁶⁷ Pursuing his reflection, Thomas Aquinas does away with the “necessary reasons” that Bonaventure invoked to go from oneness to the affirmation of the Trinity: “We must state without ambiguity that there is in God a plurality of suppositis or Persons in the oneness of the essence, *not because of reasons put forward that do not reach a conclusion with necessity*, but because of the truth of the faith.”⁶⁸ Bonaventure’s reasoning seems to him to be a pious rationalism that endangers the faith by wanting to prove too much, for it takes away from the dignity of the faith. For Thomas, it is only on the basis of revelation in salvation history that we can recognize a Trinity in oneness.⁶⁹ Theological arguments (the famous Trinitarian analogies) only constitute probable arguments, indications or adaptations that allow us to show believing minds what we hold on faith but without any validity from necessity.⁷⁰ These analogies, however, make manifest that what is proposed to our faith is not impossible, and they show that arguments against the faith can be refuted (such arguments against the Trinity are not compelling). For this reason, Aquinas makes a fundamental methodological distinction in the consideration of Oneness and Threeness. Effectively, Trinitarian epistemology involves two distinct orders of knowledge: that which concerns the divine essence (oneness), which natural reason can reach to a certain extent, and that which concerns the distinction of Persons (Trinity), to which only faith gives access.⁷¹ The articulation of the two orders is assured by analogies in a reflection of which faith is the principle (Word, Love, Relation, Person).

⁶⁷ This, according to Thomas Aquinas, is the “motive” of the revelation of the Trinity: to understand that creation is a Trinitarian work and that the action and gift of the divine Persons accomplish our salvation (*ST* 1, q. 32, a. 1, ad 3).

⁶⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *I Sent.* d. 2, q. 1, a. 4, sol., 74.

⁶⁹ *ST* 1, q. 32, a. 1.

⁷⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *I Sent.* d. 3, q. 1, a. 4, ad 3 (*adaptationes quaedam*); *ST* 2–2, q. 1, a. 5, ad 2 (*persuasiones quaedam*).

⁷¹ Hence the *Summa Theologiae*’s treatise *De Deo* has three parts: first, what concerns the oneness of essence; second, what concerns the distinction of Persons; and, third, what concerns the procession of creatures *a Deo* (1, q. 2, *Prol.*).

C. Threeness and Oneness: Two Separate Orders of Knowledge

Directly opposed to Bonaventure's theses, a third current breaks the connection between Threeness and Oneness in the order of knowledge. This extreme position is well illustrated by Durandus of Saint-Pourçain (†1334), the "Modern Doctor" who was Lector of the Papal Court in Avignon. Durandus bears witness to a new stage of thinking that dissociates two ways of knowing: on the one hand, science, and on the other, authority. Faith and theology fall under authority and not science. For Durandus, an article of faith is defined precisely by its non-demonstrability and its unscientific nature. Reacting against the epistemology of Thomas Aquinas, he brushes aside the validity of analogies to illustrate the Trinitarian mystery (Word and Love). For Thomas, Christian theology cannot prove the faith, but it can show that the rational arguments put forward against the faith are not strictly imperative. For Durandus, there is no way to establish rationally that belief in the Trinity does not contain anything impossible. Reason is incapable of strictly disproving that the doctrine of the Trinity does not contain contradictions. Also, when he confronts objections against the existence of a Trinity in Oneness, Durandus simply offers no response: Such a project would be useless by definition. Durandus of Saint-Pourçain thus bears witness to the shift in perspective that is at work in the fourteenth century: A gulf opens between the theological order and the philosophical order, bringing with it an isolation of faith and theology (authority) when confronted with the prerogatives of reason (science).⁷²

Thus we are in the presence of three kinds of epistemology concerning the Oneness–Threeness relationship. They correspond to three different attitudes of discussion on the matter, either on the philosophical level or on the missionary level. First, there is the reasoning that aims at establishing rationally (*rationes necessariae*) the Christian belief in the Trinity (the missionary aspect could be illustrated by Raymond Martin or Raymond Lull). Second, there is a "defensive" apologetic reasoning that does not appeal to necessary reasons to affirm the Trinitarian faith, but which thinks itself

⁷² Gilles Emery, "Dieu, la foi et la théologie chez Durand de Saint-Pourçain," *Revue Thomiste* 99 (1999): 659–99.

capable, on the rational level, of disproving arguments advanced against belief in the Trinity (Thomas Aquinas).⁷³ Third, we find an attitude that abandons this apologetic intellectual project by separating the order of the divine Oneness from the order of the Trinity (Durandus of Saint-Pourçain).

III. The Divine Essence (Oneness) and the Persons (Threeness)

With the scholastics, the articulation of the divine oneness and of the Trinity takes place in the discussion, at the speculative level, on the relationship between the divine essence and the Persons. The common position, whose precision resulted from the debate on the theses of Gilbert de la Porrée, is well illustrated by Peter Lombard in the middle of the twelfth century: Each Person, taken by Himself, is absolutely and really identical with the divine essence, and the three Persons are one and the same divine essence or substance (*una summa res*).⁷⁴ The threeness of Persons is affirmed within a very strict understanding of the divine oneness (monotheism). Afterward, theologians will try to establish a difference between the reality of God Himself and our way of knowing, which entails a diversity of concepts. Person and essence are identical in the order of God's reality, but the concepts of person and essence are different. We affirm, then, a "real identity" and a "distinction of reason" between the person and the essence.⁷⁵ Against "Porretanism" the scholastic masters of the thirteenth century did not fail, in general, to make clear that the relational property is not added to the essence (*extrinsecus affixa*); the relational property is "nothing other" than the essence.⁷⁶

The problematic Augustinian and anti-Porretan issues lead to the seeking of the ultimate articulation of the Trinity and Oneness in the theory of relation. Thomas Aquinas's thought plays a decisive role

⁷³ Vincent Serverat, "L'irrisio fidei. Encore sur Raymond Lulle et Thomas d'Aquin," *Revue Thomiste* 90 (1990): 436–48.

⁷⁴ Peter Lombard, *Sententiae* I, d. 34, c. 1–2, 246–51.

⁷⁵ See for example Albert the Great, I *Sent.* d. 34, aa. 1–3 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. 26, 162–68).

⁷⁶ See for example Bonaventure, I *Sent.* d. 33, a. 1, q. 2 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. 1, 574–76). Duns Scotus's formal distinction does not alter this oneness.

here and will determine the subsequent discussion (it will provoke either agreement or critical reservation). Aquinas understands the divine Person as a subsisting relation. More precisely, the concept of “divine Person” signifies relation insofar as this relation is endowed with the consistency of a reality that subsists (that is, relation as hypostasis).⁷⁷ If the Dominican Master can conceive of the person as a relation, it is because of his analysis of relation. Thomas’s thought starts with the categorial conception of relation as an accident existing not “between” things but “in” things. Developing Aristotle’s line of thought (*Categories* 7 and *Metaphysics* D, 15), Thomas Aquinas distinguishes two aspects of relation, as in each of the nine genera of Aristotelian accidents: first, the existence of the accident (*esse*); and, second, the definition or proper nature of this accident (*ratio*). As far as its *ratio* is concerned, relation presents a unique character among the accidents: It does not directly affect its subject, it is not an intrinsic determination of its subject, but it is a pure relationship to another (*ad aliud*). Relation has here an “ecstatic” character, a sort of metaphysical simplicity that allows its direct attribution to God. Yet as to its existence (*esse*), relation, as one of the categories, possesses the mode of existence proper to accidents, that is, inherence in a subject (existence in and through another).

The application of this analysis to God is clear: As regards existence, the *esse* of the divine relation is the very being of the unique divine essence; under the aspect of its existence, relation is purely and simply identified with the unique being of God. As regards its definition or proper nature, relation is transposed in God as a pure relationship of “opposition” according to origin (fatherhood, filiation, procession); under this second aspect, relation does not consist in a determination of the divine essence, but only in an interpersonal reference according to origin.⁷⁸

Thus it is within the theme of relation that Thomas Aquinas arranges the question of the relationship between Oneness and Threeness. For Aquinas, the unique essence is not on one side and relation on the other. Everything comes together in relation, which comprises the element of personal distinction (*ratio*) and the element of the divine hypostatic subsistence (*esse*). Here we see

⁷⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1, q. 29, a. 4.

⁷⁸ *ST* 1, q. 28, a. 2.

quite well that, contrary to what will become the common teaching of the Thomistic school, Thomas Aquinas does not make a division between a treatise “*De Deo uno*” and “*De Deo trino*.” Rather, in the analysis of relation he brings together the aspect of the common essence of the three Persons (subsistence of the divine *esse*) and the aspect of the distinction of Persons (relationship of origin). These two aspects together constitute the notion of the divine Person. That is why priority is given neither to the essence nor to the mutual relationship, but instead to the *person* that unites these two dimensions.⁷⁹ For the same reason, the study of God’s creative and salvific action in the world will have to take into account a twofold aspect: that of the divine essence (the three Persons act in virtue of their one essence), but also of the personal property (each Person intervenes according to His distinct property).⁸⁰

Theological schools will diverge on the place we should give to relation in respect to origin (procession). In the analysis of the Oneness–Threeness relationship within the notion of “person,” the theological movement stemming from Bonaventure will tend to stress the action of generation and procession, while the movement stemming from Thomas Aquinas stresses relation.⁸¹ In like manner, the school of thought linked to Aquinas attributes the constitution of the divine Person to relation, understood in its full sense according to the two aspects mentioned above; the followers of Bonaventure will retain the possibility of looking upon the divine Person as constituted by an absolute rather than relational element (Duns Scotus).⁸² Where the mystical tradition coming from Dionysius is emphasized in pronounced fashion (Eckhart), the One appears to present itself to experience as the core of the mystery, beyond the

⁷⁹ For this analysis, see Gilles Emery, “Essentialism or Personalism in the Treatise on God in Saint Thomas Aquinas?” *The Thomist* 64 (2000): 521–63; Hans Christian Schmidbaur, *Personarum Trinitas. Die trinitarische Gotteslehre des heiligen Thomas von Aquin* (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1995).

⁸⁰ See for example Thomas Aquinas, I *Sent.* d. 32, q. 1, a. 3.

⁸¹ For a general survey: Michael Schmaus, *Der Liber propugnatorius des Thomas Anglicus und die Lehrunterschiede zwischen Thomas von Aquin und Duns Scotus*. 2. Teil. Bd. 1: *Die trinitarischen Lehrdifferenzen. Systematische Darstellung und historisch Würdigung* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1930), 385–589.

⁸² Friedrich Wetter, *Die Trinitätslehre des Johannes Duns Scotus* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1967), 283–342.

Trinity of Persons; still we must qualify this judgment with Eckhart's own perspective, which looks at the relationship between God's oneness and man's union with God.⁸³ But the great majority of authors agree in finding in the notion of person the synthesis or convergence of the aspect of oneness and plurality in God.

IV. Unity and Plurality: The Transcendentals

The elucidation of plurality within unity requires a final clarification. Roscellinus and Abelard faced the problem of "number" in God without succeeding in solving it satisfactorily. The solution will not be forthcoming except by recourse to the doctrine of the transcendentals. For the scholastic authors, who are generally quite attached to the divine oneness, there could be no question of a plurality that would prejudice the oneness of God. By this very fact, quantitative plurality has to be excluded (which Abelard had achieved by omitting numerical plurality). In the twelfth century, Peter Lombard attributes a purely negative significance to numbers (*one, two, three* persons): The expression "*one* God" excludes a plurality of gods; the expression "three Persons" excludes the solitude of one Person (modalism), and so on.⁸⁴ On this score, Lombard will be opposed by other masters maintaining, in a more common fashion, the positive function of these "numbers" and not merely their negative significance. But how can we speak of "number" in God without destroying the Oneness? In spite of the differences of schools (affirmation-negation relationship, formal distinction), the scholastic solution that will dominate for a long time resides in the recourse to transcendental oneness,⁸⁵ which we can explain here with the thought of Thomas Aquinas.

Using the concepts inherited from Aristotle, Aquinas excludes a material plurality from God to keep a formal plurality in the order of the transcendentals and not in the quantitative order. The transcendental one is the one "convertible with being." The transcendental one signifies being in its undividedness: It adds nothing

⁸³ Cf. Alain de Libera, "L'Un ou la Trinité? Sur un aspect trop connu de la théologie eckhartienne," *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 70 (1996): 31–47.

⁸⁴ Peter Lombard, *Sententiae* I, d. 24, 187–89.

⁸⁵ See for example Albert the Great, I *Sent.* d. 24, a. 3 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. 25, 610–14).

positive to being; rather it consists in the denial of a division (being is one insofar as it is undivided). The affirmation of the divine oneness thus consists in the denial of a division and in the affirmation of the very reality to which we attribute oneness: “The one that is convertible with being posits affirmatively being itself, but it adds nothing to being unless the denial of a division.” “When we say, ‘The [divine] essence is one,’ the term ‘one’ signifies the essence in its undividedness; when we say, ‘The person is one,’ this attribute signifies the person in its undividedness.”⁸⁶ Correlatively, Aquinas puts forward the new concept of “transcendental multitude” (*multitudo secundum quod est transcendens*) to account for the plurality of Persons who are only one God. This transcendental multitude consists in the affirmation of the oneness of each thing within the multiplicity (oneness of each Person), while adding that each Person is really distinct from the other Persons (one Person is not the other).⁸⁷ The wholly original concept of *transcendental multitudo* (a concept that is truly nonsensical for a strict neo-Platonist) expresses, through Aquinas’s pen, a radical Christian novelty in understanding the relations between the One and the Multiple. The introduction of the multitude (*multitudo*) among the transcendentals clearly comes as the expression of the eminent status of the *plurality* that the Christian faith recognizes in God. In the sweep of this thesis, Aquinas can express the eminently positive status of created plurality: Intra-Trinitarian relation (distinction) is the cause, the reason, and the exemplar of distinction in creatures. The Trinitarian distinction is, for Aquinas, the cause not only of the distinction of creation (distinction between God and the world), but also of the plurality of creatures: “Relation in God surpasses in causality what in creatures is the principle of distinction; for it is through the procession of distinct divine Persons that the whole process of creatures as well as the multiplication of crea-

⁸⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia*, q. 9, a. 7 (*Quaestiones Disputatae*, ed. Paul M. Pession, vol. 2 [Turin, Marietti, 1965], 243) and *ST* 1, q. 30, a. 3. On this question, see in particular Giovanni Ventimiglia, *Differenza e contraddizione* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1997), 191–245.

⁸⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *De Potentia*, q. 9, a. 7. Thus the transcendental multitude consists in the affirmation of each reality as one and in a twofold negation (undividedness of each Person and mutual distinction of the Persons).

tures is caused.”⁸⁸ With Thomas Aquinas, medieval thought bears witness to an astounding effort to promote plurality on the metaphysical plain, to wed Trinitarian theology to creation theology: Plurality receives the eminent status of a transcendental, while Trinitarian relation exercises a creative causality that establishes created plurality and confers on it the value of an expression of the Trinitarian mystery.

V. Conclusions

1. If we consider its general sweep, Latin scholasticism fundamentally constitutes a theology of Trinitarian oneness. The plurality of Persons in God falls within a very strict monotheism, which the doctrinal debates and the ecclesiastical context reinforce. This strict grasp of the divine oneness, much to the fore in the consideration of the immanent Trinity, is not forsaken when the scholastics showcase the distinct role of the Persons in creation and salvation.
2. The Threeness–Oneness articulation is marked constantly by the apologetic project of “necessary reasons” and by discussion of it in debates. Even at the beginning of the fourteenth century, when a certain breach in the faith–reason harmony arose, epistemological questions remained at the core of scholastic reflection.
3. From its beginnings, scholasticism is characterized by remarkable progress in analyzing language, and by the use of important metaphysical resources to account for the oneness of the Trinity. The presence of biblical reflection remains important for the great twelfth- and thirteenth-century masters of theology (whose primary task was to expound Sacred Scripture). But already the danger of a break between biblical reflection and speculative theology is felt when this latter would lose its contact with the reading of the Bible.
4. With Thomas Aquinas in particular, the Threeness–Oneness articulation is made through an analysis of relation and within

⁸⁸ Thomas Aquinas, I *Sent.* d. 26, q. 2, a. 2, ad 2; cf. G. Emery, *La Trinité créatrice*, 445–54.

the notion of *person*, which represents the height of theological thinking about God. Correlatively, plurality in the Trinity allows us to consider created plurality in a new way (transcendental multitude, creative causality of the Trinitarian distinction). This reflection on person, in Thomas Aquinas and in other authors, certainly represents the greatest contribution of scholastic theology to the Oneness–Threeness relationship. **N-V**