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Author(s): Jose Isidro Belleza

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# Joseph Ratzinger, Student of Thomas

Jose Isidro Belleza

*Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology*

*Berkeley, California, U.S.A.*

**ABSTRACT:** Against narratives which tend to oppose the “Augustinian” or “Bonaventuran” theology of Joseph Ratzinger against “Thomism” *simpliciter*, this study seeks to examine the ways in which Ratzinger’s theology exhibits not only a close affinity with Thomistic thought, but also limited yet significant divergences from Bonaventure’s theology. An examination of Ratzinger’s Trinitarian theology and ecclesiology will show his foundational reliance of the Thomistic notion of “person-as-relation,” against the near-monarchical Trinity of Bonaventure. This in turn supplies a dynamic consideration of personhood that applies to Christ, and through him, to the Church. Ratzinger’s preference for the *communio—Corpus Christi* motif to describe the Church over the idea of “people of God” shows the influence of the pre-conciliar mode of Thomistic reflection on Ratzinger’s ecclesiology. Finally, Ratzinger’s reflections on *Lumen Gentium* 8—particularly the phrase *subsistit in*—demonstrate a foundational recourse to Aristotelian-Thomist philosophy to describe the relationship of the Body of Christ to the *plura elementa sanctificationis et veritatis* found in ecclesial communities not fully united to the Catholic Church.

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Contrary to dichotomous classifications which oppose the “Augustinian” Ratzinger to Thomism,<sup>1</sup> this project seeks to explore the extent to which Joseph Ratzinger’s thought is influenced by Thomas Aquinas. Certainly, his

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph A. Komonchak, “A Postmodern Augustinian Thomism?” in *Augustine and Postmodern Thought: A New Alliance against Modernity?* eds. L. Boeve, M. Lamberigts, and M. Wisse (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 123-46. See also Komonchak, “The Church in Crisis: Pope Benedict’s Theological Vision,” *Commonweal* 132 (June 3, 2005): 11-14.

style and method have stronger affinities with those of the *nouvelle theologie*, but at least in some aspects of his work, the content of his reflections still bear the mark of the Thomistic influence impressed upon those who were formed in the preconciliar era. Through an analysis of Ratzinger's Trinitarian theology and ecclesiology, this essay will examine points of synthesis with Thomism to show that, true to Ratzingerian form, his doctrinal content contains no breaks with the past, but only development. Although he criticized the propositional methodology of neo-scholasticism, Ratzinger's thought exhibits a strong dependence on Thomistic principles; this reliance is most evident in his trinitarian theology and in his ecclesiology.

Ratzinger himself moderates any such tendencies toward simplistic, polemical readings. It is never Thomas as such whom he opposes, but the rationalistic, manualist method of theology which reached its zenith between Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris* and the Second Vatican Council—the stifling style which dominated his educational experience as a young seminarian.<sup>2</sup> Later in his life, as Pope Benedict XVI, a series of three General Audience catecheses in honor of the Angelic Doctor reveals Ratzinger's profound appreciation and affinity for the great Dominican theologian.<sup>3</sup> Despite a career largely marked by a retrieval of a more Patristic style, combined with a special appreciation for Augustine (seen in his doctoral dissertation) and for Bonaventure (seen in his habilitation thesis), Joseph Ratzinger still bears the marks of Thomas Aquinas. Whether this is due to Thomas's almost inescapable influence on theology in the West or to a more conscious attempt at some kind of synthesis on Ratzinger's part is a question beyond the task of this project. Nevertheless, the stamp of Thomism is evident, perhaps most especially in Ratzinger's

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<sup>2</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs 1927-1977*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1998), 44. "This encounter with personalism [through Martin Buber] was for me a spiritual experience which that left an essential mark, especially since I associated such personalism with the thought of Saint Augustine, who in his *Confessions* had struck me with the depth and power of all his human passion and depth. By contrast, I had difficulties penetrating the thought of Thomas Aquinas, whose crystal-clear logic seemed to me to be too closed in on itself, too impersonal, and ready-made. This may also have had something to do with the fact that Arnold Wilmsen, the philosopher who taught us Thomas, presented us with a rigid, neoscholastic Thomism which was simply too far afield from my own questions."

<sup>3</sup> See the General Audiences of 2, 16, and 23 June, 2010.

Trinitarian theology. In any case, the caricature of an “anti-Thomist” Ratzinger simply has no basis in the man’s oeuvre.

Edward J. Butterworth’s 1985 dissertation on the Trinitarian theologies of Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure articulated the main points of divergence between the two high medieval doctors.<sup>4</sup> Thomas makes the concept of relation central to his Trinitarian theology and in fact treats relation as more important than procession. Bonaventure, in contrast, tends to highlight God’s primacy-in-unity, and accordingly emphasizes the fecundity and self-diffusiveness which flows out of God’s primacy; for Bonaventure, then, the relations among the three Persons is less central than the primacy of the singular Godhead. In the *Summa Theologica*, which represents the reflections of the more mature Thomas, it seems that relation, almost exclusively, constitutes the distinctions among the Trinitarian persons. Not so for Bonaventure; in a nearly-monarchical tendency, it is rather the unbegottenness of the Father which is the condition for the generative power through which the other two persons proceed.

This comparative analysis draws a stark contrast between Thomas and Bonaventure regarding the Trinity: although he does not treat it directly, Butterworth’s dissertation nevertheless suggests for us, in a very clear way, the strongest point of synthesis between the Trinitarian theology of Joseph Ratzinger and that of Thomas Aquinas. Ratzinger’s emphasis on the category of *relation*—more specifically, the notion of *person as relation*—is of a significance hardly understated, for such a notion not only places Ratzinger’s Trinitarian theology squarely in the province of Aristotelian-Thomism, but at the same time sharply distinguishes it from the Seraphic Doctor’s paradigm.

The first part of this essay has the simple aim of demonstrating Joseph Ratzinger’s greater indebtedness to the Angelic Doctor’s Trinitarian theology than to that of Bonaventure. Certainly, in line with the *nouvelle theologie* which preceded and inspired him, Ratzinger is concerned with bridging the gap between theology and the lived experience of Christians; for the future pope, the cold, formal method of neo-Scholastic Thomist

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<sup>4</sup> Edward Joseph Butterworth, *The Doctrine of the Trinity in Saint Thomas Aquinas and Saint Bonaventure* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1985).

manualism often obscured more than illuminated this vital connection between faith and life. In light of this, it becomes clear why Ratzinger's contributions to dogmatic and fundamental theology so often point toward the articulation of a *theological anthropology*. His Trinitarian theology is no different. As a German scarred by both the nightmare of Nazism and the specter of Soviet supremacy, Ratzinger sought a way to vindicate the irreducible dignity of the human person against the totalizing systems which made the 20<sup>th</sup> century the bloodiest in human history. Yet unlike the phenomenological-personalist style epitomized by Karol Wojtyla (a school also called—perhaps with tenuous warrant—“Lublin Thomism”), Ratzinger's approach to the human person is firmly and more explicitly grounded in the Western theological tradition. Specifically, he analogically grounds the understanding of the human person in the Divine Persons themselves such that, just as the Persons of the Trinity are by their nature ordered toward the others, so too is the human person ordered toward other persons in community. The notion of person as relation, which undergirds this anthropological assertion, seems to come from Thomas Aquinas himself. It is not unreasonable to claim, therefore, that Ratzinger's Trinitarian theology and theological anthropology exhibit a decidedly Thomistic bent. Since a thorough examination of Ratzinger's ecclesiological works would require energies and resources beyond the scope of the present project, the second part of this work will simply focus on three ways in which the influence of Thomas Aquinas is evident in the ecclesiology of Joseph Ratzinger. The fact that Ratzinger's *Trinitarian* theology is decidedly Thomistic and not Bonaventuran will reveal a dynamic consideration of personhood that applies to Christ, and therefore, also to the Church. Ratzinger's preference of the *communio—Corpus Christi* motif to describe the Church over the idea of “people of God” shows the influence of the pre-conciliar mode of Thomistic reflection on Ratzinger's ecclesiology. Finally, Ratzinger's reflections on *Lumen Gentium* 8—particularly the phrase “subsistit in”—demonstrate a foundational recourse to Aristotelian-Thomist philosophy to describe the relationship of the Body of Christ to the *plura elementa sanctificationis et veritatis*<sup>5</sup> found in ecclesial communities not fully united to the Catholic Church.

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<sup>5</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution “*Lumen Gentium*” (Vatican City:

## Thomas Aquinas on the Trinitarian Persons

While questions 27 to 43 in the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa Theologica* represent the mature Thomas' doctrine on the Trinity, questions 27-29 especially lay down the doctrine of the Divine Persons as "substantial relations" in God, and not as mere accidents<sup>6</sup> (recall that for Aristotle, the category of "relation" is not only an accident in itself, but also covers six of the ten categories of being).<sup>7</sup> Questions 28 and 29 are the most important for our present considerations. Here, Thomas<sup>8</sup> holds that it is the consideration of personhood in God which constitutes the prime analogate for a consideration of created, human personhood. Here, Thomas's point of departure is the classic Western definition of "person" as articulated by Boethius, namely, "individua substantia rationalis naturae." However, Thomas also exceeds and further develops the classical definition of personhood proffered by Boethius in the direction of a more vivid understanding in which the dynamism of relationship illumines and complements the more ancient preoccupation with mere inert substance.<sup>9</sup> Article 1 merely vindicates Boethius' definition while Article 2 distinguishes the word *persona* from hypostasis, subsistence, and essence. Beginning with Article 3, however, Thomas demonstrates the limits of the Boethian definition as the word "person" is applied to God. By the way of eminence, God is said to be a person inasmuch as God is the most perfect of all rational natures. In Article 4, Thomas brings together two points in Boethius which Boethius had not explicitly joined together, and it is here that we find Thomas' most extensive treatment of the notion of person as relation.

The *sed contra* of the same article<sup>10</sup> is illuminating: while Boethius in his *De Trinitate* simply attributes any predication of the Trinitarian persons

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Typis Poliglottis Vaticanis, 1964), 8.

<sup>6</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, qq. 27-29. (hereafter, "ST")

<sup>7</sup> Aristotle, *Categories. On Interpretation. Prior Analytics*, trans. H. P. Cooke & Hugh Tredennick, Loeb Classical Library 325 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938), 2-111: Aristotle derived ten ways in which a thing can "be": the first is substance (the individual thing itself), followed by nine types of predicates (accidents) which can be said of a substance—quantity, quality, relation, place where (location), position, time when, *habitus*, action, and passion. The last five categories are subtypes of relation.

as referring to relation, Thomas goes a step further by asserting that “person” signifies “relation” directly (*in recto*). The *respondeo* of the article, following Question 28’s conclusions that distinction in God is only by relation of origin, reasserts that relations in God exist not accidentally but substantially; therefore, the relations signify the divine essence itself, although indirectly.<sup>11</sup>

Even in this single question of the *Prima Pars*, it is clear that Thomas stands firmly in line with the trajectory of medieval Western philosophy, since he accepts Boethius’ contribution to the notion of person. This reception, however, is not uncritical; indeed, he surpasses Boethius by asserting that what distinguishes a person from other substances is more than simply a rational nature. The signification of person as relation, not in the manner of an accident but in the manner of substance, shows in an eminent way the dynamic originality of Thomas’s thought. He inaugurates a development not only of Boethius’ definition but also of the understanding of Aristotelian categories themselves. The God who is *ipsum esse subsistens* must exceed the division of categories which obtain in *ens commune*; in accord with this insight, it becomes possible to predicate what can only be accidental in creatures as essential in God. In particular, the notion of subsistent relation *in divinis* as distinct from accidental relations in creatures<sup>12</sup> is one of the signature achievements of Thomas’ doctrine of God that does not seem to be taken up with great vigor by Bonaventure or his intellectual heirs, but later becomes explicitly foundational in the theology of Joseph Ratzinger.

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<sup>8</sup> Aquinas, ST I, q. 29, a. 2, *resp.*

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, “On the Understanding of ‘Person’ in Theology,” in *Dogma and Preaching: Applying Christian Doctrine to Daily Life*, trans. Michael J. Miller and Matthew J. O’Connell (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004), 189-192; Aquinas, ST I, q. 28.

<sup>10</sup> Aquinas, ST I, q. 29, a. 4, *sed contra*. “. . . dicit Boetius, in libro de Trinitate, quod omne nomen ad personas pertinens, relationem significat. Sed nullum nomen magis pertinet ad personas, quam hoc nomen persona. Ergo hoc nomen persona relationem significat.”

<sup>11</sup> Aquinas, ST I, q. 29, a. 4, *resp.*; see also q. 28, a. 2-3. “Relatio autem in divinis non est sicut accidens inhaerens subiecto, sed est ipsa divina essentia, unde est subsistens, sicut essentia divina subsistit. . . verum est quod hoc nomen persona significat relationem in recto, et essentiam in obliquo, non tamen relationem in quantum est relatio, sed in quantum significatur per modum hypostasis.”

<sup>12</sup> Aquinas, ST I, q. 28, a. 2, *resp.*: “Quidquid autem in rebus creatis habet esse accidentale, secundum quod transfertur in Deum, habet esse substantiale, nihil enim est in Deo ut accidens in subiecto, sed quidquid est in Deo, est eius essentia.”

## Ratzinger's Trinitarian Debt to Thomas

Ratzinger's doctrine on the Trinity is perhaps best expressed in his now-classic *Introduction to Christianity*. Although he does not explicitly cite Thomas, Ratzinger proceeds in a manner that echoes key aspects of Thomas' Trinitarian theology. Within Ratzinger's treatment of the positive significance of the doctrine of the Trinity, "Thesis No. 2" restates both the conceptual lineage and etymology of the term *persona* (as translating *prosopon* from Greek), while also emphasizing the analogical difference between divine and human persons. For Ratzinger, "Acknowledgement that God is a person in the guise of a triple personality explodes the naive, anthropomorphic concept of person. It declares in a sort of cipher that the personality of God infinitely exceeds the human kind of personality; so that the concept of person, illuminating as it is, once again reveals itself as an inadequate metaphor."<sup>13</sup> Thomas also insists on this point by noting the marks of created personhood; a person is an individual substance (i.e., as *substantia prima*) of a rational nature, meaning that its principal activity consists in the use of reason. Such a creature, by virtue of its rational nature, *habet dominium actus sui*. In this way, the human person is analogous to God, who possesses dominion *super omnia*.<sup>14</sup> The *respondeo* of *ST I*, q. 29, a. 2 notes that even the word "relation" is used analogously; when relation is predicated accidentally of creatures, Thomas calls this meaning *ex usu*—the common usage of the term. However, when relation is predicated as subsistent in the divine nature, Thomas calls this usage of the word *significatio sua*—its own proper meaning.<sup>15</sup> Both relation and person properly refer to God first, and then only analogously in creatures.

For Ratzinger, as for Thomas, person is relation. Echoing the same spirit of *ST I*, q. 29, a. 4, personhood according to Ratzinger "is the pure relation of being related, nothing else. Relationship is not something extra added to the person, as it is with us; it only exists at all as relatedness."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J.R. Foster (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004), 180.

<sup>14</sup> Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 29, a. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 29, a. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 183. See also Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 29, a. 4, *resp.*: ". . . hoc nomen persona ad standum pro relativo, ex congruentia suae significationis, ut scilicet hoc quod stat pro relativo, non solum habeat ex usu, ut prima opinio dicebat, sed etiam ex



He then follows Thomas' equation of person, relation, and substance in God.

With the insight that, seen as substance, God is one but that there exists in him the phenomenon of dialogue, of differentiation, and of relationship through speech, the category of *relatio* gained a completely new significance for Christian thought. To Aristotle, it was among the "accidents," the chance circumstances of being, which are separate from substance, the sole sustaining form of the real. The experience of the God who conducts a dialogue, of the God who is not only *logos* but also *dia-logos*, not only idea and meaning but speech and word in the reciprocal exchanges of partners in conversation—this experience exploded the ancient division of reality into substance, the real thing, and accidents, the merely circumstantial. It now became clear that dialogue, the *relatio*, stands beside the substance as an equally primordial form of being.<sup>17</sup>

Again, although he does not use the technical Aristotelian terminology of Thomas, Ratzinger nevertheless expresses the same idea of a proper or essential accident, or more specifically, a subsistent relation in God.<sup>18</sup> Here, in a very clear way, we see not so much an "Augustinian" Ratzinger opposed to the doctrine of Thomas; rather, what we see is the shared influence of Augustine in the works of the two later thinkers. Ratzinger himself cites Augustine, who said that "in God there are no accidents, only substance and relation."<sup>19</sup> This joint Thomistic-Ratzingerian recourse to the idea of proper accident or subsistent relations will be

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significatione sua."

<sup>17</sup> Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 182-183.

<sup>18</sup> Aquinas, ST I, q. 28, a. 2; see also ST I, q. 29, a. 4, *resp.*: "Et hoc est significare relationem per modum substantiae quae est hypostasis subsistens in natura divina; licet subsistens in natura divina non sit aliud quam natura divina. Et secundum hoc, verum est quod hoc nomen persona significat relationem in recto, et essentiam in obliquo, non tamen relationem in quantum est relatio, sed in quantum significatur per modum hypostasis."

<sup>19</sup> Augustine, *De Trinitate* 5, 5, 6 (PL 42:913f): "In Deo autem nihil quidem secundum accidens dicitur, quia nihil in eo mutabile est; nec tamen omne quod dicitur, secundum substantiam dicitur. . . quod tamen relativum non est accidens, quia non est mutabile," in Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 184.

addressed again later in a discussion of their critical appropriation of Aristotle.

Despite the foregoing similarities, there is an explicit, if minor, divergence between Thomas and Ratzinger. According to the latter, the history of theological and philosophical reflection in the ancient and patristic eras tended to focus on the substance or essence of things. It was Richard of St. Victor who inaugurated a shift in focus from substance or essence to existence. He defines “person as ‘spiritualis naturae incommunicabilis existentia,’ a distinct and incommunicable existence of a spiritual nature. This formula rightly notes that ‘person’ in the theological sense lies, not on the level of essence, but rather on the level of existence,” thereby stimulating a philosophy of existence, “which as such had not been made the subject of philosophy at all in antiquity.”<sup>20</sup> Against this background, “Boethius’s definition of person, for instance, which in fact went on to be generally accepted in Western philosophy, can be criticized as entirely inadequate.”<sup>21</sup> This high medieval development of existential categories, according to Ratzinger, was not stretched to its full implications by the scholastics, including Thomas. Their limitation was that it only considered the existential dimension of personhood in reference to Christology. For Ratzinger, this is “the limitation of Saint Thomas in this matter as well, that he proceeds in theology on the existential level with Richard of Saint Victor but treats the whole matter [of Christ’s personhood] as if it were a theological exception, whereas in his philosophy he remains to a great extent faithful to the other approach of pre-Christian philosophy with Boethius’ concept of person.”<sup>22</sup>

Yet, like Ratzinger, Thomas acknowledges the incompleteness of Boethius’s definition. The concept of person as subsistent relation is already a significant, even revolutionary development of both Boethius’ and Aristotle’s respective doctrines. Ratzinger’s identification of a “limit” in Thomas’s reflections need not imply a defect in the latter’s teaching; here we simply see a confrontation between two different modes of theologizing. A medieval *summa*, marked by its sequential progressions

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<sup>20</sup> Ratzinger, “On the Understanding of ‘Person’ in Theology,” 191.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

from the first article of faith to the last, does not easily admit of the broad thematic connections which characterize contemporary non-scholastic theology such as Ratzinger's. This is clear in that whereas Thomas does not treat of the human person or ethics at all in the *Prima Pars*, Ratzinger is more immediately interested in the anthropological implications of Trinitarian doctrine. On this wider level of consideration, the differences between Thomas and Ratzinger certainly become more evident. But such reflections remain outside the scope of the present work. Within their respective treatments of the Trinitarian persons themselves, Thomas and Ratzinger are cut from the same cloth.

### **Ratzinger's Divergences from Bonaventure**

In one of its more significant yet grossly underappreciated insights into the history of medieval philosophy, Ratzinger's own habilitation identifies a major shift in Bonaventure's thought; his election as Minister General of the Friars Minor in 1257 seems to mark the chronological divide between the early Bonaventure and the late Bonaventure.<sup>23</sup> While his entire life's work certainly takes some parts of Aristotle's works for granted (e.g., the so-called *Logica Vetus*), the later Bonaventure appears to steer away from the higher principles of Aristotelian natural philosophy and metaphysics which were appropriated in greater measure by his fellow master at Paris, Thomas Aquinas. Concern for the unqualified nature of *potestas divina* accordingly bred skepticism toward the Aristotelian hylomorphic system, which appeared to bind the Godhead's actions into determined schemata within the created order. It was under Bonaventure's (indirect<sup>24</sup>) influence that Etienne Tempier, bishop of Paris, issued the Condemnations of 1277. This list of 219 condemned theses not only targeted certain Averroist tendencies in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Paris; some propositions, whether justly or unjustly, seemed to bear a Thomistic provenance. Bonaventure's turn away from Aristotelian metaphysics (and

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<sup>23</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in Saint Bonaventure*, trans. Zachary Hayes (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1971).

<sup>24</sup> Bonaventure, like Thomas, died in 1274, although the spirit of the Condemnations of 1277 finds its source in the Seraphic Doctor's later turn away from Aristotelian metaphysics. I am indebted to Fr. Augustine Thompson, OP for these insights into the Parisian controversies and their effects on later developments in philosophy and theology.

thus from his colleague Aquinas) lies in the background of the polemical war which waged for centuries after the deaths of the two doctors.

Ratzinger is less skeptical of Aristotle (and of Greek philosophy in general) than the late Bonaventure (although, as stated before, Bonaventure never completely escaped the Aristotelian air of medieval intellectual culture). Indeed, Ratzinger finds the confluence of Greek and Semitic cultures (which created the cultural matrix of the New Testament) more providential than coincidental.<sup>25</sup> Certainly, such a retrospective historical-critical insight could have never been made by a medieval, much less by Bonaventure; in any case, Ratzinger's recourse to the idea of person-as-relation, and more specifically of personhood in God as subsistent relations, bears the clear stamp of the Thomistic appropriation of Aristotelian philosophy.

Bonaventure presents a markedly different emphasis. While a more thorough treatment of his Trinitarian theology should certainly make more ample reference to his later work *Quaestiones Disputatae De Trinitate*, for the present purposes, his reflections on the Trinity in the *Breviloquium* and a short passage in *De Trinitate* provide a more than adequate encapsulation of his approach. Even in the earlier work, it is clear that Bonaventure treats the processions of the Son and Spirit from the Father as an eminent example of the neo-Platonic principle *bonum diffusivum sui*, that is, that the supreme, fruitful goodness of the Father "necessarily" spills over into the other two processions. Hence, in the *Breviloquium*:

The first and supreme Principle, by the very fact that He is first, is utterly simple; by the very fact that He is supreme, is utterly perfect. Being utterly perfect, He communicates Himself with complete perfection; being utterly simple, He remains completely undivided. Therefore, within the first Principle there are modes of perfect emanation which leave oneness of nature unimpaired. But the modes of perfect emanation are only two, through nature and through will [*per modum naturae et voluntatis*]; the first is generation, the

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<sup>25</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004), 197-202. See also Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 137-150.

second spiration-procession. Hence these are the two modes found here. Now, while two hypostases necessarily result from two substance-producing modes of emanation, we must also posit that the original producing hypostasis does not itself emanate from anything else, for then we should have an infinite series. Hence there are here three hypostases.<sup>26</sup>

Bonaventure in *De Trinitate* reiterates much of the same.

Therefore, since the perfect production, emanation and germination is realised only through two intrinsic modes, namely, by way of nature and by way of will, that is, by way of the word and of love, therefore the highest perfection, fontality and fecundity necessarily demands two kinds of emanation with respect to the two hypostases which are produced and emanate from the first person as from the first producing principle. Therefore, it is necessary to affirm three persons.<sup>27</sup>

From these two quotations, the divergence from Thomas is notable. Thomas himself would take issue with the “necessity” of the processions in God. For Bonaventure, “natural emanation” expresses an understanding of generation markedly different from that of both Augustine and Aquinas, both of whom speak of generation as an intellectual emanation. Whereas for Thomas, the procession of the persons springs from the intellect,<sup>28</sup> for Bonaventure, the intellect *qua* intellect has no proper fecundity, but only insofar as it is derived from the effusive fruitfulness of the Godhead. The primary principle of the Son’s generation, therefore, is the divine nature itself (this what he means by generation *per modum naturae*); the natural diffusive fecundity of the Good, as expressed in the neo-Platonic maxim *bonum diffusivum sui*, is the central feature of Bonaventure’s Trinitarian theology. This is not to say that Bonaventure denies or retreats from a

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<sup>26</sup> Bonaventure, *Breviloquium* I, 3, 2, in Rik Van Nieuwenhove, “In the Image of God: The Trinitarian Anthropology of St Bonaventure, St Thomas Aquinas, and the Blessed Jan Van Ruusbroec (1),” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 66 (June 2001): 112-113.

<sup>27</sup> Bonaventure, *Bonaventure: Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, trans. Zachary Hayes (New York: The Franciscan Institute, 1979), 263; and Van Nieuwenhove, “In the Image of God,” 113.

<sup>28</sup> Aquinas, ST I, q. 27, a. 3-4.

consideration of relations in the Trinity; he even agrees with Thomas to the extent that there are three persons and four relations in God (what Thomas calls active and passive spiration, Bonaventure calls spiration and procession, respectively). However, he never reaches the full metaphysical profundity of the Thomistic consideration of person-as-relation. This brief foray into Bonaventure's Trinitarian theology simply serves to show how Ratzinger, at least in this specific area of his thought, is far closer to Thomas than to Bonaventure.

These Trinitarian reflections in turn illumine Christology, and it is interesting to note that Ratzinger in his *Introduction* and Thomas in the *Summa Theologica* treat of the Trinity before Christ, such that the understanding of Christ's personhood is not only a relationship with the Father and Spirit, but also a relationship with creation, especially with humankind. This idea of relationship with Christ in turn supplies Ratzinger's preference for the image of the Body of Christ—*communio* in his reflections on the Church.

### **Ratzingerian Ecclesiology:**

#### **Body of Christ — *Communio* vs. People of God**

The renewed vision of the Church as Mystical Body of Christ has its origin not so much in the *ressourcement—nouvelle theologie* movement in early twentieth century theology, but in the Roman neoscholastic circles which influenced the drafting of Pius XII's encyclical *Mystici Corporis*. Certainly, the image of the Body of Christ hearkens back to the Pauline corpus, but its reappropriation into recent ecclesiological reflections occurred largely thanks to the work of Roman neo-Thomists, not the *nouvelliers*. Henri De Lubac, perhaps the pre-eminent exponent of the *nouvelle theologie*, in his acclaimed work *Corpus Mysticum*, showed that for the medievals, the term "mystical body" meant the Eucharistic species, not the Church. The *nouvelle theologie*, characterized by an attempt to recover the patristic-medieval synthesis of faith and life, perhaps overstated the medieval understanding of "mystical body" as opposed to the biblical and now-recovered ecclesial sense of the term, which now found pontifical approbation through the encyclical *Mystici Corporis*.

Two of the prime ghostwriters of the encyclical were Fr. Sebastiaan Tromp, SJ,<sup>29</sup> a Dutch neo-Thomist who taught at the Gregorian University and also worked for Cardinal Ottaviani in the Holy Office, and Fr. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Rector Magnificus* of the Angelicum.<sup>30</sup> They were largely influential in drafting the content of the text, which in part also responded (indirectly) to other theses associated with de Lubac and the *nouvelle theologie*. By insisting on the image of the Church as *mystical body*—against the mere Eucharistic predication of de Lubac—Pius XII (and the neo-Thomists behind him) articulated an ecclesiology which is by its nature *relational*. The Mystical Body exists throughout the entire world and unites all who are washed in the common baptism. Baptism is the sacrament of *incorporation*, or embodiment *in corpore Christi*. This relational ecclesiology founded in the body of Christ is incomprehensible without a prior understanding of the *personhood* of Christ—and thus the personhood of all people—as itself fundamentally *relational*. In other words, the relational personality of Christ in the Godhead is the condition for the possibility of the relationship of human beings in His body, which is the Church.

Ratzinger takes up this personal-relational theme in the 1985 book length interview with Vittorio Messori *Rapporto sulla fede*, published in English as *The Ratzinger Report*. Here he contrasts the myriad ways in which the conciliar motif of “People of God” was adapted to fit various sociological agendas (some warranted, some less fitting than others) with the clearer biblical motif “Body of Christ.”<sup>31</sup> He does not discount a correct interpretation of “People of God,” but remarks that it “actually refers always to the Old Testament element of the Church, to her continuity with Israel. But the Church receives her New Testament character more distinctively in the concept of the ‘Body of Christ.’”<sup>32</sup> Again relying on the theme of “incorporation” into the Mystical Body which was renewed by

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<sup>29</sup> Sebastiaan Tromp, “Annotations ad enc. *Mystici Corporis*,” *Periodica de re morali, canonica, liturgica* 32 (1943): 377-401, especially 395-399. See also Alexandra von Teuffenbach, *Pius XII: neue Erkenntnisse über sein Leben und Wirken* (Aachen: MM Verlag, 2010).

<sup>30</sup> David Berger, “Kommentär zur Enzyklika *Mystici Corporis*,” *Einsicht: Romisch-Katolische Zeitschrift* 34, no. 2 (February 2004): 40.

<sup>31</sup> Vittorio Messori & Joseph Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report*, trans. Salvator Attanasio & Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), 45-49.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

*Mystici Corporis*, Ratzinger exhibits a firm reliance on personal and relational ontology which has its roots in the Thomistic doctrine of person-as-relation. For Ratzinger, the idea of *communio* is inseparable from the idea of the Body of Christ. Indeed,

Christian unity is first of all unity with Christ, which becomes possible where insistence on one's own individuality ceases and is replaced by pure, unreserved being "from" and being "for." From such being with Christ, which enters completely into the openness of the one who willed to hold on to nothing of his own individuality (cf. also Phil 2:6), follows the complete "at-one-ness"— "that they may all be one."<sup>33</sup>

The constitution of the individual in the relational personhood of Christ is found when the individual is in *communio* with other Christians. This means that Ratzinger does not totally discount the contributions of de Lubac; indeed, de Lubac's historical approaches greatly influenced Ratzinger's own appreciation for the study of history in theological reflection. Specifically, the insistence on the joint motif Body of Christ—*communio* already conceptually links unity with Christ and the unity of Christians with participation in the Eucharist—the medieval idea of *corpus mysticum*. The "designation of this sacrament as the 'breaking of bread' expresses the social requirement of the Eucharist, which is not an isolated cultic act but a way of existence: life in sharing, in communion with Christ, who gives the gift of his very self."<sup>34</sup> Thus, through a brilliant synthesis, Ratzinger's ecclesiology holds the reflections of Roman neo-Thomism and de Lubac's *nouvelle theologie* together in a way that expresses their shared foundations in Thomas's doctrine of person-as-relation.

### ***Subsistit in Ecclesia Catholica: Ratzinger on Lumen Gentium 8***

Against interpretations that would diminish the unicity of the Catholic Church, Ratzinger has always presented a stern defense of *Lumen Gentium*

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<sup>33</sup> Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 187.

<sup>34</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996), 43.



8, which states that the “Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church.” Certainly, the simpler and more traditional statement “*Ecclesia Christi est Ecclesia Catholica,*” unequivocally and univocally, asserts the doctrine without a modicum of doubt. The use of the verb *subsistere* might certainly lead an uninformed reader to see in the change from the traditional formulation a *relaxation* of the doctrine. However, for Ratzinger, this is certainly not the case.

In “The Ecclesiology of the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*,” Ratzinger notes that “*subsistit* derives from classical philosophy, as it was further developed in Scholasticism. *Subsistere* is a special variant of *esse*. It is ‘being’ in the form of an independent agent.” Indeed, the original nominal form of *subsistere* is not the early modern neologism *subsistentia*, but the classical Aristotelian term *substantia*. This certainly indicates that the term *subsistit in*, far from being a diminishment, actually represents an intensified copula, such that the “substance” of the Church of Christ is indeed the Catholic Church. However, this appeal to Aristotelian terminology, rather than closing the door to ecumenical dialogue, actually permits a mode of conceptualization most conducive to a real appreciation of the “many elements of sanctification and truth” found “outside its visible structure.”<sup>35</sup> Indeed, for the Second Vatican Council,

the society structured with hierarchical organs and the Mystical Body of Christ, are not to be considered as two realities, nor are the visible assembly and the spiritual community, nor the earthly Church and the Church enriched with heavenly things; rather they form one complex reality which coalesces from a divine and a human element.<sup>36</sup>

The identity of the “society structured with hierarchical organs” and the “Mystical Body” is affirmed in the strongest of terms; hence, the “substance” of the Church of Christ *is* the Catholic Church. However, when it comes to considering the other ecclesial communities in imperfect communion with the Catholic Church, the Council affirms that their “many elements of sanctification and truth” are in fact “gifts belonging to the

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<sup>35</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 8.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

Church of Christ” which “are forces impelling them toward Catholic unity.”<sup>37</sup> To continue the Aristotelian metaphor, the communities which enjoy said “gifts” participate as “accidents” in the “substance” of the Church.

This should not be considered, in the manner of the Averroist, Bonaventuran, Scotist, or Ockhamite appropriation of Aristotle’s metaphysics on substantial form—an emphasis on a primordial separation between substance and accident, such that the unity of accidents in a substance is a merely *formal* unity. Instead, one should appeal to the Thomistic doctrine of the unity of substantial form, meaning that the inherence of accidents in a substance is already an irreducible unity. Thus, those communities outside the visible structure of the Church participate in a real and concrete, though imperfect way in the grace of Christ which is mediated through his mystical body. Ratzinger’s defense of the phrase *subsistit in*, whether in his public role as Prefect for the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith (through the instruction *Dominus Iesus*), or in his article “L’ecclesiologia della Costituzione *Lumen Gentium*,”<sup>38</sup> is largely incomprehensible outside the understanding of Aristotelian categories and metaphysics as appropriated by Aquinas. This Ratzingerian-Thomistic synthesis, far from expressing an exclusively Roman-centric vision of the Church, actually permits a conceptual understanding of ecumenism which both highlights the unity of Christians while safeguarding the unicity of the Catholic Church.

### **Thomas Aquinas: Appropriating and Surpassing Aristotle**

One of the later medieval critiques of the Aristotelianized intellectual landscape represented by the universities was that it seemed to impose foreign or pagan categories on the Godhead. Bonaventure himself represents the beginning of this critique, as Ratzinger demonstrated in his habilitation. Whereas Thomas Aquinas adopted in large measure the logical, natural, and metaphysical reflections of Aristotle into his own system, Bonaventure and the so-called “Franciscan school” in his mold

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, “L’ecclesiologia della Costituzione *Lumen Gentium*,” in *Il Concilio Vaticano II: Recezione e attualità alla luce del Giubileo*, ed. Rino Fisichella (Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 2000), 79.

seemed to rely only on the works which Augustine and the early medievals would have had at their disposal—the so-called *Organon* or *Logica Vetus*. As is clear from the preceding reflections, however, the fact that Ratzinger generally seems to follow Thomas in the articulation of his Trinitarian doctrine means that, necessarily, Ratzinger follows the Thomistic appropriation of both Aristotelian logic and metaphysics. However, as also shown above, this is not an uncritical appropriation of the Philosopher's doctrine. Neither Thomas nor Ratzinger engage in an unqualified recourse to Aristotle's teachings, and this is especially true in the field of Trinitarian theology. But before noting the similarities between Thomas and Ratzinger in their limited retrieval of Aristotle vis-a-vis the doctrine of the Trinity, a few more general comments on the relationship between Thomas and Aristotle will help to contextualize Ratzinger's approach in comparison with that of Thomas.

Perhaps the most evident area where the generally close relationship between Aristotelian philosophy and Thomistic theology dissolves is found in Thomas' treatment of the Eucharist. Catherine Pickstock astutely comments that, in his articles on transubstantiation, Aquinas "pushes these Aristotelian categories to breaking point."<sup>39</sup> In the mysterious gift of his Body and Blood, because it concerns the very divinity of the Godhead, the ten categories of being cannot apply as cleanly as they do with mere created things. Indeed, for a strict Aristotelian, Thomas' insistence that Christ's Body and Blood are present by way of substance and not by quantity<sup>40</sup> is utterly and completely incomprehensible, as is the idea that the accidents can remain as carriers of the substantial change (as opposed to the usual persistence of *materia prima*).<sup>41</sup>

Yet there are other Thomistic sources outside Aquinas' academic manuals and commentaries that show how the Angelic Doctor departs from the letter of Aristotle in a clear and concrete way. Rather than an in-depth look at questions 75-77 of the *Tertia Pars*, one can simply refer to some of the most accessible and widely known works in the Thomistic

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<sup>39</sup> Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1998), 259.

<sup>40</sup> Aquinas, ST III, q. 76, a. 1, ad. 3: "...corpus Christi est in hoc sacramento per modum substantiae, et non per modum quantitatis."

<sup>41</sup> Aquinas, ST III, q. 75.

corpus—his Eucharistic hymns for the feast of Corpus Christi—for evidence of some themes that go beyond anything the Philosopher had ever considered.<sup>42</sup> In the devotional hymn *Adoro te devote*, we find,

Visus, tactus, gustus in te fallitur  
sed auditu solo tuto creditur.  
Credo quidquid dixit Dei Filius;  
Nil hoc verbo veritatis verius.<sup>43</sup>

In *Pange lingua*,

Verbum caro, panem verum,  
verbo carnem efficit  
fitque sanguis Christi merum  
etsi sensus deficit;  
ad firmandum cor sincerum  
sola fides sufficit.

[...]

Praestet fides supplementum  
sensuum defectui.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, the magnificent sequence of the Corpus Christi Mass:

Quod non capis, quod non vides  
animosa firmat fides  
praeter rerum ordinem

[. . .]

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<sup>42</sup> The texts of Thomas' Eucharistic hymns are taken from Corpus Thomisticum, Sancti Thomae de Aquino, "*Officium corporis Christi «Sacerdos»*," <http://www.corpusthomisticum.org/pcx.html>. Translations given in the following footnotes are my own.

<sup>43</sup> Aquinas, *Adoro te devote*: "Sight, touch, and taste all fail in you / but only through hearing is everything believed. / I believe whatsoever the Son of God says; / there is nothing truer than this word of truth."

<sup>44</sup> Aquinas, *Pange lingua*: "The Word made flesh is true bread, / by his word is flesh effected, / and the blood of Christ comes about / as if the senses fail; / only faith suffices / to strengthen the sincere heart. / [...] / May faith provide an aid / to the failure of the senses."

Fracto demum Sacramento  
Ne vacilles sed memento  
tantum esse sub fragmento  
quantum toto tegitur.  
Nulla rei fit scissura  
signi tantum fit fractura  
qua nec status nec statura  
Signati minuitur.<sup>45</sup>

In all these well-loved hymns, Thomas beautifully presents, in the disarmingly simple manner of nursery rhymes, the failure not only of the Aristotelian categories in classifying the Eucharistic mystery, but also the failure of the senses to comprehend the true, fundamental reality of Christ's presence in the species of consecrated bread and wine. The Philosopher according to whom all things in the intellect must first pass through the senses is left behind in theology; in those things which truly touch the divine nature, in those things pertaining to the *ipsum esse subsistens* in whom the distinction of essence and existence does not obtain, the senses do not comprehend and the categories fall apart. God is indeed *praeter rerum ordinem*—beyond the natural order of things.

With this brief foray into Thomas' Eucharistic doctrine, we see that the Angelic Doctor knows when to appropriate Aristotle and when to discard him. Thomas leans on Aristotelian philosophy as much as possible, and certainly to a greater extent than Bonaventure; but when treating of the most important mysteries of the faith, Thomas makes Aristotle yield to the doctrine of the Church. Just as the categories fall apart in the Eucharist, so too are they inadequate in expressing the mystery of the Trinity. We have already seen how Thomas' proposal of proper or essential accidents in God, specifically the persons of the Trinity as subsistent relations, constitutes a surpassing of not only the Boethian definition, but also of Aristotelian logic as a whole.

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<sup>45</sup> Aquinas, *Lauda Sion*. "A lively faith seals / that which you do not understand nor see / beyond the order of natural things. / [...] When the Sacrament is broken / do not worry but remember / there is as much in the fragment / as in the whole. / Nothing is diminished / in the breaking of the Sacrament / as neither its status nor its stature / is diminished in the signs."

## Joseph Ratzinger: Appropriating and Surpassing Aristotle

Ratzinger also moves in this direction when discussing the inexhaustible mystery of the Trinity. He leans upon an analogy with quantum physics, in which the apparent structure of light or matter—as either a wave or a particle—is dependent on the observer. The physicist, he says, “is becoming increasingly aware today that we cannot embrace given realities. . . in *one* form of experiment or *one* form of statement; on the contrary, from different sides we can glimpse different aspects, which cannot be traced back to each other.”<sup>46</sup> More and more, the discoveries of physics point to the elusive nature of comprehensive explanations; indeed, there is a growing awareness that even the most advanced theories accounting for the newest discoveries can only constitute “a provisional assessment of the whole, which is not accessible to us as a unified whole because of the restrictions implicit in our point of view.”<sup>47</sup> As a result, Ratzinger finds that the “approach of modern day physics may offer us more help here than Aristotelian philosophy.”<sup>48</sup>

The implication of the observer or the subject in all perceptions of reality points to an intersubjective understanding of the world. This understanding, in turn, might help to shed some light on the inner dynamism of the Trinitarian persons within the Godhead. Building upon the analogy with the paradigm of quantum physics, he notes that “Schrödinger has defined the structure of matter as ‘parcels of waves’ and thereby hit upon the idea of a being that has no substance but is purely actual, whose apparent ‘substantiability’ really results from the pattern of movement of superimposed waves.”<sup>49</sup> With this insight, Ratzinger beautifully hearkens back to the type of conditional appropriation of Aristotelian terminology characteristic of Thomas’ own Trinitarian approaches. For the future pope, Schrödinger’s theory always “remains an exciting simile for the *actualitas divina*, for the fact that God is absolutely ‘in act’ [and not ‘in potency’], and for the idea that the densest being—God—can subsist only in a multitude

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<sup>46</sup> Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 173.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 174-175.

of relations, which are not substances but simply ‘waves,’ and therein form a perfect unity and also the fullness of being.”<sup>50</sup>

## Conclusions and Observations

The foregoing investigation shows that, at least in the realm of Trinitarian theology, Joseph Ratzinger has far more in common with Saint Thomas Aquinas than with Saint Bonaventure. Whereas the latter insisted on the fecundity of the Father as the necessary principle for the procession of the other two Trinitarian persons, the former, in his doctrine of person-as-subsistent relation, takes the divine relations within the Godhead as a given. It is this latter idea, not the former, which illuminates Ratzinger’s Trinitarian theology. His insistence that the relation stands beside the substance as an equally primordial form of being directly mirrors the Thomistic doctrine of the subsistent relation and is in keeping with Thomas’ spirit of making Aristotle give way to theology and not the other way around.

Ratzinger’s Christocentric ecclesiology is ultimately rooted, not in an Augustinian-Bonaventurean doctrine of the Trinity, but in a properly Thomistic understanding of the divine Persons as subsistent relations. This in turn informs the idea of the personhood of Christ as fundamentally relational, firstly with the other two Persons of the Trinity, and secondarily with other human beings. A relational ecclesiology follows from this, which emphasizes incorporation into the Mystical Body of Christ through baptism. These are the same themes articulated by early twentieth century neo-Thomists and taken up wholesale by the encyclical *Mystici Corporis* of Pius XII. Finally, Ratzinger’s defense of the phrase *subsistit in* of *Lumen Gentium* 8 shows another area in which his ecclesiological reflections exhibit a heavy debt to the interpretation of Aristotelian philosophy offered by Thomism.

Certainly, Ratzinger diverges from Thomas in many ways. This is first and foremost seen in the style of theologizing. The medieval *summa* and the contemporary theological book approach reflections *de divinis* in modes that do not always admit of an easy synthesis between them. The logical progression of a manual for medieval students necessitated a

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

systematic, ordered progression through the articles of faith against the background of Aristotelian knowledge established in the trivium and quadrivium. Contemporary theological texts, however, are marked with the stamp of modernity, in that the rise of the prosaic monograph, marked by the author's personal style, was more freely conducive to the articulation of broad themes, connections, and insights which would simply be out of place in a medieval *summa*. As a result, whereas Thomas is plainly focused on God in himself in the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa Theologica* (and the Trinity in itself, in the last thirteen questions of the section on God in the *Prima Pars*), Ratzinger immediately discusses the implications of the doctrine of person-as-relation for theological anthropology. This concern seems to undergird all his reflections on the Trinity, and it is no wonder that, in *Introduction to Christianity's* section on the Trinity, Ratzinger also finds a way to weave considerations of human fatherhood, human sonship, ecumenism, and human relations in general into his treatment of the Trinitarian persons. He also finds in the doctrine of the Trinity a powerful criticism of the atomistic individualism which marks modern and postmodern theories of self-identity and autonomy. For Ratzinger, "the doctrine of the Trinity, when properly understood, becomes the reference point of theology that anchors all other lines of Christian thought,"<sup>51</sup> because "talking about God discloses what man is."<sup>52</sup>

Barring an explicit confirmation from the pope emeritus himself *dum spirat*, whether or not Ratzinger directly leaned on Thomas' Trinitarian theology can only remain a *quaestio disputata*. However, his insistence on the doctrine of person-as-relation certainly suggests that he did. Interestingly, *Introduction to Christianity's* treatment of the Trinity cites Augustine and Bonaventure while it does not cite Thomas; however, Ratzinger's foundational appeal to the idea of person-as-relation is found explicitly in neither of the former two doctors, whereas it is central in *Prima Pars* questions 27-28. The true reasons for Ratzinger's "silence" concerning his apparently Thomistic inspiration can only be confined to the realm of speculation. Perhaps—at least in *Introduction to Christianity*—his

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.



work is marked by the context of his intellectual generation, in which the conflation of decadent, manualist neo-Scholasticism with Thomism *simpliciter* was still a regnant tendency of the leading German-language theologians.

Alternatively, perhaps the Ratzingerian-Thomistic connection can be explained in terms of a common intellectual descent from Augustine. While the divergences between the so-called “Franciscan school” and “Dominican school” in the late medieval period evolved into an opposition between “Augustinianism” and “Thomism” in the twentieth century, the works of Thomas exhibit a clear deference to Augustine in many matters. A great deal of the *sed contra* statements in the *Summa Theologica* are appeals to Augustine, and many replies to objections deal with correcting erroneous interpretations of Augustine’s work. In the context of Trinitarian theology, Ratzinger himself suggests the veiled Augustinian origin of the idea of person-as-relation: “in God there are no accidents, only substance and relation.”<sup>53</sup> Whether or not Thomas himself took the spirit of this particular passage from *De Trinitate* and integrated it into *Prima Pars* questions 28 and 29 is unclear; there is no explicit citation of *De Trinitate* 5 in the *Summa*. In any case, there seems to be an apparent line of development of Augustine’s thought in Ratzinger, with Thomas’ doctrine of the Trinity as a necessary stop on the way.

In the context of a broader discussion of the interpretation of Ratzinger’s theology, his approaches to Trinitarian theology show the futility of the polemical attempts to classify his thought according to ideological schemata. He escapes facile tendencies to locate his theology on one side of an arbitrary binary divide. He is no mere “conservative” in that he simply regurgitates received teaching; he is no mere “liberal” in that he seeks a synthesis with contemporary intellectual approaches while jettisoning the past. He is no mere “anti-Scholastic Augustinian,” for his Trinitarian theology is actually closer to Thomas than to Augustine or Bonaventure; yet he is no mere Scholastic, for he acknowledges the shortcomings of Aristotelian philosophy when speaking of God. In this way, in terms of a conditioned appeal to both Aristotle and the received tradition, Ratzinger follows Thomas’ example of critically appropriating

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<sup>53</sup> See footnote 19 above.

different methods in philosophy and theology, testing everything, and holding fast to what is good.

Even if he never became Bishop of Rome, the figure of Joseph Ratzinger would always loom large among Catholic theologians of the twentieth century. After his service as an influential *peritus* at the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), Ratzinger continued on an illustrious academic career in the theological faculties of Bonn, Tübingen, and Regensburg, writing and speaking for decades on matters touching all theological disciplines. Called to the Roman Curia in 1981 by Pope John Paul II as Prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, he confronted the most pressing and controversial questions facing the global Catholic Church. From his election to the papacy in 2005 to his historic resignation in 2013, his brief reign on the Chair of Peter was marked by a vigorous attempt to recover and reinvigorate Catholic identity in the midst of the hyper-fractionalization of postmodernity. As the close of his earthly life draws nearer, assessments not only of his pontificate but of his decades-long contribution to contemporary theological discourse will inevitably arise in fora both academic and popular. In light of this not-so-distant future, this essay aimed to be a modest contribution, showing how the thought of Joseph Ratzinger is as coherent as it is multifaceted, and as profound as it is broad. Drawing from the progenitors of what became rival theological schools, he was able to effectively articulate perennial and foundational Catholic doctrines in the tumultuous intellectual and spiritual landscape of the twentieth century. In other words, Ratzinger represents a true theological *synthesis*, a reconciliation of seemingly contradictory interpretive traditions, and an eminent expression of the ultimate coherency of Christian doctrine. By tracing a few of the significant ways in which Joseph Ratzinger follows a Thomistic rather than Bonaventuran line of thought, this project hopes to broaden the conversation about the characterization of his life and work, so that the extent of his erudition might not lie hidden behind binary interpretive lenses but seen as an authentic expression of the broad Catholic tradition.

*Jose Isidro Belleza is a graduate of the University of San Francisco (2010), a former United States Army Officer (2010-2017), and is*

now a concurrent MA (Philosophy) and MA (Theology) student at the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology in Berkeley, CA.

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