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Thomas Marschler

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Substantiality and Personality in the Scholastic Doctrine of God

THOMAS MARSCHLER
(University of Augsburg)

1. Initial Remarks

(1) When the relationship between the notions “substance” and “person” is discussed in relation to the doctrine of God, thinking about the conflicts and tensions between those two terms, which have become highly visible in modern theology and philosophy, is unavoidable. Following Karl Barth, many 20th-century theologians have protested in numerous ways against continued descriptions of the personal God, witnessed to in Scripture, by appeal to traditional ontological terms. As a representative of those scholars, who tried to preserve a Scripture-based account on Christian faith in the face of accusations that it had been Hellenized, the Reformed theologian Emil Brunner († 1966) may be quoted:

“Der Gott, mit dem wir es im Glauben zu tun haben, ist nicht ein besprochenes, gedachtes Sein, nicht ein Ens, eine «Substanz», wie die Gottheit der metaphysischen Spekulation, nicht ein – wenn auch durch Abstraktion noch so sublimes – Denkobjekt, sondern das uns als Ich mit Du anredende Subjekt. Gott ist redende, handelnde, sich selbst und seinen Willen kundgebende Persönlichkeit.”¹

This theological objection is backed by a reflection on the notion of personality and the conditions of personal existence recognized by modern philosophy since Descartes. From the viewpoint of transcendental philosophy, the very root of personhood is found in the formally unconditioned self-determination of finite freedom and appears as an original action [*Tathandlung*] of the self.² Hence, it seems impossible to describe personality with the help of categories derived from “substance ontology” or to explicate human freedom in a metaphysical way by assuming sub-structures like potentialities or essences. This does not only apply to a discussion of human persons, but *a fortiori* to the concept of personality in the philosophical doctrine of God. This crisis of “classical theism”, which was caused by the subjective turn in philosophy, was exacer-

¹ E. BRUNNER, *Die christliche Lehre von Gott. Dogmatik I*, 3rd edit., Zürich–Stuttgart 1960, 142.

² Cf. G. ESSEN, *Die Freiheit Jesu. Der neuchalkedonische Enhypostasiebegriff im Horizont neuzeitlicher Subjekt- und Personphilosophie (ratio fidei 5)*, Regensburg 2001, 137–191.

bated by pantheistic connotations in the concept of an “absolute substance”, a concept generated by Spinozism. Even Hegel’s philosophy of religion was unable to correct these tendencies in a convincing way.³ The problems indicated in this brief sketch remain a challenge for every attempt to mediate between subjectivity and personality in contemporary philosophical and theological paradigms in the doctrine of God; it would be all too easy to read them into the scholastic theological literature. Such an anachronistic way of thinking can be found as early as the works of Ferdinand Christian Baur (†1860); Baur tried to detect a development from substance to subjectivity in John Duns Scotus’ doctrine of God.⁴ There was no doubt among scholastic or early modern authors that persons are a particular kind of substances. Nevertheless, the distinguishing characteristics of persons, who possess a rational nature, freedom and a special dignity resulting from these features, have always been emphasized. Consequently, the notion of personality, which was developed in the philosophy of subjectivity and is based on actual self-awareness, has been widely rejected by modern scholastic theology as an inroad to thinking about Trinitarian theology or Christology.⁵ This common conviction was even consolidated after the ec-

³ D. F. Strauss already made this accusation against the followers of Hegel in 19th-century Protestant theology. Cf. D.F. STRAUSS, *Die christliche Glaubenslehre*, Bd. 1, Tübingen-Stuttgart 1840, 513f. This debate has had a great impact on the philosophical doctrine of God up to today; since today pan(en)theism and monism (inspired e.g. by process theology) are once more discussed as alternatives to classical theism. For further discussion see various articles by Klaus MÜLLER, e.g. K. MÜLLER *All-Einheit christlich – eine kleine Provokation mit Folgen*, in: T. MARSCHLER/T. SCHÄRTL (Eds.), *Eigenschaften Gottes. Ein Gespräch zwischen systematischer Theologie und analytischer Philosophie* (STEP 6), Münster 2016, 97–116.

⁴ Cf. F.C. BAUR, *Die christliche Lehre von der Dreieinigkeit und Menschwerdung Gottes in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, Bd. 2, Tübingen 1843, 655. Baur’s view is based on a highly problematic and “voluntaristic” understanding of John Duns Scotus’ doctrine of free will. For further discussion see the critical remarks in P. MINGES, *Der Gottesbegriff des Duns Scotus auf seinen angeblich exzessiven Indeterminismus geprüft*, Wien 1907.

⁵ Cf. e.g. J. POHLE/J. GUMMERSBACH, *Lehrbuch der Dogmatik*, Bd. 1, 10th edit., Paderborn 1952, 445f.: “Wäre das Selbstbewußtsein für sich allein das Wesentliche und Formale der Persönlichkeit, so würde hieraus folgen, daß bei nur einem Selbstbewußtsein auch nur eine Person und bei doppeltem Selbstbewußtsein zwei Personen entstehen müßten. Da dem Dreieinigen nur ein (absolutes) Selbstbewußtsein eignet, dem Gottmenschen Christus aber zwei, so würde im einen Falle die Dreipersonlichkeit Gottes, im anderen die auf der unio hypostatica beruhende Einpersonlichkeit Christi zerstört und aufgelöst. Mithin führt die Günthersche Definition direkt zu trinitarischen und christologischen Häresien: folglich ist sie falsch. Aber auch mit dem Volks- und Rechtsbewußtsein steht sie nicht im Einklang, weil diese das seiner noch nicht bewußte Kind (z.B. im Mutter-schoß) oder den stumpfsinnigen Idioten ebensogut als wahre Personen behandelt, wie jeden seiner selbst mächtigen Erwachsenen.” For the condemnation of Günther, inter alia because of errors concerning Trinitarian theology and Christology, cf. the *Breve Eximiam tuam* of Pius IX from 1857 (H. DENZINGER/P. HÜNERMANN, *Enchiridion symbolorum de-*

clesiastical censorship against the works of Anton Günther (†1863). Therefore, a dialectic between substance and person in the early modern sense of the word never became a crucial problem during the long tradition of scholastic theology – a fact which applies to discussions in the philosophy of religion as well as in theology.

(2) A second approach to the topic of this paper is much more closely related to the scholastic discussion. It comes down to the question whether the two notions “substance” and “person” can be used at all while talking about the (Trinitarian) God – or whether their use (or, at least, the use of one of them) should perhaps be restricted to the area of created beings. This question clearly marks the transition from a philosophically established terminology to a notion which could also be useful for the theological doctrine of God. Since this problem is discussed throughout the works of scholastic authors, it should also be briefly discussed in the context of this paper.

(3) Finally, there is a third approach to the topic. It aims at the relationship between “substance” and “person” within God, assuming with the Christian creed that God is Trinitarian. This is a central problem for scholastic dogmatics, a problem which has aroused the speculative interest of authors throughout the centuries: arriving at a rationally satisfying way of spelling out the core claim of Christian belief, namely that there is *one* God in *three* persons. This will be the topic of the main section in this paper.

While examining these aspects, only a very small and subjective sampling of theological discourse can be presented. Nevertheless, I have tried to select some exemplary positions which have dominated the discussion during almost the entire second millennium of Christian theology. Moreover, the scope of this article is restricted to a systematic overview which aims to portray the guiding forms of thought results of important discussions. This in turn requires a certain simplification concerning the presentation of positions; we will not be able to support each and every claims by appeal to detailed evidence from primary sources.

2. On the Use of the Notions “Substance” and “Person” in the Scholastic Doctrine of God

At the beginning of scholastic theology in 12th and 13th centuries, there were no crucial doubts concerning the notions “substance” (as a synonym for essence)

initionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum: Kompendium der Glaubensbekenntnisse und kirchlichen Lehrentscheidungen. Lateinisch-Deutsch, Freiburg 2015, nr. 2828).

and “person(s)” in the doctrine of God. On the one hand, this is because the phrase *una substantia (et tres personae)* was well established through Patristic tradition from Tertullian onward,⁶ and, in particular, systematically employed by Augustine⁷. On the other hand, this phrase was deeply rooted in the tradition of the ecclesiastical magisterium. Moreover, medieval theologians felt challenged to develop exact philosophical definitions, for use within Christian dogmatics, of both terms.

(1) There were serious problems in applying the notion of substantiality to God. An exemplary reflection on these difficulties can be found in the *Prima Pars* of Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae* (†1274). For Aquinas, it is obvious that God as *esse per se* cannot be related to any category. Hence, as the *primum extra omne genus*⁸ he is not a substance in the sense of a category, because categorically determined substances are always characterised by a restriction of the plenitude of being by a certain essence, i.e. by the contraction and application of the act of being regarding a certain “quid”.⁹ Hence, the distinction between *esse* and *essentia* is characteristic of created substances, whereas according to Aquinas divine being is pure actuality of being. As a consequence, neither the difference between accidental and substantial perfection within the divine being, nor any possibility of successive evolvment of potentialities which have their origin in divine being, can be assumed for God. All divine perfections must be part of the divine essence, since they are identical with the one perfect being of God. Aquinas uses this insight to justify divine unity, simplicity and singularity, i.e. the non-communicability of divine nature to several individuals.¹⁰ Hence, it is quite clear how divine “substantiality” has to be understood: it is pure subsistence and excludes all further moments of determination which

⁶ “Unter Substanz versteht Tertullian das konkrete Wesen eines jeden Seienden: eines Gegenstandes, eines Menschen oder auch Gottes; sie bezeichnet das Grundsubstrat des Einzelwesens und den Träger seiner jeweiligen Eigenschaften. Die Substanz ist die tragende Ursprungswirklichkeit, die Vater, Sohn und Geist eint. So ist der Sohn bleibend dem Vater als Inbegriff der göttlichen Substanz verbunden; der Sohn weitet sie gleichsam aus. Gegenüber der dem Vater eignenden Seinsfülle (Pater enim tota substantia est) ist der Sohn als ‚derivatio totius et portio‘ der einen göttlichen Ursprungswirklichkeit zu bestimmen”: F. COURTH, *Trinität. In der Schrift und Patristik* (Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte II/1a), Freiburg 1988, 83. For a discussion of “triune personality” in Tertullian cf. *ibid.*, 84–87. However, Tertullian’s authorship of *De trinitate* is contested.

⁷ For Augustine’s doctrine of the Trinity and many aspects of the history of its reception, see R. KANY, *Augustins Trinitätsdenken. Bilanz, Kritik und Weiterführung der modernen Forschung zu „De trinitate“* (Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 22), Tübingen 2007.

⁸ Cf. AQUINAS, *S. th.* I, 3, 6 ad 2. In this paper, Aquinas is always quoted according to the digital version of his works in the *Index thomisticus*: <http://www.corpusthomicum.org/>.

⁹ Cf. AQUINAS, *S. th.* I, 3, 5 c. and ad 1; I, 5, 3 ad 1.

¹⁰ Cf. AQUINAS, *S. th.* I, 11, 3c.

must be considered in a description of categorical substances – in particular the function of substances as bearers of accidents. “Being a substance applies to God as long as it designates existing-through-itself.”¹¹ With this specification of the notion of substance in the doctrine of God, Aquinas employs a mode of thinking initiated by Augustine¹² and brought into the medieval debate by Anselm of Canterbury¹³: Aquinas uses the term “divine substance” almost naturally on the one hand, while adopting the tradition of divine “super-substantiality” on the other hand, a tradition well known to him from commenting on Pseudo-Dionysius.¹⁴ Hence Aquinas employed a strategy of affirming divine substantiality by excluding all categorical imperfections of created being and by using the notions *substantia*, *essentia/quidditas*, and *natura*¹⁵ in a factually synonymous way; this strategy has been adopted by virtually all scholastic authors. John Duns Scotus (†1308) for example adopts the designation of divine being as an “ocean of infinite substance”¹⁶ from John of Damascus. Like many other medieval authors before and after him, he explains the phrase, from the Pseudo-Athanasian Creed, that the son is “begotten of the essence of the Father” without problematizing the notion of substance.¹⁷ Hence, in Scotus’ doctrine of God the term completely sheds its controversial character, which had at least still been indicated in the writings of Aquinas. From scholastic theology in the late medieval and early modern periods until the neo-scholastic era of the 19th and 20th century, it was common and not at all controversial from a speculative point of view to speak of God as a (purely spiritual and unsurpassably perfect) substance. The First Vatican Council still uses this expression, which had been used by councils of earlier times in a similar way,¹⁸ without any particular com-

¹¹ Cf. AQUINAS, S. th. I, 29, 3 ad 4: “Substantia vero convenit Deo, secundum quod significat existere per se.”

¹² Cf. AUGUSTINE, De trin. 5,3 (CCL 50, 208): “et ideo sola est incommutabilis substantia uel essentia quae deus est, cui profecto ipsum esse unde essentia nominata est maxime ac uerissime competit. quod enim mutatur non seruat ipsum esse, et quod mutari potest etiamsi non mutetur potest quod fuerat non esse, ac per hoc illud solum quod non tantum non mutatur uerum etiam mutari omnino non potest sine scrupulo occurrit quod uerissime dicatur esse.”

¹³ Cf. ANSELM OF CANTERBURY, Monologion c. 26–27 (Opera omnia I), Seckau 1938, 44f.

¹⁴ Cf. in particular AQUINAS, Super Dion. De div. nom., c. 1, l. 1–2.

¹⁵ In Thomist tradition, only the different respects, which are emphasized by all of these notions, were usually stressed.

¹⁶ JOHANNES DUNS SCOTUS, Ord. I, dist. 8, p. 1, q. 4, n. 198 (Opera Omnia IV), Vatikanstadt 1956, 264: “pelagus infinitae substantiae”.

¹⁷ Cf. JOHANNES DUNS SCOTUS, Ord. I, dist. 5, p. 2, q. un. (Opera Omnia IV), Vatikanstadt 1956, 41–86).

¹⁸ In definitions of the magisterium from ancient and medieval times, the unity of the divine substance is usually contrasted by the Trinity of the persons of the Trinity. As examples for many sources cf. Fides Damasi (DENZINGER/HÜNERMANN, Enchiridion [cf.

mentary.¹⁹ An explicit paragraph dealing with divine substantiality is often omitted from the scholastic treatises *De deo*,²⁰ because such a paragraph is always included by necessity as soon as divine being as the metaphysical basis of God's attributes is discussed.²¹ Nevertheless, most early modern scholastic scholars have seen divine substantiality – understood in an analogous way,²² i.e. in its determination as *esse per se subsistens* – as formally constitutive of the divine nature from a metaphysical point of view, at least as far as this nature can be grasped by the finite human spirit, a spirit which can only perceive God as he is mirrored in his creation can only describe him from this point of view.²³ Divine being is pure act, the simplest reality as such which is not further determinable. This claim is used in theological arguments to combat any sort of attempt to give this divine substance further modal determination – a concept which was

fn. 5], nr. 71); Ps.-Athanasianum (DENZINGER/HÜNERMANN, Enchiridion [cf. fn. 5], nr. 75); Synode of Braga (DENZINGER/HÜNERMANN, Enchiridion [cf. fn. 5], nr. 451); IV. Lateran Council (DENZINGER/HÜNERMANN, Enchiridion [cf. fn. 5], nr. 803); Council of Florence, Decree concerning the Jacobites (DENZINGER/HÜNERMANN, Enchiridion [cf. fn. 5], nr. 1330).

¹⁹ Cf. Vat. I, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*, Cap. 1 (DENZINGER/HÜNERMANN, Enchiridion [cf. fn. 5], nr. 3001). Can. 1 (DENZINGER/HÜNERMANN, Enchiridion [cf. fn. 5], nr. 3023).

²⁰ For an example of the introduction of this sort of passage in the final period of scholastic handbook literature, see POHLE/GUMMERSBACH, *Lehrbuch der Dogmatik*, I [cf. fn. 5], 255f. („Die absolute Substantialität Gottes“).

²¹ Cf. e.g. F. SUÁREZ, *Disputationes Metaphysicae* 28.3.8 (*Opera omnia* XXVI), Paris 1866, 15b: “Unde ipsamet ratio entis, prout in Deo est, essentialiter includit rationem substantiae, sapientiae, iustitiae; atque adeo (quod praecipuum est) includit essentialiter ipsum esse omnino independens et a se, cum tamen e contrario in creatura ipsamet ratio entis sit omnino dependens et ab alio et in unoquoque ente est limitata ad certum perfectionis genus. Et ob hanc causam ratio entis dicitur esse in Deo per essentiam, in creaturis vero per participationem.” For further remarks concerning divine substantiality, cf. DM 34.1.4 (XXVI, 348b–349a); DM 34.5.60 (XXVI, 399b) or DM 33.1.8 (XXVI, 332b).

²² Cf. M.J. SCHEEBEN, *Handbuch der katholischen Dogmatik*. Zweites Buch: *Gotteslehre oder die Theologie im engeren Sinne* (Gesammelte Schriften IV), Freiburg 1943, § 68, n. 107 (41); n. 118 (45).

²³ Cf. SCHEEBEN, *Gotteslehre* [cf. fn. 22], § 68, n. 106 (41): “Einen substantiellen Begriff von Gott kann es (...) vonseiten unserer Erkenntnis nicht in dem Sinne geben, daß wir eine direkte und intuitive Vorstellung von der göttlichen Substanz in sich hätten und so die Prädikate Gottes direkt, wie sie in ihrem Subjekte und mit demselben eins sind, erkennen könnten. Denn vermöge unserer mittelbaren Erkenntnisweise erkennen wir Gott nur aus seinen Wirkungen und beziehen die hieraus geschöpften Prädikate auf seine Substanz als Trägerin derselben, ohne diese selbst zu schauen.” The whole passage is an application of a basic Thomist principle, cf. S. th. I, 39, 2 c.: “intellectus noster res divinas nominat, non secundum modum earum, quia sic eas cognoscere non potest, sed secundum modum in rebus creatis inventum.”

at the very root of the pantheistic turn in Spinoza's thinking about God.²⁴ On the basis of these premises, Spinoza's challenge to a theology which construes God as an (absolute) substance was much less dangerous to early modern Catholic theology than to the Protestant doctrine of God.

(2) In a similar way, "person" – the second of the two notions to be discussed in this paper – had already been introduced and legitimized for centuries in Patristic tradition by the time medieval theologians launched their efforts to achieve a more precise systematic understanding of it. The problem of coordinating Latin and Greek terminology (concerning the exact equivalents of the notions *ousía*, *hypóstasis* and *prósopon*), which had long overshadowed the debates in the ancient church, had already been solved by the end of the Patristic period.²⁵ However, it is not only out of faithfulness to the dogmatic tradition that scholastic scholars affirm the term "person" in the doctrine of God. As Aquinas argues, "person designates the most perfect in the whole nature, namely that, which subsists in a rational nature", and, hence, something, which is characterized by a unique form of power over oneself and a singular dignity. Therefore, God cannot lack this feature of perfection – although, as all other attributes, it must be attributed to him "in a sublime way", i.e. by excluding all imperfections of created beings.²⁶ Consequently, Thomists have spoken of an analogous use of this notion.²⁷ This predication is primarily employed in a formal-ontological sense by scholastic scholars. Its model from ancient philosophy can be found in Boethius' (†524/526) famous definition, which almost all scholastic theologians used as their Christological and Trinitarian starting point whenever the question of personality comes up. "Persona est naturae rationa(bi)lis individua substantia".²⁸ This definition determines "being a person" as a way of realizing substantial being and, more closely, as the subsisting of a creature with

²⁴ Cf. e.g. R. GARRIGOU-LAGRANGE, *Dieu. Son existence et sa Nature*, 4th edit., Paris 1923, 362ff.

²⁵ For a recent overview concerning the development of Trinitarian thinking in the history of the church, cf. V.H. DRECOLL, *Entwicklungen und Positionen in der Geschichte des Christentums*, in: V.H. DRECOLL (Ed.), *Trinität (Themen der Theologie 2)*, Tübingen 2011, 81–162.

²⁶ Cf. AQUINAS, *S. th. I*, 29, 3 c.: "Respondeo dicendum quod persona significat id quod est perfectissimum in tota natura, scilicet subsistens in rationali natura. Unde, cum omne illud quod est perfectionis, Deo sit attribuendum, eo quod eius essentia continet in se omnem perfectionem; conveniens est ut hoc nomen persona de Deo dicatur. Non tamen eodem modo quo dicitur de creaturis, sed excellentiori modo; sicut et alia nomina quae, creaturis a nobis imposita, Deo attribuuntur; sicut supra ostensum est, cum de divinis nominibus ageretur."

²⁷ Cf. SCHEEBEN, *Gotteslehre* [cf. fn. 22], § 114, n. 901 (p. 384f.).

²⁸ BOETHIUS, *Contra Eutychen III* (BOETHIUS, *Die Theologischen Traktate. Lateinisch-deutsch. Transl. and ed. by M. Elsässer [PhB 397]*), Hamburg 1988, 84.

the ability to reason in an individual and concrete way.²⁹ This definition has to prove itself in two theological contexts which employ it in very different ways. In *Christology*, the main difficulty is to show how one person might bear two rational natures, namely a human and a divine nature. The central speculative challenge for all interpreters of the Calcedonian Creed is to develop a theory of how these two natures are combined in one single subject, and of how the person may be understood as a crucial unifying principle without endangering the integrity of these natures. Moreover, a specification of the Boethian definition seems inevitable from a Christological perspective. It is quite clear from a dogmatic point of view that true individuality must be added to abstract essential attributes if we understand the non-personal human nature of Christ in a correct way – the church fathers were talking about the Son of God’s assuming human nature *in atomo*.³⁰ Boethius’s apparent assumption that the individuality of a rational substance is already a sufficient criterion for *personal* being endangers the personal unity of Christ, which must be none other than the unity of the second divine person. However, in Trinitarian theology the problems appear to be quite the other way round. There is a need here to acknowledge three persons who must nevertheless not individuate the one divine substance in the strict sense of the word. For in this case these persons would constitute three divine beings, leading to an inevitable tri-theism. As a consequence, the formal constitution of personality cannot be based on the individuality of this essence the bearer of which must be regarded as person. There must be an aspect of determination which differs from individuality alone. It was for this reason that early scholastic scholars, such as Abelard or even Peter Lombard, doubted whether the Boethian definition could be applied to Trinitarian theology at all.³¹ Meanwhile, Gilbert of Poitiers advanced the thesis that the Boethian definition remained useful as long as the term *individua substantia* was interpreted in a more precise way, as a designation of (personal) *subsistence* or of perfect being-for-itself.³² The majority of scholastic thinkers, following this path, were thus able to affirm the Boethian definition as well as to look for alternative ways of determining personality. It was Richard of St. Victor (†1173) who came up with the most popular attempt; he defined person as an “incommunicable exist-

²⁹ Cf. C. SCHLAPKOHL, *Persona est naturae rationabilis individua substantia*. Boethius und die Debatte um den Personbegriff (Marburger Theologische Studien 56), Marburg 1999.

³⁰ Cf. T. MARSCHLER, *Die spekulative Trinitätslehre des Francisco Suárez S. J. in ihrem philosophisch-theologischen Kontext* (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters NF 71), Münster 2007, 118ff.

³¹ Cf. J. SCHNEIDER, *Die Lehre vom dreieinigen Gott in der Schule des Petrus Lombardus* (Münchener Theologische Studien, S 22), München 1961, 118. 121.

³² Cf. SCHNEIDER, *Die Lehre vom dreieinigen Gott* [cf. fn. 31], 120.

tence³³ within a theological context. Hence, Richard not only points to processions within God (*existere as ek-sistere*) as the main characteristic of personal being, but also to complete ontological determination. Aquinas can assent to this expression, which he himself quotes as an explication of the Boethian definition³⁴ – and he can do so without agreeing with every aspect of Richard’s criticism of Boethius.³⁵ His own alternative definitions of “person” stay closely to the Boethian expression,³⁶ although in opposition to Boethius he stresses the moment of *subsisting distinctly* and avoids the misleading determinative attribute of “individuality”.³⁷ For John Duns Scotus, the negative determination of *incommunicable* subsistence (as the negation of an actual as well as a merely possible dependence or communicability on the part of an individual rational nature to an alien bearer) becomes the central starting point of his theological understanding of personality.³⁸ The aspect of incommunicability, which is also present in the writings of Aquinas and other scholastic scholars of the era,³⁹ is regarded by many authors in subsequent centuries as the very characteristic of personal being. This notion is suitable for describing created persons and can also be unproblematically affirmed in the context of Christological and Trinitarian theology.⁴⁰ In analogy to these efforts concerning the way in which “substance” is to be understood, we may speak of a transcendental concept of personality (in John Duns Scotus’ sense) that has been developed within theology. If personality is understood in terms of this concept, then “personality” means a

³³ Cf. RICHARD VON ST. VIKTOR, *De trinitate* l. 4, c. 22 (SC 63, 280ff.).

³⁴ Cf. AQUINAS, *S. th. I*, 29, 3 ad 4.

³⁵ Cf. G. EMERY, *La théologie trinitaire de saint Thomas d’Aquin*, Paris 2004, 138.

³⁶ Cf. e.g. AQUINAS, *1 Sent. d. 23*, q. 1, a. 4 c.: “persona dicit aliquid distinctum subsistens in natura intellectuali”; *S. th. I*, 29, 3 c.: “subsistens in rationali natura”. For the Thomistic notion of person in general, cf. EMERY, *La théologie trinitaire* [cf. fn. 35], 129–141; S.A. HIPPEL, *The doctrine of personal subsistence. Historical and systematic synthesis*, Fribourg 2012, 69–107.

³⁷ Cf. HIPPEL, *The doctrine of personal subsistence* [cf. fn. 36], 100.

³⁸ Cf. JOHANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Ord. I, d. 23*, q. un., n. 15 (*Opera Omnia V*, Vatikanstadt 1959, 355f.). For extensive explanations cf. HIPPEL, *The doctrine of personal subsistence* [cf. fn. 36], 109–146.

³⁹ Aquinas thinks that Boethius’ definition of person expresses it by using the attributive determination “individua substantia”: “...per hoc quod additur individuum, excluditur a persona ratio assumptibilis; humana enim natura in Christo non est persona, quia est assumpta a digniori, scilicet a verbo Dei”: *S. th. I*, 29, 1 ad 2. Cf. HIPPEL, *The doctrine of personal subsistence* [cf. fn. 36], 99–102; cf. 51–54 for Albertus Magnus.

⁴⁰ Cf. F.A. STAUDENMAIER, *Die christliche Dogmatik*, Bd. 2, Freiburg 1844, 578 rightly points out: “Der Ausdruck substantia individua will somit die göttliche Person nicht dem endlichen Individuum gleichstellen, sondern nur nahe legen, daß, wenn an der göttlichen Person etwas Individuelles ist, dieses Individuelle sich rein auf das Fürsichsein bezieht, durch welches die Person jene Einheit für sich bildet, welche nicht weiter mittheilbar in dem Sinne ist, daß die Mittheilbarkeit eine Art von Theilbarkeit in sich schliesse.”

mode of being-for-itself which is ontologically completely determined and therefore the highest form of substantial existence for a rational being.⁴¹ Hence, personality is not predicated *in quid*, but rather *in qualiter*: The notion does not designate a category with subordinated individual species of persons or their individuals, but rather the mode of existence described above, a mode of existence which is a shared characteristic of rational primary substances (*supposita*) whose common mode (as “persons”) can be described in this way.⁴² An oft-raised question in late and post-medieval school disputes concerns whether a positive reason (and if so, which one) must be given for the negative attribute of incommunicability from an ontological point of view.⁴³ Different answers to this question are possible in the context of the uncertainty of Aquinas’ guidelines on this point.⁴⁴ Above all, this topic is relevant to the discourse in Christology, which (as we saw above) already has the burden of explicating the difference between “(individual) nature” and “person”. Nevertheless, it seems inadequate for Trinitarian theology to simply confirm all of these theories by assuming a positive entity as formally constitutive of the personality in real distinction from the essence. This move would make divine simplicity questionable and would lead to the danger of a “quaternalist” addition of personal constitutives to nature. Instead, it remains obvious to scholastic theologians that persons must really be identical with their essence, as is case with the divine attributes, because even under the conditions of the Trinitarian dogma God must be understood as a *substantia simplex*. Hence many scholastic scholars explain the constitution of the divine persons with the help of relations within God, following Augustine and Aquinas. Whereas relations exist “in somebody else” as bearer (i.e. as accidental properties) in the created sphere, the being of relation in God is no more than the substantial being of the essence, since God contains no accidents. Nevertheless, the proper meaning of relation, the *ad aliud*, can also be identified within God and thus becomes the distinctive feature of the three persons in

⁴¹ Cf. the definition of *suppositum* by Francisco SUAREZ in *Disputationes metaphysicae* 34.5.58 (*Opera Omnia* XXVI), Paris 1866, 398b: “Suppositum enim absolute dictum significat substantiam completam et totalem, atque omnino determinatam in genere substantiae”. Cf. also AQUINAS, S. th. I, 29, 3 ad 4.

⁴² Cf. AQUINAS, S. th. I, 30, 4 c.: “Et ideo dicendum est quod etiam in rebus humanis hoc nomen persona est commune communitate rationis, non sicut genus vel species, sed sicut individuum vagum. Nomina enim generum vel specierum, ut homo vel animal, sunt imposita ad significandum ipsas naturas communes; non autem intentiones naturarum communium, quae significantur his nominibus genus vel species. Sed individuum vagum, ut aliquis homo, significat naturam communem cum determinato modo existendi qui competit singularibus, ut scilicet sit per se subsistens distinctum ab aliis.”

⁴³ For further discussion see MARSCHLER, *Die spekulative Trinitätslehre* [cf. fn. 30], 134–173.

⁴⁴ This is emphasized by HIPPEL, *The Doctrine of Personal Subsistence* [cf. fn. 36], 71, 107.

their incommunicability – enabling Aquinas to speak of them as “subsistent relations”.⁴⁵ Up to a certain extent, the relation has the function of an individuating principle here,⁴⁶ at least insofar as we are allowed to call the divine persons “individuals”.⁴⁷ This Thomistic solution can be defended against the objection that it leads to a “de-substantialization” of personality, since “person” only designates the relation if the person is regarded concerning the aspect of being-for-itself.⁴⁸ Therefore, the divine person can also be described in the words of Scheeben: “die Eine göttliche Substanz unter einer bestimmten Relation, d.h. wie sie in ihrer Subsistenz durch die Relation des Ursprungs zu einer besonderen Form der Selbstangehörigkeit und des Selbstbesitzes bestimmt wird.”⁴⁹ Since the 13th century, a major dispute between Dominicans and Franciscans has concerned the question whether this explanation of the Trinitarian constitution of the persons, which uses the notion of relation as a starting point, could be replaced by a concept based on divine origins which may end in the assumption of absolute personal constitutives within God. This question cannot be discussed any further here.⁵⁰ Instead I will focus on the problem of distinctions within God, a problem which scholastic thinkers have already touched on in their examinations of the formal-ontological determinations of the notions “substance” and “person”. The problem is this: How must we understand the relationship between the one divine substance, taken as essential being-for-

⁴⁵ Cf. AQUINAS, S. th. I, 29, 4 c.: “Persona enim divina significat relationem ,ut subsistentem’. 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”. Cf. for further explanations EMERY, *La théologie trinitaire* [cf. fn. 35], 141–156.

⁴⁶ Cf. EMERY, *La théologie trinitaire* [cf. fn. 35], 176. Since the relation in God is actually identical with the person, Aquinas can say: “Et ideo hypostasis et persona addunt supra rationem essentiae principia individualia” (AQUINAS, S. th. I, 29, 2 ad 3).

⁴⁷ “Individuality” as a determining aspect of personality within God only means “incommunicability”: “Individuum autem Deo competere non potest quantum ad hoc quod individuationis principium est materia, sed solum secundum quod importat incommunicabilitatem” (AQUINAS, S. th. I, 29, 3 ad 4).

⁴⁸ Cf. Aquinas’ balanced statement in S. th. I, 29, 4 c., immediately following the quotation from fn. 45: “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. Similiter etiam significat essentiam in recto, et relationem in obliquo, in quantum essentia idem est quod hypostasis; hypostasis autem significatur in divinis ut relatione distincta; et sic relatio, per modum relationis significata, cadit in ratione personae in obliquo.”

⁴⁹ SCHEEBEN, *Gotteslehre* [cf. fn. 22], § 114, n. 910 (387f.).

⁵⁰ Cf. the very detailed discussion of the topic in R.L. FRIEDMAN, *Intellectual Traditions of the Medieval University. The Use of Philosophical Psychology in Trinitarian Theology Among the Franciscans and Dominicans, 1250–1350* (STGMA 108/1–2), Leiden–Boston 2013.

itself, to the three personalities insofar as the latter are determined by the aspect of incommunicable subsistence?

3. The Three Persons and the Unity of the Essence – Scholastic Attempts for a Mediation

The scholastic efforts to mediate between divine substantiality and personality (or personalities) are shaped by presuppositions rooted in the councils of the ancient church. On the one hand, the distinction among persons of the Trinity should not blur the unity and the equality of the divine essence. On the other hand, the three persons should not be regarded as mere extrinsic manifestations of an essence which is in principle a-personal or mono-personal: Arianism, Tritheism, and Monarchianism (especially in its Modalist interpretation) must be ruled out. To illustrate the difficulty in discovering an adequate theoretical explanation of the Trinitarian dogma, I will look at two important issues discussed by scholastic theologians. First, a type of metaphysical distinction must be found to adequately describe the relationship between “essence” and “relations/persons”. Then we will examine whether and how “subsistence” can be attributed to the three persons as well as to the indivisibly unitary essence of God.

3.1 *Models of Distinction in the Doctrine of God*

(1) The paradigm of an overly strong theory of separation which treats essence and persons as entities in their own right (i.e. as divided *res*) has been associated with the early scholastic master Gilbert of Poitiers (†1155) by theologians since the 13th century.⁵¹ The doctrine attributed to him says that the relations must be regarded as real and distinct additions to the essence, teaching that the “deity” is a different “form” from the persons constituted by it. This doctrine faced strong opposition from Bernhard of Clairvaux (†1153).⁵² The

⁵¹ For the Trinitarian theology of Gilbert cf. M.E. WILLIAMS, *The Teaching of Gilbert Porreta on the Trinity as Found in his Commentaries on Boethius*, Roma 1951, especially 81–126; M.A. SCHMIDT, *Gottheit und Trinität nach dem Kommentar des Gilbert Porreta zu Boethius, De Trinitate*, Basel 1956; J. HOFMEIER, *Die Trinitätslehre des Hugo von St. Viktor, dargestellt im Zusammenhang mit den trinitarischen Strömungen seiner Zeit*, München 1963, 80–100.

⁵² Cf. BERNHARD VON CLAIRVAUX, *De consideratione 15 (Opera omnia III)*, ed. by J. LECLERCOQ/H.M. ROCHAIS, Rom 1963, 479. For Bernhard’s criticism against Gilbert cf. M. STICKELBROECK, *Mysterium venerandum. Der trinitarische Gedanke im Werk des Bernhard von Clairvaux (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters NF 41)*, Münster 1994, 39–63.

strongest argument given by critics of this theory is that the theory was in danger of introducing a “quaternistic” understanding of God while also blurring the distinction between God and the world of created being. The reason is that God would also have to be regarded as a composite being from a metaphysical point of view. The condemnation of Gilbert’s position by the Synod of Reims under Eugene III confirmed these objections in 1148 and laid down guidelines for the future path of theology: “God” and “deity” must always be regarded as strictly identical entities.⁵³ Only some decades later, the Trinitarian doctrine of Joachim of Fiore (†1202), whose main work on this topic has (presumably) been lost, became a test case for this strong theory of identity.⁵⁴ This Cistercian abbot is a striking medieval example of a proponent of strong social Trinitarianism. Joachim believed to have found quaternistic tendencies in the approach of Peter Lombard (†1160),⁵⁵ since the latter understood the divine essence as the *una summa res* apart from the persons of the Trinity. According to Joachim’s teachings as quoted by the Fourth Lateran council,⁵⁶ the only entities he acknowledged as actual were the three divine persons. Since he did not regard the unity of the essence as a reality of its own in God but rather as a quasi-collective which was founded in similarity, he consequently denied that the divine essence is ontologically autonomous. As illustrations, he used the example of many human beings founding a nation, or the community of the faithful which constitutes the one church.⁵⁷ However, this seems to imply that Joachim denies that there is a real unity of being in God. This means that this real unity would then – at best – be replaced by a merely effective unity, or by a moral unity of three individuals which are related to each other through their mutual love. The Fourth Lateran Council took the side of Joachim’s critics in 1215, defining that “there exists a certain supreme reality, incomprehensible and ineffable, which truly is the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, the three per-

⁵³ Cf. DENZINGER/HÜNERMANN, *Enchiridion* [cf. fn. 5], nr. 746.

⁵⁴ Cf. A. TERRACIANO, *La teologia trinitaria di Gioacchino da Fiore. Ricerca sullo Psalterium decem chordarum*, Napoli 1993.

⁵⁵ Cf. SCHNEIDER, *Die Lehre vom dreieinigen Gott* [cf. fn. 31].

⁵⁶ Recent research has questioned whether these accusations are correct. However, these doubts seem to be heavily influenced by contemporary convictions concerning Trinitarian theology. Cf. A. MEHLMANN, *De unitate trinitatis. Forschungen und Dokumente zur Trinitätstheologie Joachims von Fiore im Zusammenhang mit seinem verschollenen Traktat gegen Petrus Lombardus*, Diss. Freiburg i. Br. 1991, or W.H.J. SCHACHTEN, *Die Trinitätslehre Joachims von Fiore im Lichte der Frage nach der Subjektivität Gottes in der neueren Theologie*, in: *Franziskanische Studien* 62 (1980) 39–61.

⁵⁷ Cf. DENZINGER/HÜNERMANN, *Enchiridion* [cf. fn. 5], nr. 803.

sons together and each one of them separately“.⁵⁸ On the contrary, the Council affirmed the strict *numerical identity* of the essence with the three persons, a doctrine which later scholastic theologians did not question.⁵⁹ Attempts to understand the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as a collective entity are explicitly rejected by the Lateran Council, which pointed to the non-univocal notion of unity between divine and human persons:

“When, therefore, the Truth [i.e. Christ] prays to the Father for those faithful to him, saying ‘I wish that they may be one in us just as we are one’ [John 17,22], this word ‘one’ means for the faithful a union of love in grace, and for the divine persons a unity of identity in nature.”⁶⁰

Perhaps this decision can be regarded as the strongest articulation of the theological paradigm often labeled *Latin Trinitarianism* in contemporary debates. Following this path, later Scholasticism could only develop a weak version of a view which contained aspects of a communal understanding of the Trinity. The only way to acknowledge, for example, the ideas of “(mutual) love”, “community”, or “friendship” within God⁶¹ was by assuming the numerical identity of all of the persons with the divine essence and by denying that this essence could be multiplied.

(2) Because of these doctrinal commitments in early scholasticism, every subsequent theory of the distinction between the divine essence and the persons of the Trinity had to avoid a real distinction. Within this rather narrow framework, two tendencies started to develop from 13th century onwards.

A *weak theory of distinction* allows only rational differences between the divine essence and the persons of the Trinity (similarly to the difference between essence and attributes), although a “foundation in reality” has to be admitted. In late medieval schools, this view was labeled the *distinctio rationis ratiocinatae* (as opposed to the *distinctio rationis ratiocinantis*, which is based purely on operations of the human mind and was considered insufficient for the doctrine of

⁵⁸ DENZINGER/HÜNERMANN, *Enchiridion* [cf. fn. 5], nr. 803. For the background to the debate concerning Joachim, cf. F. ROBB, *The Fourth Lateran Council’s Definition of Trinitarian Orthodoxy*, in: *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 48 (1997) 22–43.

⁵⁹ Cf. e.g. AQUINAS *S. th. I*, 33, 2 ad 4; *I*, 39, 5 ad 2.

⁶⁰ DENZINGER/HÜNERMANN, *Enchiridion* [cf. fn. 5], nr. 806.

⁶¹ Early modern scholastic scholars still diverge in their views on these topics. While Jesuits, such as SUAREZ, *Disputationes metaphysicae* 30.16.60 (*Opera Omnia* XXVI), Paris 1866, 303b, or VALENTIN DE HERICE, *Quatuor tractatus in primam partem S. Thomae distincti disputationibus*, tr. 2, 14.3.17–19, Pamplona 1623, 247a–248a, do not want to talk about “friendship” between the Trinitarian persons, DIEGO RUIZ DE MONTOYA, *De voluntate Dei* 52.4–5, Lyon 1630, 585b–589b clearly argues in favour of this notion in the doctrine of God. These works also provide a detailed examination of the various positions to be found in the Church Fathers and earlier scholastic theology.

God).⁶² In the writings of Aquinas we find a paradigmatic representation of this model.⁶³ Aquinas is convinced that the reality of God, because of its plenitude of being, cannot be grasped by the abstractions of human reason. There is no adequate concept for what God really is – his essence evades precise definition.⁶⁴ If we want to talk about him at all, we can only attribute to him certain perfections that we find in the things which he created. These perfections, as later scholastic thinkers prefer to say, should be regarded as “virtually” contained in the one divine cause, for they participate in its plenitude in many different ways. The one and unique essence of God is reflected in manifold finite essences. With the attributes we apply to God, we do not designate God as he is in himself; rather, we designate the way in which he is represented by his creatures. This is the only adequate way we can approach the hidden reality of God.⁶⁵ Hence, according to Aquinas, the “rational distinction” between the essence and the persons in God has to be understood within a metaphysics of participation. In subsequent scholasticism this distinction is sometimes explained with even weaker justifications. An advantage of all *distinctio-rationis*-theories is that they avoid the danger of understanding persons and essence as coexisting in an additive way. However, a central threat to applications of this model to the Trinitarian doctrine of God had been pointed out by Petrus Aureolus (†1322) at the beginning of the 14th century: If this mode of distinction has any effects on the differentiation between the persons as such, then we would wind up with Sabellianism.⁶⁶ In other words: If the relations which constitute the persons do not have any real subsistence apart from the one essence, then the Trinity seems to be absorbed by the unity of the essence.

⁶² For this type of distinction see S.K. KNEBEL, *Distinctio rationis ratiocinantis*. Die scholastische Unterscheidungslehre vor dem Satz “A = A”, in: *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 44 (2002) 145–173.

⁶³ In S. th. I, 28, 2 c., Aquinas makes clear that the relation only differs from the essence “secundum intelligentiae rationem” in God.

⁶⁴ Cf. AQUINAS, *De pot.* 7, 2 ad 11: “Haec autem propositio, Deus est, quantum est de se, est per se nota, quia idem est in subiecto et praedicato; sed quantum ad nos non est per se nota, quia quid est Deus nescimus: unde apud nos demonstratione indiget, non autem apud illos qui Dei essentiam vident.”

⁶⁵ Cf. AQUINAS, S. th. I, 13, 2 and 4.

⁶⁶ Cf. PETRUS AUREOLUS, 1 Sent. d. 2, q. 3, a. 3, n. 53 (*Scriptum super primum Sententiarum*, dist. 1–8, Bd. II, ed. E. M. Buytaert [FIP.T 3], St. Bonaventure/NY 1956, 587): “Sed secundum sic dicentem, paternitas et filiatio sunt idem secundum rem essentiae divinae, quamvis sint distincta secundum rationem ab ea. Ergo inter se erunt eadem secundum rem, quamvis distinguantur secundum rationem, et per consequens Pater et Filius sola ratione distinguuntur, et redit error Sabellii.”

(3) *Stronger theories of distinction*, which came up one generation after Aquinas, can be seen as reaction to this threat. These amount to a reduced form of the real distinction in God.

a) The famous “formal distinction” of John Duns Scotus, whose roots reach back to the older Franciscan school originating with Richard Rufus († around 1260),⁶⁷ aims mainly to solve difficulties in the doctrine of God. Its core thesis may be summarized as follows: When we describe a thing using certain concepts with distinct definitions, these concepts must have ontological equivalents, and these equivalents must be characterised by more than just their lack of “reality”. Therefore, all formal contents which can be understood on their own, even if they only exist as constitutional parts of a greater reality and not as “things” in themselves, possess a certain mode of being *as such* and are “formally non-identical”⁶⁸ with each other. Recent research has called this the “noetisch-noematischen Parallelismus der einfachen, insbesondere der schlechthin einfachen Begriffe”,⁶⁹ or the perception of different eidetic contents. This anti-nominalist premise is also relevant to the distinction between the divine essence and the persons of the Trinity.⁷⁰ In the doctrine of the Trinity, we express apparently contradictory claims, e.g. “Pater generat, essentia non generat”. Hence, in God there must be more than a rational difference between the subjects of these propositions – that is, between essence and person(s). For Scotus, the difference between essential divine attributes, which is also valid *ex natura rei*, is closely connected with this formal distinction between the divine essence and

⁶⁷ For discussion of this issue see B. JANSEN, *Beiträge zur geschichtlichen Entwicklung der Distinctio formalis: Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* 53 (1929) 317–344. 517–544. See also M.J. GRAJEWSKI, *The Formal Distinction of Duns Scotus*, Washington 1944, 102–124; E. WÖLFEL, *Seinsstruktur und Trinitätsproblem. Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung der natürlichen Theologie bei Johannes Duns Scotus (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters 40,5)*, Münster 1965, 19, fn. 61; H. KRAML, *Beobachtungen zum Ursprung der «distinctio formalis»*, in: L. SILEO (Ed.), *Via Scoti. Methodologica ad mentem Joannis Duns Scoti. Atti del Congresso Scoticistico Internazionale Roma 9–11 marzo 1993, Rom 1995*, 303–318.

⁶⁸ Cf. e.g. M. SCHMAUS, *Der liber propugnatorius des Thomas Anglicus und die Lehrunterschiede zwischen Thomas von Aquin und Duns Scotus, II. Teil: Die trinitarischen Lehrdifferenzen (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters 29,1)*, Münster 1930, 512–515.

⁶⁹ L. HONNEFELDER, *Ens in quantum ens. Der Begriff des Seienden als solchen als Gegenstand der Metaphysik nach der Lehre des Johannes Duns Scotus (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters NF 16)*, Münster 1979, 174.

⁷⁰ For detailed records cf. F. WETTER, *Die Trinitätslehre des Johannes Duns Scotus (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters 41,5)*, Münster 1967, 58–71, and R. CROSS, *Duns Scotus on God*, Aldershot–Burlington 2005, 235–240.

the persons of the Trinity.⁷¹ According to a widespread scholastic conviction, the reason for this is that the doctrine of immanent divine processions, which Franciscan theologians regard as centrally important, is intimately linked with the possibility of distinguishing between will and intellect within God (and is therefore based in a metaphysics of the divine spirit). The objection that a formal distinction between persons (or attributes) and essence would destroy divine unity and simplicity was overcome by Scotus, who pointed to the mode of infinity – a mode which determines the inner nature of the essence as well as of the attributes and persons. It is a unique mode of existence, which makes the real identity of formally distinct notions possible in God.⁷² This mediation between unity and diversity in God, which is based on a metaphysics of distinction, remained a characteristic doctrine of the Scotist school in the period to follow. Scholars from other traditions have rejected it for reasons mentioned above, or they have tried to unmask it as a disguised version of the *distinctio rationis ratiocinatae*.⁷³ That said, some leading figures of nominalist theology, as William of Ockham (†1347), Marsilius of Inghen (†1396), and Gabriel Biel (†1495),⁷⁴ maintained the formal distinction in the context of Trinitarian theology in order to emphasize divine unity and simplicity, although they rejected it elsewhere. A complete exposition of the philosophical and theological argumentation in late medieval accounts of this topic would be a paper of its own⁷⁵, which is also true for the continued survival of the formal distinction in certain *distinctio virtualis*-theories of modern scholasticism.

b) A solution which follows intuitions similar to (but is distinct from) the Scotist distinction of different formalities was suggested by the Dominican Durandus of Saint Pourçain († 1334), a contemporary of Scotus. Durandus argues for understanding relation in a modal way, so that it participates in the cha-

⁷¹ Cf. especially JOHN DUNS SCOTUS, Ord. I, d. 8, q. 1, n. 4 (Opera Omnia IV, Vatikanstadt 1956, 261f.); cf. also CROSS, Duns Scotus on God [cf. fn. 70] 109ff.

⁷² Cf. JOHN DUNS SCOTUS, Ord. I, d. 3, p. 1, q. 1–2, n. 59: “ens infinitum includit (...) omnem ‘perfectionem simpliciter’ sub ratione infiniti...” (Opera Omnia III, Vatikanstadt 1954, 41).

⁷³ See the overview, as well as his own statement on the discussion, in: SUÁREZ, Disputationes metaphysicae 7.1 (Opera omnia XXV), Paris 1877, 250a–261a; cf. also: MARSCHLER, Die spekulative Trinitätslehre [cf. fn. 30], 346–354.

⁷⁴ Cf. SUÁREZ, De trinitate 4.4.2 (Opera Omnia I, Paris 1856, 625a); further evidence can be found in SCHMAUS, Der liber propugnatorius [cf. fn. 68], 550f., with fn. 79; W. MÖHLER, Die Trinitätslehre des Marsilius von Inghen, Limburg 1949, 13f.86ff.; R.L. FRIEDMAN, Biel and Later-Medieval Trinitarian Theology, in: R.L. FRIEDMAN/L.O. NIELSEN (Eds.), The Medieval Heritage in Early Modern Metaphysics and Modal Theory, 1400–1700 (New Synthese Historical Library 53), Dordrecht 2003, 113ff.

⁷⁵ Cf. FRIEDMAN, Intellectual Traditions [cf. fn. 50], II, 597–871.

racter of being only analogously.⁷⁶ This framework enables Durandus to examine the Trinitarian relations in God and to defend himself against the objection that he has merely resuscitated an additive model of the Trinity in the tradition of Gilbert of Poitiers. Like Scotus, Durandus proposes a distinction which avoids the pure real distinction by clarifying the relationship between the divine essence and the person-constituting relation (as “*res et modus habendi rem*”).⁷⁷ He calls this distinction the “*distinctio realis secundum quid, et cum determinatione*”. This model not only points to various similar-sounding modes of speaking in theological tradition, where terms like *τρόποι τῆς hypárxeos* or *modi existendi/modi se habendi* in the description of divine persons can be traced back to Patristic times. *Mutatis mutandis*, a modal understanding of personality can easily be applied to the created sphere as well. Durandus’ ideas exercised important influence in early-modern scholasticism. Many authors in this period carefully considered the possibility and application of a “modal distinction” (i.e. a view which affirmed the use of ontological determinations to modify essentially constituted beings), and the modal distinction gained relevance in many areas of metaphysics and speculative theology. The effects of Scotus’ theory of distinction can also be found, at least in a limited way, among authors such as the Jesuits, who are – strictly speaking – external to the Scotist school and who explicitly reject the formal distinction itself. However, in Trinitarian theology, both the Scotist model and Durandus’ proposed solution have been commonly regarded as threatening either the unity of God or the numerical identity between essence and persons; and the unique value of the merely rational distinction (in Aquinas’ sense) has been stressed almost everywhere. There were authors (such as Suárez) who accepted a determination of personality, at least in the created realm, which makes a modal addition to nature. Among such authors, the Scotist view remained effective as far as Trinitarian theology was concerned; that is, it remained effective in the sense that it understood relations as *quasi*-modal realities and modal distinctions as a paradigm for our *rational* differentiation between the persons of the Trinity and the divine essence.⁷⁸ An exact reconstruction of the debates on ontological *modi*,

⁷⁶ For the modal distinction between nature and *suppositum* cf. e.g. DURANDUS A S. PORCIANO, 1 Sent. d. 34, q. 1, n. 14 (In Petri Lombardi Sententias Theologicas Commentariorum libri IV), Venedig 1571, 92rb. As part of the Durandus edition project at the University of Cologne, a freely available transcription of this commentary has been published: <http://durandus.phil-fak.uni-koeln.de/12823.html>

⁷⁷ Cf. DURANDUS OF SAINT POURÇAIN, 1 Sent. d. 33, q. 1, n. 26–28 (In Petri Lombardi Sententias Theologicas Commentariorum libri IV), Venedig 1571, 90ra. For discussion of Durandus’ concept of the Trinity and the controversy caused by it see I. IRIBARREN, *Durandus of St. Pourçain. A Dominican Theologian in the Shadow of Aquinas*, Oxford–New York 2005.

⁷⁸ Cf. MARSCHLER, *Die spekulative Trinitätslehre* [cf. fn. 30], 261–274.687f. and elsewhere.

which gained special importance in Christology, would be an interesting topic for further research.

3.2 *The Problem of Absolute Subsistence in God*

(1) If God's substance is equated with "being-for-himself" and if the three persons must be seen as numerically identical with this substance, we must ask whether "subsistence" can be attributed to the divine essence as such – with the consequence that at least in a logical sense this subsistence must have priority over personal subsistence. (Any other order of priority is impossible because of the abovementioned real identity between the divine essence and the persons of the Trinity). This problem of an "absolute subsistence" in God saw great controversy in late medieval and early modern scholasticism. The position which ascribes subsistence to divine essence has mostly drawn strong criticism in modern theology, criticism which has often been extended more generally to scholastic speculation about the Trinity as such. At the end of the 19th century, Herman Schell (†1906), a Catholic dogmatic theologian from the University of Würzburg, wrote:

“Wenn es eine absolute Subsistenz in Gott gäbe, so wäre die Bedeutung der Relationen für die Subsistenz Gottes als unabhängiges und unmitteilbares Sein nicht einzusehen; sie wären mindestens entbehrlich, weniger von *konstitutiver* als von *ornamentaler* Bedeutung für die Subsistenz Gottes.”⁷⁹

These objections have been oft-repeated as well as extended. The theory of the *subsistentia absoluta* was considered a challenge to the Father's primacy in the Trinity⁸⁰ in favour of the primacy of the essence, but it was also seen as “die trinitätstheologische Form von essentialistischer ‚Seinsvergessenheit‘”⁸¹. In following this premise, from the age of high scholasticism the doctrine of God seems to consolidate the theoretical separation between a mainly philosophical treatise

⁷⁹ H. SCHELL, *Katholische Dogmatik. Kritische Ausgabe*, transl. and ed. by J. HASENFUSS/P.W. SCHEELE, *Die Theologie des dreieinigen Gottes. Die Kosmologie der Offenbarung*, Bd. 2, München-Paderborn-Wien 1972, 77.

⁸⁰ Cf. K. RAHNER, *Der dreifaltige Gott als transzendenter Urgrund der Heilsgeschichte*, in: J. FEINER/M. LÖHRER (Eds.), *Mysterium Salutis*, Bd. 2: *Die Heilsgeschichte vor Christus*, Einsiedeln 1967, 317–401, here 391.

⁸¹ M. SCHULZ, *Sein und Trinität. Systematische Erörterungen zur Religionsphilosophie G.W.F. Hegels im ontologiegeschichtlichen Rückblick auf J. Duns Scotus und I. Kant und die Hegel-Rezeption in der Seinsauslegung und Trinitätstheologie bei W. Pannenberg, E. Jüngel, K. Rahner und H.U. von Balthasar* (Münchener Theologische Studien S 53), St. Ottilien 1997, 126.

de deo uno and a section *de deo trino* which is based exclusively on revelation.⁸² So it might even seem that the theologians themselves are to blame for the fact that a rational doctrine of God tending toward Unitarianism could emancipate itself from such a supernatural appendix of Trinitarian speculation during the early modern period. Furthermore, a *de facto* mono-personal conception of God could darken the Trinitarian message of salvation in the New Testament even in the minds of many Christians.

(2) The affirmation of absolute subsistence in God can be traced back to 13th-century theology. We find evidence for this in the works of Bonaventure (†1274),⁸³ Thomas Aquinas,⁸⁴ and John Duns Scotus.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, some important differences have to be kept in mind here.

a) A weaker form of the theory of the *subsistentia absoluta* can be found, wherever the divine essence is conceived as a basic, (*quasi*) *formal foundation* of real divine subsistence in the three persons of the Trinity. It is beyond all doubt that this concept is the very heart of Aquinas' understanding of divine essence as *esse per se subsistens*. The constitutional primacy of the divine essence over the personal being in God, which results from this premise, is a distinguishing feature of God over and above created beings. As we have seen above, this concept is based on the identification of essence, being, and subsistence within God. Nevertheless, we are by no means forced to conclude that the divine essence is individualized in the sense that it would somehow be established as a subject in its own right before or alongside the persons of the Trinity. Following the Augustinian tradition, Aquinas claims that God's action in the world is "undivided", accomplished in virtue of the single divine essence, but that it is nevertheless an action common to all three persons (and only accomplished by the persons). This was stated perhaps even more clearly by Henry of Ghent (†1293) shortly after Aquinas. Meanwhile, not even Henry wanted to question the view

⁸² The most influential criticism of a separation between both treatises can be found in K. RAHNER, *Bemerkungen zum dogmatischen Traktat "De Trinitate"*, in: K. RAHNER, *Schriften zur Theologie IV*, Einsiedeln 1960, 103–136.

⁸³ Cf. K. OBENAUER, *Summa actualitas. Zum Verhältnis von Einheit und Verschiedenheit in der Dreieinigkeitslehre des heiligen Bonaventura* (Europäische Hochschulschriften T 559), Frankfurt am Main u.a. 1996, 437–442.459f.; K. OBENAUER, *Zur subsistentia absoluta in der Trinitätstheologie*, in: *Theologie und Philosophie* 72 (1997) 188–215, especially 189–193.

⁸⁴ Cf. OBENAUER, *Zur subsistentia absoluta* [cf. fn. 83], 199f.: "Der entscheidende Referenzbegriff bleibt die *essentia subsistens*. Erst durch die sachliche Identität der Beziehung, welche von ihrer *ratio propria* her kein Subsistieren besagt, mit der *essentia subsistens* wird klar, daß von der *relatio* gelten muß, was von der *essentia* gilt, nämlich daß sie *subsistiert*."

⁸⁵ Cf. CROSS, *Duns Scotus on God* [cf. fn. 70], 176–182 ("The [Weak] Priority/Subsistence of the Divine Essence").

that the divine essence is the *ratio agendi*, i.e. that it is the formal principle behind shared Trinitarian actions.⁸⁶

b) However, the turn of the 14th century bears witness to a certain tendency to strengthen the concept of the *subsistentia absoluta*.⁸⁷ In particular, this tendency can be found in places where the foundation of God's subsistence in the divine essence is connected with the claim that there could somehow be divine actions *apart* from the three persons or which in some sense *disregard* them. In this respect, the problem whether God could assume a created nature through the mediation of his undivided essence alone can be regarded as a meaningful test case; as such it was often debated by scholastic thinkers. The question is whether the created (human) personality could be replaced not only by the personal subsistence of the Son, but also by the (non-personal!) subsistence of the divine essence. Shortly after Aquinas, this possibility was affirmed by Durandus as well as (especially) Scotus. Aquinas' understanding of God as the pure actuality of being, which manifests itself in the divine essence, and personality does not leave much room to reflect that there may be divine actions accomplished by the divine essence apart from the persons of the Trinity. However, in Scotist thinking, the divine essence gains a stronger logical primacy over the three persons; it does so in virtue of the formal distinction. For Scotus, the divine essence has a being of its own (*esse existentiae*) which is prior to the three persons; moreover, the subsistence of the three persons derives from the essence in its infinity. Hence according to Scotus the expression *hic Deus* signifies the divine essence in its being-for-itself. The person (*suppositum*) is not replaced as the bearer of notional acts;⁸⁸ but God's actions *ad extra*, "insofar as he is God", are regarded as being immediately constituted by the divine essence. This concept highlights the ontological primacy of divine nature; Scotus appeals to this concept to argue that the divine essence could become the bearer of a created nature through incarnation.⁸⁹ Scotus' "formal individualization" of the absolute,

⁸⁶ Cf. HENRY OF GHENT, Qdl. 5, q. 8. ad 1 (ed. J. Badius, Paris 1518, fol. 167r).

⁸⁷ Cf. for the following and with further evidence MARSCHLER, *Die spekulative Trinitätslehre* [cf. fn. 30], 444–447.

⁸⁸ Cf. JOHN DUNS SCOTUS, Ord. I, d. 7, q. 1, n. 75 (*Opera omnia* IV), Vatikanstadt 1956, 141: "Ergo suppositum conveniens huic actioni, est suppositum distinctum, existens in ista natura: in nullo tali est natura in quantum intelligitur per se esse, etsi per se sit aliquo modo antequam in persona, – et ideo non poterit ,per se agere' ista actione."

⁸⁹ Cf. JOHN DUNS SCOTUS, Ord. III, d. 1, p. 1, q. 2, n. 102 (*Opera omnia* IX), Vatikanstadt 2006, 36: "Ad quaestionem dici potest distinguendo, quia aut potest intelligi primus terminus istius unionis esse persona, aut essentia subsistens communis tribus". "Si intelligatur alio modo, quod primus terminus unionis sit ipsa natura in tribus per se subsistens, videtur possibile quod una natura assumatur a tribus quasi mediante una essentia existente in tribus, sicut una albedo potest esse in tribus corporibus, si una superficies – in qua esset – esset in eis. Quod autem ipsa essentia per se existens posset esse terminus

essential existence has been taken over by nominalist authors. They have given support to an explicit *subsistentia-absoluta*-theory. The Dominican theologian Thomas de Vio Cajetan (†1534) converted these medieval scholastic ideas into a more complete systematic framework at the beginning of the early modern period. He confirms that the three persons are one single God, “this God” (*hic Deus*), a notion which signifies the deity in its subsistence. Thus, there is a single common subsistence of the three persons.⁹⁰ On account of this absolute subsistence, the divine essence has a proprietary form of individuality which is distinct from the *incommunicable* individuality of the three persons. Cajetan even goes as far to suggest naming the divine *individuum naturae*, the particular substantial nature which only lacks the moment of incommunicability, the “incomplete person” (*persona incompleta*).⁹¹ This quasi-personality would enable “this God” (as actually three-personal) to integrate a created nature into the unity of his essence alone; he could to a certain extent incarnate himself as God in a “pre-personal” way. The *subsistens commune* as well as the *subsistens incommunicabile* would be able to become the bearers of an alien nature.⁹² Cajetan, from a Scotist point of view, clearly radicalized Aquinas’ ideas about absolute subsistence in God. In the period to follow, Cajetan was often seen as the authentic interpreter of Aquinas *par excellence*; a striking example is that his commentary was integrated in the *Editio Leonina* of Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*. Nevertheless, his view on the debated topic has always been controversial, and it found prominent opponents as well as supporters among all of the modern scholastic schools. One of his fervent supporters was the Jesuit philosopher and theologian Francisco Suárez (†1617), who regarded absolute subsistence as the most remarkable difference between God and creatures, identifying it as the immanent reason for the possibility of Trinitarian persons.⁹³ Only

proximus illius unionis, videtur, quia ipsa nullum esse habet a persona, sed est prius naturaliter quam sit in persona et dat esse personae: est enim natura de se ‘haec’ et per se subsistens, licet non incommunicabiliter; videtur autem quod incommunicabilitas non sit necessario ratio propria terminandi istud, sed subsistentia singularis” (n. 108f., ebd. 49).

⁹⁰ Cf. e.g. CAJETAN, *Commentaria in III^{am}*, q. 3, a. 2, n. 6 (in: THOMAS VON AQUIN, *Opera omnia*, Ed. Leonina, tom. XI, Rom 1903, 57b): “In Deo autem invenitur duplici ratione et modo habens naturam: scilicet habens naturam communiter, ut hic Deus; et habens naturam incommunicabiliter, ut Pater. Ac per hoc, invenitur subsistens in natura communiter, ut hic Deus: et subsistens in natura incommunicabiliter, ut quaelibet divina persona.”

⁹¹ Cf. CAJETAN, *Comm. in III^{am}*, q. 2, a. 2, n. 15 (in: THOMAS VON AQUIN, *Opera omnia* [cf. fn. 90], 29a–b).

⁹² Cf. CAJETAN, *Comm. in III^{am}*, q. 3, a. 3, n. 10 (in: THOMAS VON AQUIN, *Opera omnia* [cf. fn. 90], 61a–b).

⁹³ For further remarks and an examination of preceding traditions, see MARSCHLER, *Die spekulative Trinitätslehre* [cf. fn. 30], 429–473, especially 453–462.

if the essence subsists can it be communicated to three persons without its unity and identity being destroyed.⁹⁴ If the essence, by contrast, received its subsistence through the three personalities only, it would be difficult to respond to the objection that the individuality of God's being can only be found in the persons – with the consequence that there is no “individual deity” at all. New doubts would emerge concerning the numerical unity and simplicity of God's essence, as well as concerning the strict impossibility of multiplying that essence. Suárez explicitly accepted the consequences of the *subsistentia-absoluta*-theory in the field of incarnational Christology.⁹⁵ It is this strong and fully developed version of the *subsistentia-absoluta*-theory which is primarily affected by the above-mentioned modern theological criticism. The extent to which modern concepts of the Trinity, considered from the viewpoint of the economy of salvation, can provide a convincing alternative to this theory is a question on its own which extends beyond the framework of scholastic discourse. These approaches mainly take their point of departure as the proper actions of the divine persons in the world, the purpose being to examine the unity of the divine essence; and these approaches consider God's substance, also *ad intra*, to be the result of the mutual relationships of three perichoretic subjects.

4. Conclusion

Now is the time to halt our investigations, which aimed to highlight several areas of discussion about the understanding of the notions “substance” and “person” and about the relation between these terms in scholastic thought. I shall conclude with some summarizing remarks:

(1) Substance or Person? No scholastic theologian has regarded these notions as contradictory alternatives. All authors are convinced that God is both: He is person in the sense of a highest form of substantial being and he is sub-

⁹⁴ Cf. especially SUAREZ, *De incarnatione* 11.3.21–22 (*Opera omnia XVII*), Paris 1860, 447a; *Disputationes metaphysicae* 33.1.8 (*Opera omnia XXVI*), Paris 1866, 332b: “solus Deus est substantia completa sine ulla compositione, quod non solum de persona divina, sed etiam de Deo ut hic Deus est et abstrahi potest a tribus personis, verum habet; est enim hic Deus substantia physice, seu reipsa completa, quia per seipsam est essentialiter subsistens, et ex se non indiget aliquo ad consummatam et absolutam substantiae perfectionem, nam, licet tribus personis communicetur, neque ab eis in re distinguitur, neque propter dependentiam aliquam in eis subsistit, vel ut ab eis complementum accipiat, sed solum ut suam infinitam perfectionem eis essentialiter, et per summam identitatem communicet [...]”.

⁹⁵ For evidence cf. MARSCHLER, *Die spekulative Trinitätslehre* [cf. fn. 30], 470–473.

stance in the sense of an incommunicable (threefold) personality and this personality admits of no further ontological determination. Comparing the many different contributions throughout the centuries which aimed to understand the relationship between both notions, it is apparent that the primacy of the divine essence – at least from the perspective of human understanding – was unrivalled in scholastic Trinitarian theology. One must know what is meant by the term “God” in order to be able to speak about “God as Father, Son, and Holy spirit”. The unique character of essential being in God must be subjected to ontological reflection before we can determine the mode of personality in God. Knowledge about fundamental essential attributes is necessary to ground both the distinction of processions within God and the idea of the self-diffusive divine goodness which is the source of Trinitarian life. From a scholastic perspective, “person” is the necessary and final ontological determination of divine reality, but whenever you ask “what” God is, you have to talk about God’s undivided essence. This also applies to claims about the divine spirit and subjectivity (intellect and will). From the viewpoint of constitutional logic, the Trinitarian processions *ad intra* will appear as the self-representation of the one essence through the instantiations of the persons. That essence is the essential and fertile existence of God, an existence which eternally communicates itself into three incommunicable modes of subsistence⁹⁶. For important scholastic theologians like Francisco Suárez, this ability to communicate itself *ad intra* is the highest sign of divine perfection.⁹⁷ The rather formal character of the ontological function of personality also appears when we reflect on the power of divine actions *ad extra*. Divine personality is the necessary condition for God’s acting at all – but his works in the created world are not accomplished on the basis of personal proprieties; rather, they are accomplished by his one and unique essence. As a consequence, from the external perspective on God of created beings, his Trinity never becomes evident. The Trinity is only knowable via positive revelation, in which God manifests himself as existing and acting in three persons without providing necessary rational reasons for this truth. Therefore, the view on the world in the light of God’s Trinitarian being remains at this stage a contingent interpretation with many premises, and this topic was rather neglected since the late medieval period by scholastic theology. Neither the doctrine of appropriations, as found in Aquinas,⁹⁸ nor the view on the entire Christian form of life in the light of Trinitarian faith characteristic of the thinking of

⁹⁶ In contrast, see the remarkable protest against applying the term “fertility” to the divine essence in H.U. VON BALTHASAR, *Theologik*, Bd. 2: *Wahrheit Gottes*, Einsiedeln 1985, 122.

⁹⁷ Cf. e.g. SUÁREZ, *Disputationes metaphysicae* 34.5.60 (*Opera omnia* XXVI), Paris 1866, 399b and the passage already mentioned 33.1.8 (XXVI, 332b).

⁹⁸ Cf. EMERY, *La théologie trinitaire* [cf. fn. 35], 369–398.

Bonaventure,⁹⁹ received much attention in later periods. However, it was beyond any doubt that natural theology, which does not presuppose revelation, maintains its importance within Christian thought. Contrary to many approaches in contemporary theology, the possibility of a mono-personal divine being (i.e. the Jewish or Islamic model) has always been regarded as a serious option for scholastic scholars from the viewpoint of pure natural reasoning, an option which cannot be ruled out without supernatural revelation.

(2) Although there is no doubt about the primacy of the substance, whose importance for the scholastic doctrine of God is beyond all doubt, it would be unfair to accuse scholastic theology of a general tendency towards Modalism. Unlike Modalism, no scholastic thinker totally reduced the divine Trinitarian structure to the level of divine activity in the history of salvation. Instead, much energy was spent on proving that the difference between the hypostases within God must be eternal and real, independently of creation. We have discussed two great attempts to mediate between the divine substance and the persons of the Trinity: For the Thomists, the undividable divine actuality of being unfolds itself into in the Trinity's subsistent relations, whereas the Scotists emphasized the integration of formally different processions within the infinity of the divine essence. For static-relational models as well as dynamic, process-related models, God's true reality, which our notions as such cannot express, is neither a monadic unity nor an unmediated Trinity – much more, it is something which makes both of these alternatives simultaneously possible and true. Hence, abstract and theoretical scholastic reflections sometimes arrive at conclusions which seem almost to compare to the witness of those who claim to have had mystical experiences of God, as these experiences are directed towards the *complexio oppositorum*. "Since in God", as Cajetan writes,

"there is one single reality in fact, neither purely absolute nor purely relational, neither mixed nor composed nor resulting from both; but possessing in the most sublime and formal way that which belongs to the relational (and even to many realities, which stand in relations) and to the absolute; therefore, there is [...] one single formal ground within God, which is neither purely absolute nor purely relational, neither purely communicable nor purely incommunicable, but which encompasses in the most sublime and formal way that which belongs to absolute perfection, as well as that, which is demanded by the relational Trinity."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Cf. W. BEIERWALTES, *Gutheit als Grund der Trinität. Dionysius und Bonaventura*, in: W. BEIERWALTES, *Platonismus im Christentum*, 3rd edit., Frankfurt 2014, 85–99.

¹⁰⁰ CAJETAN, *Comm. in I^{am} q. 39, a. 1, n. 7* (in: THOMAS VON AQUIN, *Opera omnia* [cf. fn. 90], 397b): "Ad evidentiam horum, scito quod, sicut in Deo, secundum rem sive in ordine reali, est una res non pure absoluta nec pure respectiva, nec mixta aut composita aut resultans ex utraque; sed eminentissime et formaliter habens quod est respectivi (imo multarum rerum respectivarum) et quod est absoluti; ita in ordine formali seu rationum formalium, secundum se, non quoad nos loquendo, est in Deo unica ratio formalis, non

Or in the short formulation of Suárez: “God is a truly absolute and relational reality, without distinction between these aspects, since they include neither addition nor incompatibility as such.”¹⁰¹

On this highest level of insight, which again proves the primacy of unity in the scholastic concepts of God from the viewpoint of theological meta-reflection, only God perceives himself.

(3) From today’s perspective, a metaphysical reflection on the relationship between divine substantiality and personality has by no means lost its importance, insofar as we are aiming to rationally justify Christian belief in the Trinity. For this reason, the texts from the scholastic millennium of Christian theology, which unfold a speculative doctrine of God, are unrivalled in their thoroughness and the keenness of their insight, and are thus of enduring value. At the same time, these texts caution us against blithely transferring insights from Trinitarian theology onto anthropology and ecclesiology, as supporters of social Trinitarianism today have been known to do in connection with their claim to redefine philosophical ontology from the viewpoint of a Trinitarian faith. The notions of “substance” and “person” show in exemplary fashion that scholastic scholars have kept a sharp eye on God’s dissimilarity to creatures as well as on his unique divinity¹⁰² – which is the best protection against a functionalist abuse of theological notions.

(4) A remarkable problem of scholastic Trinitarian theology can surely be found in the wide neglect of the important role played by salvation and revelation, namely the role of serving as necessary points of reference for theological speculation. 20th-century theology was certainly right in accusing scholastic

pure absoluta nec pure respectiva, non pure communicabilis nec pure incommunicabilis; sed eminentissime ac formaliter continens et quidquid absolutae perfectionis est, et quidquid trinitas respectiva exigit. Oportet autem sic esse, quia oportet cuilibet simplicissimae rei secundum se maxime uni, respondere unam adaequatam rationem formalem: alioquin non esset per se primo unum intelligibile a quovis intellectu.”

¹⁰¹ F. SUÁREZ, *De Trinitate* 4.4.19 (*Opera omnia* I), Paris 1856, 628a: “una res vers absoluta et vere relativa, sine distinctione inter se, quia, ut sic, non involvunt impositionem nec repugnantiam.”

¹⁰² As a consequence, neither Aquinas nor the later scholastic doctrine of the Trinity show a tendency to transfer the notion of person, which was derived from Trinitarian theology, into anthropology or to declare it as a starting point for a “Trinitarian ontology”. Much more, both are clearly separated from each other: “apud nos relatio non est subsistens persona, et ideo hoc nomen pater, apud nos, non significat personam, sed relationem personae” (AQUINAS, *S.th.* I, 32, 2 ad 1). In turn, this also means that the notion of personality, which is initially derived from the created sphere, can only enter Trinitarian theology in a clearly determined way. That is, it can only be a term for the mode of subsistence of an essence characterized by its spirituality, which cannot be determined and communicated further. Cf. also the passages for a justification of “fatherhood” in God (AQUINAS, *S.th.* I, 33, 2 ad 4; I, 33, 3c.).

philosophers of reflecting on the dogma in a merely analytic fashion which was divorced from its historical context. Furthermore, the scholastic approaches of medieval and early modern times hardly attempt to convincingly bridge the gap between the Biblical foundation of the doctrine of the Trinity (from the perspective of modern exegesis) and systematic interpretation of this doctrine. From a speculative point of view, this way of reflecting did not succeed at developing a notion of the divine substance or of the divine essence in its being as such a notion according to which God's three personalities could occupy a *truly constitutive position*. However, this concept would be the only way to overcome the idea that the divine essence is a somehow independent entity with an actual primacy over the persons of the Trinity. Scholasticism was driven by the perennial concern that the divine essence would lose its simplicity if it were to contain any constitutional moments – even if those moments were the Trinitarian persons. At the same time, medieval theologians stressed the strict consubstantiality of the divine hypostases, a view taken from the anti-Arianism of Patristic times; this view seems to demand a “complete” notion of the divine essence as the basis for every discussion about the persons of the Trinity. On the scholastic paradigm, which has been called the “psychological” view of the Trinity¹⁰³, a conception of the self-unfolding of the divine spirit (i.e. of its essence), which regards this self-unfolding as root of God's internal processions, separates itself from these assumptions only at first glance. By ascribing identical *essential* predicates and acts to all of the Trinitarian persons, in contrast with the *notional* acts proper to each person, we can maintain the primacy of the divine essence: the Father has perfect knowledge and perfect will *as God* – not only because or through generating the Son, but in order to be able to generate the Son to begin with.¹⁰⁴ And the Son, as begotten, is perfectly *knowing*,¹⁰⁵ although he is

¹⁰³ This characterization appears not only in the title of the dissertation of M. SCHMAUS, *Die psychologische Trinitätslehre des Hl. Augustinus* (Münsterische Beiträge zur Theologie 11), Münster 1927, but can already be found in L. Billot, *De deo uno et trino*, 5th edit., Prati 1910, 342. For critical remarks concerning this labeling cf. KANY, *Augustins Trinitätsdenken* [cf. fn. 7], 398. 405f.

¹⁰⁴ Therefore, God's “knowing” and “willing” in the treatises *De deo uno* are discussed independently of the doctrine of the Trinity. This is already true of medieval scholasticism, but even more so of early modern theology. For the problems detected by scholastic scholars on their own, and which arise from these premises, concerning the question *from what sort of knowledge in the Father's mind* the divine Son is proceeding, cf. MARSCHLER, *Die spekulative Trinitätslehre* [cf. fn. 30], 590–609.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. BILLOT, *De deo uno et trino* [cf. fn. 102], 337.514: “Pater intelligit quia Deus, Filius intelligit quia Deus, Spiritus Sanctus intelligit quia Deus.” This distinction between essential and notional knowing can already be found in Augustine, *De trin.* 15,7 (CCL 50A, 468); 15,23 (CCL 50A, 496): “nouit itaque omnia deus pater in se ipso, nouit in filio, sed in se ipso tamquam se ipsum, in filio tamquam uerbum suum quod est de his omnibus quae sunt in se ipso. omnia similiter nouit et filius, in se scilicet tamquam ea quae nata sunt de

unable to *speak* (in the notional sense of the word). Therefore, the generation of the Son, which is notionally connected with the act of intellect, is not constitutive of the divinity of the Father. As for the Word, this is generated by the Father's knowing himself and must be "essentially" knowing and speaking as a con-substantial person in its own right. Such claims serve once more to theologically neutralize the explanation of the processions in God assumed within a metaphysics of divine spirit. Therefore, *interpersonally* conceptualized approaches have never totally disappeared, not even from Latin Trinitarian theology, although the *intrapersonal* approach to the constitution of the Trinity has been the leading paradigm. The problem of how an essential and undivided knowledge of "God" (in analogy to the expression of the "three persons in one essence") can be reconciled with the irreducible *de se* perspective on the three "persons" or subjects of perceptions did not arise as an explicit topic before modern scholasticism, although even then it only arose in restricted contexts.¹⁰⁶ The solutions of some neo-scholastic scholars remain rather cryptic.¹⁰⁷ As Hans Urs von Balthasar and others have noted, these problems, which have been discussed in Trinitarian theology until very recently, may be regarded as a sign of the imperfection of human reflection in face of the divine mystery.¹⁰⁸ Otherwise they would have to be regarded as an indication that the most intimate centre of Christian theology is inconsistent.

his quae pater nouit in se ipso, in patre autem tamquam ea de quibus nata sunt quae ipse filius nouit in se ipso. sciunt ergo inuicem pater et filius, sed ille gignendo, ille nascendo. et omnia quae sunt in eorum scientia, in eorum sapientia, in eorum essentia unusquisque eorum simul uidet, non particulatim aut singillatim."

¹⁰⁶ Some hints can already be found among early modern scholastic thinkers. I will present an examination and analysis of these texts on another occasion.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. e.g. B. LONERGAN, *The Triune God: Systematics*, translated from: *De Deo trino: Pars systematica* (1964) (Collected Works 12), Cap. 5, Assertum XII–XIII, Toronto 2007, 376–420. The discussion was taken over by W. KASPER, *Der Gott Jesu Christi*, Mainz 1982, 352.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. BALTHASAR, *Theologik*, Bd. 2 [cf. fn. 96], 39.