MEDIEVAL TRINITARIAN THOUGHT FROM AQUINAS TO OCKHAM

How can the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be distinct and yet identical? Prompted by the doctrine of the divine Trinity, this question sparked centuries of lively debate. In the current context of renewed interest in trinitarian theology, Russell L. Friedman provides the first survey of the scholastic discussion of the Trinity in the 100-year period stretching from Thomas Aquinas' earliest works to William Ockham's death.

Tracing two central issues – the attempt to explain how the three persons are distinct from one another but identical as God, and the application to the Trinity of a "psychological model," on which the Son is a mental word or concept, and the Holy Spirit is love – this volume offers a broad overview of trinitarian thought in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, along with focused studies of the trinitarian ideas of many of the period's most important theologians. An "Annotated bibliography" points the reader to further secondary literature.

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Symbols, abbreviations, and conventions

a.	articulus
BN(C)	Biblioteca nazionale (centrale)
c.	caput
d(d).	distinctio(nes)
f(f).	folio(s)
ms(s).	manuscript(s)
Ord.	*Ordinatio*
OTh	*Opera theologica*
prin.	principium
q(q).	questio(nes)
Rep.	*Reportatio*
resp.	responsio
Sent.	*Sententiae*
un.	unica/us
<*x*>	(in a Latin text): I have added *x* to the text
[*x*]	(in a Latin text): I have deleted *x* from the text
[*x*]	(in an English text): I have added *x* to the text

References to published Latin texts are abbreviated according to the editor's or the series name and keyed to the "Bibliography of primary sources"; line numbers in modern critical editions are indicated in superscripts to page number references.

Translations into English of central Latin texts are numbered and are cross-referenced by means of this numbering system.

"At n. *x*" indicates that the reader should see the main text at footnote indicator *x*.

Introduction

My purpose in this book is to give a broad overview of some of the central aspects of and developments in the trinitarian theology written in the Latin West between roughly 1250 and 1350 AD.[1] The emphasis here will be on philosophical theology, on the rational investigation of the Trinity by later-medieval theologians using the full range of tools available to them from especially the Aristotelian tradition of philosophical analysis. Nevertheless, the philosophical nature of the discussion as it is presented here should not obscure the fact that the intense interest with which later-medieval theologians approached the issue is an indication primarily of the immense *religious* importance it had for them. For the doctrine of the Trinity is at the heart of the Christian faith. On the basis of statements from especially the New Testament that suggested that the savior, Jesus Christ, is the very same God as the Father who sent him and yet is in some way distinct from the Father,[2] the doctrine of the Trinity was formulated by the early Church Fathers and in the Creeds issuing from the ecumenical councils of the second to the fourth centuries

[1] On a number of issues, the Latin and the Greek Christian traditions had (and have) rather divergent trinitarian views; I touch on one of the points of contention – the *Filioque* controversy – in Chapter 1 below, at and around n. 39.

[2] Statements like the one from John's Gospel found in Quotation 2a, in Chapter 2 below.

AD. According to this doctrine, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct and yet identical: distinct as persons, identical as God. Once the doctrine was formulated, however, the major goal in trinitarian theology would be to explain precisely how three *really* distinct persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, can be *essentially* identical, i.e. identical in the one, simple divine essence. Identity and distinction: that is the major issue in trinitarian theology. This issue drove the trinitarian discussion in the Latin West from Augustine of Hippo and Boethius through Anselm of Canterbury and up to the figures who will be dealt with in the present book. How can it be that the Son is identical to the Father and the Holy Spirit as one God, while really distinct from both the Father and the Holy Spirit as a person? To see just how much is riding on this doctrine, consider that in order to explain how God the Son was able to take flesh as Jesus Christ, while God the Father and God the Holy Spirit never took flesh, you have to explain how these three persons can be really distinct from each other and yet all one God. This example, moreover, shows that the doctrine of the Trinity is closely tied to the theology of the incarnation, and through that to the issues of redemption and salvation that are of immediate concern to all the faithful.

Given the enormous significance of the Trinity to the Christian faith – its biblical roots, its patristic elaboration, and its centrality to the Christian message – it cannot be wondered at that later-medieval theologians approached trinitarian theology with the utmost seriousness, and wrote a great deal about it. In fact, the trinitarian literature written during the hundred years between 1250 and 1350 is immense. Basically every theologian from the period had to think about trinitarian theology in the course of his theological education, and a large portion of the various genres of medieval theological literature – the period's *Sentences* commentaries, quodlibetal

questions, and disputed questions[3] – deal with trinitarian issues. Given the enormity of the later-medieval literature on the Trinity, I will be concentrating in the four chapters of the present book on two major aspects of the discussion. The first aspect is the metaphysics of identity and distinction in the Trinity, that is to say, what "mechanism" – if any – brings about the real distinction of the three divine persons, while still allowing them to be essentially one. In short, how is it even possible to explain the fact that the three divine persons are really distinct from one another but the same in the divine essence? Roughly speaking, Chapter 1 and Chapter 4 deal with this metaphysical issue of identity and distinction. The second aspect of our period's trinitarian theology that I will deal with is the application to the Trinity of a "psychological model," according to which the Son is a mental word or concept, and the Holy Spirit is a gift or love. The psychological model was a major resource that theologians in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries relied upon in order to clarify or to explain how the persons in the Trinity could be personally distinct yet essentially identical. Indeed, in the later-medieval period the psychological model was probably the means most frequently turned to when attempting to prove that there is a Trinity of persons. I will deal with the psychological model in Chapters 2 and 3, in Chapter 2 detailing how several theologians used theories of concept formation to explain how the Son is distinct from the Father and the Holy Spirit, and in Chapter 3 discussing reactions to that view, including reactions from a number of theologians who claimed

[3] The *Sentences* of Peter Lombard (†1160), the standard theological textbook at the medieval university, was lectured or "commented" on by all students pursuing their doctorate in theology; written *Sentences* commentaries are a major source for studying medieval thought. Disputations, from which disputed questions come, were a form of medieval university exercise presided over usually by a master of theology. Quodlibetal disputations, the source of quodlibetal questions, were a special form of disputation held twice a year, during which a master might be asked questions on any subject by anyone in attendance (*de quolibet a quolibet*).

that the psychological model was of little or no use in clarifying or explaining the Trinity. Throughout the book I will give the big picture, describing how the period's trinitarian theology evolved, but I will always illustrate the trends under discussion by explaining the actual positions and arguments of a few selected medieval theologians. In this way, while giving an overview of some of the major issues in later-medieval trinitarian theology, simultaneously I mean to show something of the large variety of views defended in the period's trinitarian thought.

It should be noted that the conclusion to Chapter 4 is also a conclusion to the entire book. I have included in the footnotes what I consider to be the minimum necessary Latin text, and have translated as much of that text as practical, in order to indicate what I think the highly technical jargon of later-medieval trinitarian theology actually means. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. References in the footnotes to editions of the Latin texts are abbreviated according to the editor's (or the series') name and keyed to the "Bibliography of primary sources"; line numbers in modern critical editions are indicated in superscripts to page number references. I do not necessarily respect the orthography of any edition I use. I have mostly avoided discussing secondary literature in the main text or the footnotes of the book, instead including an "Annotated bibliography of selected secondary literature," where I point the reader towards the most important work currently available on later-medieval trinitarian theology. This bibliography is by no means exhaustive, but the works referred to there can in turn lead the reader to much further useful literature. Finally, in an appendix to the book I have presented a list of "Major elements in Franciscan and Dominican trinitarian theologies."

CHAPTER ONE

The Trinity and the Aristotelian categories: different ways of explaining identity and distinction

The task in trinitarian theology is to explain how three really distinct persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, can be essentially identical. In the present chapter, I describe the later thirteenth-century origins of two different, and indeed rival or competing, ways of explaining that most basic trinitarian fact. In particular, I discuss a theory that appeals to the Aristotelian category of relation to explain personal distinction and essential identity. From Thomas Aquinas (†1274) and on, most Dominican theologians held a version of this theory, which I call the "relation account" of personal distinction. I also discuss a rival theory that, in order to explain identity and distinction, appeals to emanation, that is to say the way that the divine persons are put into being or originated. This "emanation account" of personal distinction is closely related to the Aristotelian categories of action and passion, and, as we will see, following a tendency in Bonaventure's (†1274) thought, most Franciscan theologians adhered to this view. Significantly, the confrontation between the respective adherents of each of these two major views drives many of the most important developments in late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century trinitarian thought. For this reason, this chapter really sets the stage for the rest of the book.

The chapter is structured as follows. First I give some background information on the two trinitarian views, the primarily Dominican relation account and the primarily Franciscan emanation account; in this first section I also provide the most important trinitarian terminology. Then I show how the two views are visible in early work of Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure, specifically in their *Sentences* commentaries from just after 1250. After that, I focus on authors in the Franciscan current, showing the development of the emanation account in John Pecham (†1292) and in Henry of Ghent (†1293).

BACKGROUND, AND THE RELATION ACCOUNT

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, then, there were rival ways of looking at the Trinity, one way that appealed to relations, the other to emanations. Before I specify how these two ways differ, I would like to point out what they have in common. What these two explanatory approaches to trinitarian identity and distinction agreed upon was that each divine person was *constituted*; that is to say, each person took on his own distinct personal being, on account of a single characteristic that is unique to that one person and distinguishes that person from the other two persons. This single characteristic was called a "personal property" (*proprietas personalis*), and according to both the relation and the emanation account the personal properties bring about some type of real distinction between the persons. The three divine persons, then, according to both the relation and the emanation account, are essentially identical (i.e., they share completely the same divine essence) apart from one difference, which is the unique personal property that makes each of the persons distinct from the other two persons. The personal properties thus bring about "merely" personal distinction, that is, a *real* but not an

essential distinction. It is worthwhile noting that here, as basically everywhere in medieval theology, the trick was to avoid heresy, and in trinitarian theology the most significant heresies to avoid were, on the one hand, the Sabellian heresy, which maintained that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were merely different names for one and the same totally undifferentiated God, and, on the other, the Arian heresy, which maintained that the Father was God, but the Son and the Holy Spirit were not God.

The disagreement, then, between the relation and the emanation account was over the nature of these personal properties: are they relational in nature or are they emanational in nature. Interestingly, these two ways of explaining trinitarian identity and distinction have their remote origins in the thought of the pagan philosopher Aristotle, since they are based on the categories of relation, on the one hand, and of action and passion, on the other.[1] The relation account itself descends ultimately from Augustine of Hippo (†430) and Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius († *ca.* 525), who in their respective works *De trinitate* examined which of the ten Aristotelian categories can be applied to God or said about God and which cannot.[2] To make a longer story short, Augustine and Boethius claimed that only two categories can be said about God: substance and relation. Substance is the category that describes things that have an independent existence of their own, like individual members of a natural kind, e.g., John the human being, Fido the dog, Lucy the cow. God clearly has independent existence, and so for Augustine and Boethius God is substance to the highest degree. What about relation? This is more

[1] Aristotle's ten categories are: *substance*, quality, quantity, *relation*, *action*, *passion*, place, time, posture (or position), state (or habit). The ones in italics are those that are of greatest relevance here.

[2] For Augustine, see in particular Book V of his *De trinitate* (ed. Mountain and Glorie); for Boethius, especially Chapters 4–6 of his *De trinitate* (ed. Moreschini).

complicated, but the problem with predicating any accident – and relation is an accident – of God is that Aristotelian accidents inhere in their subject, they exist in it, and they are different from their subject, since accidents can come and go while the subject remains. But the fact that, for example, the whiteness in one particular white thing inheres in the white thing and is different from it implies composition, i.e., two different things being put together, the whiteness and the thing that is white. Such composition cannot be found in an utterly simple God. Thus, God cannot be great by some accidental greatness, nor can he be wise by some accidental wisdom, since if God's greatness and wisdom were accidents inhering in God and distinct in some way from God, this would compromise God's simplicity. But relation is different from the other categories of accident. Boethius sums up the difference: "Some of the categories point to the thing itself, others point to the circumstances of the thing."[3] Relation says nothing about the thing itself, but only about a particular disposition that the thing is in with respect to other things. For example, if someone standing to my right moves to my left, it seems obvious that nothing has truly changed about that other person or about me, that is to say, about our substances; what has changed is the spatial arrangement between us. As Boethius says, it is the circumstances of the thing that the category of relation points to, not the thing itself. Aristotle actually noted this characteristic of relation when he named the category: the particular characteristic of relation, what sets it apart from the other categories, is that it is *toward something* (Latin: *ad aliquid*; Greek: *pros ti*), and hence relation indicates nothing about its subject or foundation besides the extrinsic circumstances in which that subject or foundation finds itself. For

[3] Boethius, *De trinitate*, c. 4: "Aliae <categoriae> quidem quasi rem monstrant, aliae vero quasi circumstantias rei . . ." Ed. Moreschini, p. 177[269–71]; ed. Stewart, Rand, and Tester, p. 22[99–101].

Augustine and Boethius, then, special *divine relations*, possessed of no accidentality and inherence, and therefore implying no composition, are compatible with God's simplicity; in fact, these relations explain how the Father and the Son (and, by extension, the Holy Spirit) are distinct personally but identical essentially. How do the divine relations do this?

Augustine and Boethius capitalized on the fact that 'father' and 'son' are relative terms. This is just to say that a father is a father only because he is the father of a child (in this case a son), and hence father and son are always said relatively to each other. Put succinctly: you will never find a father who has not had either a son or a daughter. Now, a father is related to his son by the relation paternity or fatherhood (*paternitas*); a son is related to his father by the relation filiation or sonhood (*filiatio*). The relation account of personal distinction claims that the Father and the Son are personally distinct in God since the Father is the Father only because he has the Son. If the Father did not have the Son, then he would not be the Father. If the relations between them are real and not mere mental constructs, then Father and Son must be distinct in some way – not distinct essentially (since they share everything else and they are one God), but distinct as persons. These divine relations, then, are the personal properties that bring about non-essential but nevertheless real distinction between the Father and the Son: that the Father has a Son and that the Son has a Father, these are the differences that make the Father and the Son personally distinct from each other. Boethius encapsulated this theory in a phrase used in virtually every later-medieval trinitarian discussion: "Substance preserves unity, relation multiplies the Trinity."[4] In this way, later-medieval theologians

[4] Boethius, *De trinitate*, c. 6: "Substantia continet unitatem, relatio multiplicat trinitatem." Ed. Moreschini, p. 180$^{339-40}$; ed. Stewart, Rand, and Tester, p. 28$^{7-9}$.

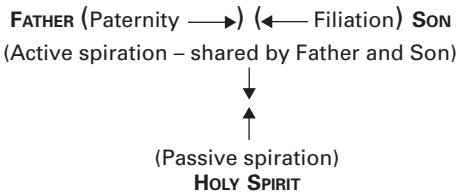

Diagram A: Relation account of personal distinction

inherited from Augustine and Boethius an explanation for the way that the Father and the Son were distinct persons: by appealing to paternity and filiation, the very relations between them.

As the relation account of personal distinction developed over time, a stress came to be laid upon the fact that not only are these relations that constitute the persons real, they are also *opposed*. *Opposition of relations* became the most important element in explaining the distinction between the persons. In modern terms we might describe opposed relations as "mutually implicative," i.e., the existence of one of two opposed relations necessarily implies the existence of the other. Thus, because paternity and filiation are opposed to or toward each other, they are the constituting properties of the Father and the Son. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same is true concerning the Holy Spirit's passive spiration (*spiratio passiva*, the Spirit's being "breathed"): it is because passive spiration is opposed to the Father and Son's active spiration (*spiratio activa*, their active "breathing" of the Spirit) that passive spiration is the constitutive property of the Holy Spirit, although active spiration does not constitute a person in its own right, since it is shared by the Father and the Son. Diagrammatically, the relation account of personal distinction, relying upon the opposition of relations between the persons, can be set out as in Diagram A.

In the Latin West, the relation account of personal distinction was the dominant theory for explaining the distinction between the