

Substantial Union with God in Matthias Scheeben

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IN *Romance and System: The Theological Synthesis of Matthias Joseph Scheeben*, Aidan Nichols describes Scheeben as “above all a theologian of human deification.”¹ The scriptural foundation for the Church’s teaching on deification is found in 2 Peter 1:3–4: “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature.”² Scheeben unpacks the meaning of this passage in a traditional manner: “We must receive a sort of new nature, not by the addition of a new substance or by the implanting of radically new faculties in the soul, but by a transfiguration and elevation of our whole nature with all its faculties to a higher sphere.”³ Traditionally, deification has been understood as the elevation of our nature by a sharing in the divine operations: knowing and loving God as he knows and loves himself. What is particularly striking about Scheeben’s writing on deification, which he treats in each of his major works, is not his articulation of this traditional understanding but rather his bold exposition of how God shares his very substance with the graced soul.⁴

¹ Aidan Nichols, O.P., *Romance and System: The Theological Synthesis of Matthias Joseph Scheeben* (Denver, CO: Augustine Institute Press, 2010), 287.

² RSV, 2d Catholic edition.

³ Matthias Joseph Scheeben, *Nature and Grace*, trans. Cyril Vollert, S.J. (New York: B. Herder Co., 1954), 11.

⁴ In his *Scriptum super Sententiis*, Aquinas makes the distinction between the ways in which rational and non-rational creatures attain to God—the first being, he says,

Nichols describes Scheeben's position on "participation in the substance of the divine nature"⁵ as follows: "There thus comes about a communion (*koinônia*) in the divine substance, or, better, says Scheeben, a 'co-possession' (*Mitbesitz*) of divine life by God and the graced creature."⁶ Whereas Scheeben was more cautious initially on the point of substantial union, even from the beginning of his career he wrote boldly on how we do not just imitate the divine nature and life but are intrinsically united to God in his inner life. In the *Glories of Divine Grace*, he writes: "God . . . enters substantially into the soul . . . and unites Himself so intimately with such a soul that it seems He wills it to be a part of His being."⁷ And further: "We are then truly made one spirit with God. This does not mean that the substance of our soul ceases to exist, but it is so intimately united with God that in a certain manner there results from the union one whole. . . . The fire of the Divinity penetrates our soul and takes it to Himself, making it seem identical with God Himself."⁸ Although these two statements are cursory and appear in his early translation and major reworking of Joannes Nieremberg's seventeenth-century work on grace,⁹ this idea can be traced through the rest of his

"according to substance." The full quotation is as follows: "Other creatures, although they follow the divine likeness because of the operation of God Himself, do not, however, attain God according to substance; and therefore although God is in them, they are not, nevertheless, with God. But the rational creature by grace attains God Himself, inasmuch as he loves Him and knows Him; and therefore he is said to be with Him, and on the same score he is called capable of God as His perfection, by way of object; and because of this he is even said to be the temple of God and to be inhabited by God" (*In I Sent.*, d. 37 Expositio Primae Partis Textus, trans. Francis B. Cunningham, O.P., in *The Indwelling of the Trinity: A Historico-Doctrinal Study of the Theory of St. Thomas Aquinas* [Dubuque, IA: The Priory Press, 1955], 196).

⁵ Matthias Joseph Scheeben, *Handbuch der katholischen Dogmatik*, ed. M. Schmaus (Freiburg: Herder, 1948), III/IV, 398, as quoted in Nichols, *Romance and System*, 92.

⁶ Nichols, *Romance and System*, 92, quoting Scheeben, *Handbuch*, III/IV, 399. Malachi J. Donnelly, S.J., summarizes Scheeben's position as well: "This substantial cohesion, insofar as it consists in this, that the substance of one being at least partially belongs to the other being, is called a communion, or community of substance" ("The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit according to M. J. Scheeben," *Theological Studies* 7, no. 2 [1946]: 236). Donnelly, however, is not comfortable with the term substantial union and says it should be "sedulously avoided" (*ibid.*, 279).

⁷ Matthias Joseph Scheeben, *The Glories of Divine Grace: A Fervent Exhortation to all to Preserve and to Grow in Sanctifying Grace*, trans. Patrick Shaughnessy, O.S.B. (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 2000), 126. Parenthetical in-text references to this work will appear, for example, as "GDG 126."

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Cf. T. L. M. J. Geukers, "Introduction," in *Mariology*, vol. 1, trans. T. L. M. J. Geukers (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book, Co., 1946), viii.

corpus. Though not following this development chronologically, I will use all of his major works to present thematically his treatment of this inner, and even substantial, union. I will begin by looking at how the soul shares in God's Trinitarian life; continue by examining the Incarnation, the Eucharist, and the example of Mary; and finish by treating the relation of substantial union to the soul. After presenting his position on substantial union, I will engage criticisms of his thought and offer some clarifications using the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas.

Before engaging Scheeben's position on substantial union, I will make two more general points. First is the difficulty of speaking of God having substance. Aidan Nichols specifically addresses this point in Scheeben's thought. Defining substance as "the ground or bearer of attributes," Nichols states in relation to God: "In an analogical sense, we can speak of substance in God. . . . And the reason is twofold. Reason one: God is the 'absolute ground of his own attributes and at the same time is these attributes in a manner most perfect since they are identical with his substance.' Reason two: all other substances can only be bearers of their attributes as they are 'primordially caused and upheld by the power of God.'"¹⁰ The second general point is to note the background to the controversy over substantial union. Scheeben was taught the position of "substantial unification" by Passaglia and Schrader in Rome, which brought him into contact with the position of Petavius on substantial union with the Holy Spirit through an exclusive *proprium*, a union proper and exclusive to the Holy Spirit in distinction from the other divine persons.¹¹ In *Nature and Grace*, Scheeben

¹⁰ Nichols, *Romance and System*, 180–81, italics original, quoting Scheeben from *Handbuch*, II, 41. Nichols defines the substance of creatures as follows: "When we speak of the 'substance' of a creature we have in mind that which is the ground or bearer of attributes and, as such, is really distinct from them all" (ibid).

¹¹ On Scheeben's mentors, see Nichols, *Romance and System*, 91, where he states: "For Passaglia and Schrader, Uncreated Grace means a 'substantial unification' between the just and the divine persons, the union with the Spirit bringing with it a union with the Father and the Son, while Franzelin presents created grace as (simply) a necessary disposition or foundation for the real relation of the graced person to the indwelling of God." On the exclusive *proprium* theory of Petavius, see Donnelly, "The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit according to M. J. Scheeben"; idem, "The Inhabitation of the Holy Spirit: A Solution according to de La Taille," *Theological Studies* 8, no. 3 (1947): 445–70. For an overview of the discussion of indwelling in relation to a *proprium* in mid-twentieth century theology, see John F. Macfarlane, "Recourse of Theologians to St. Thomas for the Proprium Theory of the Indwelling" (S.T.L. Diss., St. Mary's University, 1966). Scheeben was also profoundly influenced by the Greek Fathers on this point, especially Cyril of Alexandria. It is the influence of the Greek Fathers that assisted him in forming his profound position on the Spirit's inhabitation. See Donnelly, 253–54.

explicitly distances himself from Petavius, but in *The Mysteries of Christianity* he refers to Petavius positively and comes to see the presence of the Holy Spirit within the soul as a substantial, and even hypostatic, presence that cannot be deemed mere appropriation.¹² Malachi Donnelly does not see this as merely adopting Petavius's position; rather, he sees it as the move toward a new theory which Donnelly deems a non-exclusive *proprium*, meaning that the soul has a direct relation to the person of the Holy Spirit; unlike Petavius's theory, this does not exclude the other persons but actually entails union with them as well. I mention this at the outset, not to engage in an exposition of the controversy, but to note that many scholars have accused Scheeben of holding Petavius's questionable position.¹³ Although Petavius did influence Scheeben on the Spirit's inhabitation, that need not hinder an appreciation of Scheeben's unique contribution.

Trinity

What distinguishes Scheeben's position most from the position of simply imitating the divine nature is the emphasis on participating in the Trinitarian relations. It is by entering into the divine relations that one shares in the very substance of God, rather than simply imitating him. The foundation for this sharing in the divine life is the communication of the divine substance itself within the Trinity. Scheeben portrays the relation between God's life and our share in it in the following passage:

The first and highest [communication] is the substantial communication and diffusion of the divine nature from the Father to the other two divine Persons. The second is the hypostatic union of the Second Person with humanity. The third is the union of the God-man with all other men in the Eucharist and in grace, with the purpose of conveying to them, from the very source of the divine goodness, all the richness of God.¹⁴

I will follow this order provided by Scheeben in my exposition, which begins with how we are related to God's communication of his own substance within himself.

¹² *Nature and Grace*, 198n8; *The Mysteries of Christianity*, trans. Cyril Vollert, S.J. (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 1946), 167. Parenthetical in-text references to this work will appear, for example, as "MC 167." Robert W. Gleason, S.J., in his book, *The Indwelling Spirit*, devotes a chapter to Scheeben, where he emphasizes the development of his position and also his reliance on the Greek Fathers for his position of substantial union (New York: Alba House, 1966).

¹³ Cf. Donnelly, "The Indwelling," 244–52, in which he gives a summary of criticisms, and also Bernard Fraigneau-Julien, P.S.S., "Grâce créée et grace incréée dans la théologie de Scheeben," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 4 (1955): 337–58.

¹⁴ *Nature and Grace*, 342.

In his chapter on the “Significance of the Trinity” in *The Mysteries of Christianity*, Scheeben speaks generally of how the Trinity reaches us through grace: “[The Trinity] thrusts the branches of its interior organism into the organism which is modeled upon it; that is, it exhibits itself in the order of grace as a prolongation of the eternal productions and processions, and really introduces their eternal products into the creature that is endowed with grace” (MC 147). This occurs in such a way that the soul is related and joined to each person of the Trinity.¹⁵ Beginning with the Father, Scheeben states that “the Father extends His hypostatic fatherhood to us” (MC 493), so that “this fatherhood is not merely imitated in God’s relationship to man, out of sheer grace, but is joined to man substantially” (MC 395). This relation to the Father leads us immediately to our relation to the Son. It is by adoption that we are made God’s sons, and this occurs only through participation with the eternally begotten Son. Though we are adopted, Scheeben argues that this sonship is a real one that brings with it all the prerogatives of having the Father as a true father. For instance: “In this way the child of grace is made mystically and supernaturally one with the Father in a relation that should be called physical rather than moral, and that in itself pertains to no creature but to God’s only-begotten, natural Son alone.”¹⁶ Our sonship is not juridical, but, Scheeben says, it is actually natural.¹⁷ Because the Father is the source of the Trinitarian relations, we share in the Trinitarian life by virtue of our relationship with the Father.¹⁸

Through adoption we have a very direct relation to the Son in that we participate in his begottenness from the Father. The first procession is the basis for entrance into God’s life. The Father substantially communicates himself to the Son, and he extends this substantial communication to us: “The communication of divine life to the creature and to mankind is

¹⁵ In *The Mysteries of Christianity*, Scheeben asserts and then asks the following: “Hence this sojourn of God in our soul is beyond doubt real and substantial. But is it also hypostatic?” He answers: “Yet the individual persons, too, as distinct from one another, can give themselves to us for our possession and enjoyment” (160).

¹⁶ *Nature and Grace*, 140.

¹⁷ Cf. Matthias Joseph Scheeben, *La dogmatique*, vol. 3, trans. Pierre Bélet (Paris: V. Palmé, 1881), no. 847 (This is a French translation of Scheeben’s *Handbuch der katholischen Dogmatik*. I am providing the numbers from within the text instead of page numbers so that it will be easier to find the passages in the original German. There is an English abridgment and adaptation as well: Joseph Wilhelm and Thomas B. Scannel, *A Manual of Catholic Theology: Based on Scheeben’s Dogmatik* [New York: Catholic Publication Society, 1901]); *The Glories of Divine Grace*, 96.

¹⁸ Scheeben, *The Mysteries of Christianity*, 115.

further to be regarded as an extension and continuation of that communication of life which is transmitted from the Father to the Son in God" (391–92). Scheeben further says that "our participation in the divine nature and divine life becomes a reproduction of the fellowship in nature and life which the Son of God has with His Father, as their supreme, substantial oneness requires" (481). We become united to each divine person, but our conformity to the Son is greatest. This conformity is no mere imitation but a union based on substance. The importance of substantial union for Scheeben is that it ensures that we genuinely and fully share in the divine life. We share in the Son's life by sharing in his generation: "But the ultimate factor in generation, the substantial connection between begetter and begotten, would be lacking if the Son of God did not unite Himself to us in His substance and take us up into His substance" (MC 493). The soul truly has a divine birth, which can even be called a reproduction of God in the soul,¹⁹ so much so that the soul is, "as it were, of equal birth with God" (MC 205). As an important caveat, it should be noted that Scheeben is careful to point out the infinite distance between our sonship and that of the Son,²⁰ though he also unites them by the substantial union of the one to the other.

Just as the relation to the Father necessitated speaking of the soul's shared sonship with the Son, so this filiation necessarily requires union with the Holy Spirit.²¹ If we most resemble the Son, it is because of the Spirit's presence: "Filiation itself does not consist solely in an accidental resemblance, received from God with the divine nature; it consists also in the co-possession of the proper spirit of God and of the substance of the divine nature."²² The Spirit in a special way enables the soul to possess the divine substance. Scheeben argues that "the first procession terminates in the second," that of the Holy Spirit, "who is the product of the union between the Father and the Son" and "brings about the union between God and the creature which imitates that relationship" (MC 144, 145). The gift of the Father and the Son in the Spirit as the gift of their own substance is the most important element of Scheeben's understanding of substantial union with God.²³ Not only is the Spirit substantially present in the soul

¹⁹ *The Glories of Divine Grace*, 12.

²⁰ Cf. *La dogmatique*, III, no. 844.

²¹ C.f., P. Alvaro Huerga, O.P., "La Pneumatologia de M. J. Scheeben," in *M. J. Scheeben: teologo cattolico d'ispirazione tomista*, Studi thomistici vol. 33 (Vatican City: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1988), 147–57.

²² *La dogmatique*, III, no. 863.

²³ Cf. *La dogmatique*, III, nn. 841, 856; *The Glories of Divine Grace*, 74; Nichols, *Romance and System*, 93.

through indwelling, but his indwelling is also the means of union with the other persons.²⁴ Scheeben speaks of the Spirit as “substantial breath” and “effusion,” “substantial grace,” divine “seed,” and “informing the soul.”²⁵ He also speaks of the Spirit bringing about a “substantial cohesion,” and “substantial society” with the soul.²⁶ The Spirit is the substantial gift of God, which unites the soul to God, allowing it to enter and participate in the Trinitarian relations. Due to the importance of the Spirit in substantial union, I will return to this point when speaking of the soul directly.

Incarnation

Although it is in examining the Trinitarian relations that we see the substantial union of the soul with God most directly, this union presupposes the substantial unification of the second person of the Trinity with human nature in the Incarnation. In fact, Scheeben describes the Incarnation in terms of bringing about unity with the internal life of the Trinity: “The Incarnation sets up a real continuity between the Trinitarian process and the human race, in order that this process may be prolonged in the race.” Indeed, this continuity implies “real contact with the source.”²⁷ The basis for this extension of the Trinitarian life is the hypostatic union. The Son has taken upon himself human nature so that “the divinity not only gives of its life to the human nature, but combines with it to form one substantial whole, as the soul does with the body.”²⁸ This substantial whole is the foundation of our substantial union with God.

²⁴ For a treatment of the Spirit’s indwelling that expounds not only St. Thomas’s view but also other major scholastic writers, see Francis L. B. Cunningham, O.P., *The Indwelling of the Trinity*. Cunningham states that the scholastic tradition commonly held the following points: “The three divine Persons really, personally and substantially dwell in man,” and “the indwelling of God in the soul is a real presence, i.e., physical and substantial, not merely moral” (36, 80).

²⁵ *La dogmatique*, III, nos. 856, 862, 856, and 841. On informing the soul, Scheeben speaks of the inhabitation of the Holy Spirit as “the most important constitutive element of divine filiation, in the sense that it [the Spirit’s inhabitation] contains a participation in the substance of the divine nature, a society, a unity, a substantial cohesion with God. The Spirit of God, in a certain sense, appears by his substance as the ‘form which informs the soul,’ or as *forma constituens esse divinum*.” Nichols comments on this passage, pointing out in particular the role of the Greek Fathers, especially Cyril of Alexandria (*Romance and System*, 91–92).

²⁶ *La dogmatique*, III, nos. 841 and 840.

²⁷ *The Mysteries of Christianity*, 385. Further down he states that “we enter into Christ’s personal relationship with the Father,” so that the “substantial unity between the Father and the Son is to be communicated to the creature” (397; 407).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 318. In case the word *combines* should cause alarm, Scheeben clarifies in the next paragraph that the hypostatic union “unites them [the distinct natures] in

In Scheeben's view, the Son of God became Incarnate chiefly for our deification, that is, to bring about a union like his union with our humanity.²⁹ This idea is brought out in *The Glories of Divine Grace*, though Scheeben makes an important clarification: "Thus we distinguish in the sacred humanity of Christ a twofold deification. The one consists in its personal union with the Eternal Word, the other in its glorification by divine grace. True, we are not so intimately united to God as is the humanity of Christ, but we do really exist in and for God, and this union finds its best illustration in that union that exists between the Divinity and humanity of Christ" (GDG 157). Although we do not just become one with Christ by sharing a common humanity, in adoption we "are made substantially akin to [the Father] as a truly divine race."³⁰ As a member of Christ's Body, the soul can be said to share in Christ's "divine dignity" (MC 377), and "divine holiness and splendor" (MC 378), because Christ's Spirit is also the Spirit of His Body, "substantially dwell[ing] in it . . . manifest[ing] His divine energy to it and in it" (MC 395). The Incarnation has brought about a new, divine humanity, which shares in Christ's divinity, through his union with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Eucharist

Just as Scheeben says that the Incarnation brings Christ's divinity and humanity into a substantial whole, so he says that the Eucharist does with us, forming a "real, physical, substantial union," as "the essential function of any food is to combine with the one partaking of it in the formation of a single substantial whole."³¹ In the Eucharist we become "homogenous"

one personal, hypostatic whole, without at the same time merging or fusing them into one nature."

²⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 488.

³⁰ *The Mysteries of Christianity*, 408. He continues: "For such a union of man with God the Father is unthinkable unless we were meant to participate in the prerogatives and the life of the divine nature, just as the Son participates in the majesty and life of the Father by His substantial oneness with the Father. This living union, the root of which is *substantial union*, can be nothing else than participation in the divine nature by the grace of sonship" (emphasis mine).

³¹ *Ibid.*, 483. The Eucharist is essential in bringing the effects of the Incarnation directly to the soul. The soul who receives the Eucharist is joined to the Incarnation, as Scheeben describes: "For, if the Word is made flesh by assuming flesh, is He not to some extent incarnated anew when He makes those who partake of Him in the Eucharist His members, and as such takes them to Himself?" (*ibid.*, 486). For more on the Eucharist in Scheeben, see B. Fraigneau-Julien, P.S.S., "Le mystère de l'Eucharistie et l'incorporation au Christ selon M. J. Scheeben," *Revue des sciences religieuses* 31 (1957): 249–74.

(MC 525) with Christ: both his divinity and his humanity dwell in us so that we share not only in the hypostatic union but also in his procession from the Father. Thus, there is a “reproduction” and even a “perfect replica” of God’s inner life given to us through the Eucharist, which Scheeben describes powerfully:

To bring this union about, the Son of God, made man, unites Himself to us in His humanity in the most intimate, substantial fashion, to form one body with us, as He Himself is one Spirit with His Father. And as He Himself has the same nature and life as the Father, by virtue of His spiritual oneness of essence with the Father, so by His ineffable union of body with us He wishes to make us share in His divine nature, and to pour out upon us the grace and life that He has received in their entire fullness from the Father and has communicated to His humanity.³²

The Eucharist is representative of Scheeben’s position that God truly wants to make us substantially one with him. This oneness is brought about not only through becoming like him, but also through truly sharing in his inner life. “Christ is the substantial . . . bond” that unites “widely separated opposites” (MC 407), and the Eucharist is a “substantial incorporation” (MC 482) with that bond.³³ The Eucharist is a “substantial union” with Christ, and through this union, a union with the entire Trinity (MC 482).

The important Eucharistic doctrine of transubstantiation also plays a role in understanding how the Eucharist leads to “supernatural union

³² *The Mysteries of Christianity*, 481. Scheeben relates the Spirit’s role in dwelling in the Body of Christ, which I touched on in the last section, with the Eucharist: “Our fusion with the God-man into one body, of which the Fathers speak in such bold terms, is conceivable only if we are filled with His divine Spirit, with the vital force of His divinity, and if we are wonderfully fused with His divinity into one Spirit. We must become one Spirit with God in as true, profound, and real a sense as Christ is perceived to be one body with us in the Eucharist” (ibid., 488).

³³ Joseph Ratzinger, while not using the terminology of substance, articulates a similar view, using the image of marriage in relation to the Eucharist: “What we developed previously in terms of the image of eating now becomes more perspicuous and more comprehensive from the point of view of the image of love between human beings: in the sacrament, which is an act of love, two subjects are fused in such a way as to overcome their separation and to be made one. Hence, the Eucharistic mystery, precisely in being transformed by the idea of nuptiality, remains at the heart of the concept of the Church as described by the term ‘Body of Christ’” (*Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today*, trans. Adrian Walker [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996], 38–39).

with God.”³⁴ Transubstantiation is the “model and efficient cause”³⁵ of the soul’s transformation in Christ, because “the transubstantiation of the bread into the real body of Christ produces and prefigures a supernatural and very remarkable transformation of Christ’s mystical body by assimilating it to its head” (MC 501). Scheeben is clear that our substance is not altered in its essence, but by being joined to Christ it receives “new quality modifying its own substance.”³⁶ Although there is not a new substance or even a substantial transformation of the soul into the substance of Christ, there is substantial joining, so that Christ “takes the partaker to Himself, not by transforming his substance, but by joining him substantially to Himself, as a member that belongs to Him and is animated by Him” (MC 484). This substantial joining does not make one into God’s substance, but it does allow a “supernatural participation in the divine mode of existence predicated of Christ’s body” (MC 476) and consequently leads through a union with his Body as a member to “a possession and partaking of God in His divine substance” (MC 526). The Eucharist manifests and makes present to the soul God’s desire for union with it, a union that does not stop until the substance of the soul is united to the very substance of God.

Mary

Before completing my survey of substantial union by looking at the effects in the soul, I want to examine the supreme example of this union in Christ’s mother, Mary. In *Mariology*, Scheeben’s treatment of Mary in the *Handbook of Catholic Dogma*, translated as a distinct book, Scheeben ascribes many unique privileges to Mary. Mary’s privileges extend to

³⁴ *Mysteries of Christianity*, 479. The entire sentence reads: “In the thoughts and feelings of every Catholic the idea of a supernatural union with God is inseparable from belief in this mystery [i.e., the Eucharist].”

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 502. In the same passage Scheeben links transubstantiation with the Incarnation: “As we have explained and contended throughout the course of exposition, only the absolutely supernatural elevation of human nature to participation in the divine nature stands in proportion to the elevation of Christ’s humanity to hypostatic union with the divine Word, as to its exemplary and efficient cause. In the same way it is only the sublime and mysterious transformation of our nature resulting from that elevation which is proportionate to the conversion of bread into the body of Christ, as to its model and efficient cause.”

³⁶ “What the [created] spirit receives is not, of course, a substance, but a new quality modifying its own substance” (*Nature and Grace*, 130). Cf. *The Mysteries of Christianity*, 379; *The Glories of Divine Grace*, 43. Scheeben also states that in this substantial union “the two substances coexist without confusion” (*La dogmatique*, III, n. 843).

substantial union, although, upon further investigation, Mary appears to have to a fuller degree what each soul is called to possess.³⁷ Scheeben argues that Mary was given “*the substantial grace*,” “the grace of the divine motherhood . . . analogous to the grace of the union,” which is “essentially . . . nothing else than the divine being of her Son, granted to the mother and infused into her.”³⁸ God desires a union with every soul, but he has brought one about with his mother in an exceeding fashion, which Scheeben even deems an infinite dignity.³⁹ Her substantial grace is ordered toward complete union with Christ, which is so great that “she is . . . assumed into the person of the Logos as His bride in such a way that she exists only in and through her relation to the divine person of her Son. And this relation conditions and defines her entire existence.”⁴⁰ Although this privilege pertains uniquely to Mary “at the outset of her origin and also forever” and to such a high degree, her union with Christ is nevertheless an image of deification for every soul. To have life only in and through the divine life and to be joined to the divine persons as spouse is the call of every soul, but it is manifested foremost in Mary.

Not only do we see in Mary the most perfect example of God’s work in the soul through substantial grace and the union of marriage, but also we find the true spouse of the Holy Spirit most fully in Mary. Her union with the Spirit is so profound that Scheeben goes so far as to say that she “is as a kind of incarnation of the Holy Ghost,” because the Spirit “forms with her

³⁷ One area already pointed out above is how the hypostatic union is an analogy for the soul’s substantial union with God.

³⁸ Matthias Joseph Scheeben, *Mariology*, vol. 1, 205; emphasis mine. On Mary’s substantial union with Christ, cf. Nichols, *Romance and System*, 443–44. On the importance of this divine motherhood, as a spousal motherhood in particular, see P. Marie-Joseph Nicholas, O.P., “Le concept de maternité dans la théologie mariale de Scheeben,” in *M. J. Scheeben: teologia cattolica d’ispirazione tomista* (Vatican City: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1988), 351–59.

³⁹ “Rightly named, therefore, is this loftiness of her nobility and dignity when it is called infinite, not indeed in an absolute sense, yet in a very real sense. Infinite in so far as it contains such a participation in the essentially infinite dignity of God, or resembles it so closely that, apart from God Himself, no higher is imaginable, neither can it be equaled or measured through any other dignity possible to a created person” (*Mariology*, 219–20).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 205. On the prior page Scheeben makes clear how this grace is embedded within her very existence: “The grace of the motherhood makes Mary a person of supernatural nature or order, in the same way as Christ is constituted a truly divine person through the grace of the union.” In another location he also states: “In like manner [as between Holy Ghost and the Logos] the mother of the Logos is connected with Him through the fact that the Logos through His love gives her His person and assumes her into a union with His person, which is the closest imaginable in the relation between two persons” (*ibid.*, 180).

one undivided whole and is embraced in her composition as her soul.”⁴¹ This can be seen as the highest substantial union of God with a creature. Mary is “informed” by the Spirit, “thus as one moral person with Him so that He forms the seal of her personality.”⁴² Mary’s role as divine mother and cooperator in Christ’s mission of redemption is possible because the Spirit dwells in her so fully. All that she does is informed by the Spirit, who marks her life with his presence. She finds the very constitution of her being and action in God, through a personal union with her Son in substantial grace and a moral union as one whole with the Holy Spirit. This teaching may be bold enough of itself, but what may be more bold is that, though Scheeben holds Mary up as a unique example, he also speaks in largely the same terms of God’s desired union with each soul.

The Soul

In the soul, as we saw in Mary, we observe both a substantial union with God and a personal union with the Spirit. Substantial grace is understood for Mary as having her life, even the very constitution of her being, defined in relationship to the second person of the Trinity. Likewise, we see that substantial union grounds the soul’s life so much in God that the soul seems to exist as one with him.⁴³ In the supernatural life, the creature begins to live in God, depending on him for the ability to live in a way that exceeds nature. Scheeben says that “to some extent God’s essence takes the place of the creature’s essence, in the sense that the creature’s supernatural faculties are radicated immediately in it.”⁴⁴ To be raised to the level of union with God requires that God share his inner life with the soul to enable it to do what it cannot normally do and to live a life beyond its natural capacities.

This sharing of the divine life with the soul, Scheeben considers a “co-possession of the divine substance,” by which “the substance of the divinity fills the creature and informs it in a certain manner.”⁴⁵ The result of sharing the same substance is a unity between God and the soul, which does not make them strictly one thing together, but nevertheless can still be called a moral union, and even a physical union to some degree. While

⁴¹ Ibid., 215.

⁴² Ibid., 181.

⁴³ “As the creature, raised above itself and deified, loses its imperfections, so in its supernatural union with God it casts off its natural, solitary condition and its dependence on self, to exist no longer in itself and for itself, but in and for God” (*The Glories of Divine Grace*, 157).

⁴⁴ *Nature and Grace*, 138.

⁴⁵ *La dogmatique*, III, nn. 866, 863.

God and the soul maintain their diverse substances absolutely, they also share one substance together in a communion, which depends on God's gracious sharing of himself. Scheeben describes this kind of union of two separate beings sharing one being, when "part of the substance of the one is passed into the substance of the other and thus forms with the substance one being in the other being."⁴⁶ Scheeben is not saying that the soul becomes indistinguishable from God, but that it depends on God so greatly as to be in a "common and organic life" of dependence on him.⁴⁷ This shared life is so strong that there is "fusion in one sole being,"⁴⁸ once again understood as the life of the one dependent being existing only through its union with the other, sharing the life and substance of the other as its own without losing its own substance.

It is important to recognize that Scheeben is speaking in light of the spiritual life. The soul does not lose its natural constitution; rather, its natural life is so infused with God's supernatural life that in the realm of the supernatural it lives only in and through him. Union with God is the end of the spiritual life and this is obtained only by God directly sharing his inner life with the soul. When the soul possesses God's life it has a union of substance, which means that it approaches God while having God within itself. This creates a sort of identity between God and the soul. The language that Scheeben uses to talk about the creature's unity with God is surprisingly strong: "Only grace raises man to such a high degree of similarity—even to a certain equality with God—that the distance between God and man is spanned" (GDG 116). And further, using a traditional image: "As the iron is in the fire and fire in it, absorbing and consuming it entirely, so that they no longer appear distinct, so the fire of the Divinity penetrates our soul and takes it to Himself, making it seem identical with God Himself" (GDG 157).⁴⁹ God does

⁴⁶ Ibid., no. 842. Other relationships of shared substance can be found between a father and son, spouses, branches and roots, and members of a body and its head.

⁴⁷ Ibid., no. 873.

⁴⁸ Ibid. Scheeben clarifies that although there is "the substantial presence of God in the creature," there is still "intact the difference of persons" (ibid.). Cf. *The Glories of Divine Grace*, 41.

⁴⁹ This surprisingly strong language is echoed in the writings of the great mystical Doctor of the Church, St. John of the Cross: "God will so communicate His supernatural being to [the soul] that *it will appear to be God Himself and will possess all that God Himself has*. When God grants this supernatural favor to the soul, so great a union is caused that *all the things of both God and the soul become one in participant transformation, and the soul appears to be God more than a soul* (*The Ascent of Mt. Carmel*, bk. 2, chap. 5)"; "Having been made one with God, the soul is somehow God through participation. Although it is not God as perfectly as it

not leave any part of the soul untouched by his life, but floods it completely, “absorbing and consuming it entirely,” making it like him by the gift of his life within it. This intimate sharing of God’s life makes the soul so like God that, though its nature remains intact, its supernatural life makes it divine. This new existence can only be understood as being derived from God in complete dependence. This is how one can understand Scheeben’s statement that “we belong to God’s kind in the same manner as the palm tree belongs to the class of plants, and the lion to that of animals” (GDG 21). Taken at face value, this statement would seem problematic, but Scheeben indicates that deified creatures can derive their divine life only from participating in God’s own life.

The result is not that “we become new gods” but that the soul is given “something which God alone is by nature,” a “reflection of the glory which is peculiar to Him and above all creatures” (GDG 26). Scheeben speaks of sharing in God’s “eternity” (GDG 27), the “holiness which is proper to the Divine Nature” (GDG 74), as examples of how we share in God’s life. The most important way of sharing in God’s life is that his essence becomes present to the soul in the manner in which it is present to himself. Scheeben elsewhere explains this as follows: “This object [God’s essence] must be brought into contact with those faculties in a way similar to that by which it is immediately, substantially present to the inner life of God Himself. . . . It must be truly present in them, so much so that if it were not already present everywhere, it would have to be substantially lodged in the creature for this very reason and purpose” (MC 159). Just as Mary’s grace of motherhood consisted in the divine being of her Son being lodged within her, so also the substantial grace given to each soul entails the divine being, the essence of God, being lodged within the soul, present to it even as it is present to the Trinity itself. This is the intimacy and union that God desires with each human being.

The Holy Spirit had a crucial role in realizing this substantial grace in Mary and has this role in the soul as well. Scheeben points to “the possession of the Holy Spirit as substantial grace.”⁵⁰ Donnelly explains the crucial role of the Holy Spirit in bringing about substantial union with God: “Being the substantial bond of union between the Father and the

will be in the next life, it is like the shadow of God. Being the shadow of God through this substantial transformation, it performs in this measure in God and through God what He through Himself does in it (*The Living Flame of Love*, stanza 3, verse 5)” (quoted in Charles Journet, *The Theology of the Church*, trans. Victor Szczurek, O. Praem. [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004], 86–87; emphasis added by Journet).

⁵⁰ *La dogmatique*, III, no. 862.

Son, the Holy Spirit appears as Their intermediary in Their union with the just soul.”⁵¹ God brings about a substantial unity of being with the soul through the imparting of a substantial gift. The Spirit, as God’s substantial love, draws the soul into the love of the Trinity.⁵² Scheeben states that “God, whose being is the same as His love and perfectly one with it, enters substantially into the soul which He has made worthy of love through grace and unites Himself so intimately with such a soul that it seems He wills it to be a part of His being” (GDG 126). It is love, the Holy Spirit, that unites the soul to God as one with him.

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit makes God’s substance present to the soul, not simply in regard to the substance itself, but even hypostatically. This reveals the real breakthrough in Scheeben’s teaching on deification. The soul does not simply become like God, which it does of course, but it also enters into God’s Trinitarian life and becomes specially related to each divine person.⁵³ Scheeben’s explication of the divine missions, which has been controversial, argues that they involve “the necessary conception of a real, substantial, and hypostatic entrance of the Son and the Holy Spirit into our souls” (MC 159). The criticism against such a position is that it violates the principle of the unity of the divine operation *ad extra*.⁵⁴ Defending Scheeben from this charge, Donnelly argues:

Whereas . . . the divine processions do not enter formally into creation (they are rather presupposed), on the contrary, under the form of quasi-formal causality, they and their eternal products can at least be conceived as entering formally into the grace-life. This will be an ‘influence,’ a formal communication of the divine being (of course, in a finite manner, from the side of the recipient soul); but it will not be an action. It will be a union, a *tractio* of the just soul into trinitarian life. Although it is indeed presupposed, efficient causality, an ‘action,’ formally has nothing to do with such an ‘influence’ of the divine Persons; for an efficient causality does not enter formally into any union.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Donnelly, “The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit according to M. J. Scheeben,” 268.

⁵² “In the concrete the name Holy Spirit signifies the spiritual substance of God as it is in the third person” (Nichols, *Romance and System*, 93, quoting Scheeben, *Handbuch* III/IV, 407).

⁵³ “Evidently, then, all three persons come to us and give themselves to us, inasmuch as they are one with the essence, and in the essence with each other. Yet the individual persons, too, as distinct from another, can give themselves to us for our possession and enjoyment” (*The Mysteries of Christianity*, 160).

⁵⁴ For the magisterial foundations of this principle see Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, trans. Patrick Lynch (Cork: The Mercier Press, 1955), 72.

⁵⁵ Donnelly, “The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit according to M. J. Scheeben,” 251. Rahner describes this *quasi-formal causality* as follows: “He does not merely indirectly

As mentioned above, Scheeben does argue for a particular union with each divine person, though a union that does not exclude the other persons. The Holy Spirit, as the substantial gift of God, particularly serves to unite the soul to the Trinity. He dwells in the soul as his temple and also leads to the indwelling of the other persons, acting as “intermediary.”⁵⁶

The Holy Spirit’s hypostatic presence in the soul is the means by which the soul is substantially united to God in his inner Trinitarian life. The Spirit brings about substantial union, because he is the love of the Father and the Son. Aidan Nichols describes the importance Scheeben gives to this relationship with the Spirit: “The Spirit’s union with graced human beings, though never less than moral, must be more than moral for it is hypostatic. Pneumatic union, in joining human beings with God, unifies as intimately, on its own level, as does the “one-ing” of body and soul in each of us, or that of Godhead and manhood in Christ.”⁵⁷ Body-soul unity and the hypostatic union are the examples that manifest how closely the Spirit unites himself with the soul. Though Scheeben does not speak of each soul as an incarnation of the Holy Spirit, this substantial presence certainly makes the Spirit present in a radical way. Speaking of the Spirit, Scheeben states:

[W]e possess this love not only in the general sense in which we say that everyone who is loved possesses the love of another. We possess it in its substantial nature and its hypostatic outpouring; it is substantially in us. . . . The same love with which the eternal Father loves His Son is in us as it is in the Son, in its inner essence and with its inner effusion; it is our own property and rests upon us: “that the love wherewith Thou has loved Me” says the Son to the Father, “*may be in them*.”⁵⁸

God’s substantial love dwells in the soul through the Spirit, allowing the soul to possess this love as its own.

Possessing what belongs to God substantially in the Spirit comes only by being possessed substantially by the Spirit, because the “relationship of possession is essentially reciprocal” (MC 165). Scheeben explains further:

give his creature some share of himself by creating and giving us created and finite realities through his omnipotent *efficient* causality. In a *quasi-formal* causality he really and in the strictest sense of the word bestows *himself*” (Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel [New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 2010], 36). Rahner takes up the issue of a personal relation with each divine person at length in *The Trinity* (24–28, 34–38, 77), which he describes as “each one of the three divine persons communicates himself to man in gratuitous grace in his own personal particularity and diversity” (ibid., 34–35).

⁵⁶ Ibid., 254.

⁵⁷ Nichols, *Romance and System*, 94.

⁵⁸ *The Mysteries of Christianity*, 162, quoting Jn 17:26; Scheeben’s italics.

“If by grace the Holy Spirit dwells in us with His divine substance as the object of our possession, He likewise dwells in us as the proprietor of our soul and our whole being” (MC 165). We belong to the Spirit in a way that is “truly hypostatic and proper” to him. The Spirit takes possession of the soul in a manner not exclusive of the “other divine persons” but rather “for them.”⁵⁹ The Spirit “makes us adoptive children of God” (MC 168), so that we “belong to the Father and the Son” (MC 166), conforming to them by “personally possess[ing] within our very selves the very same Spirit that” they possess (MC 169). Thus, the “hypostatic relationship” (MC 385) the soul has with the Spirit becomes the means by which it shares in the inner divine life. The Spirit initiates “a fellowship of the creature with the divine persons through Him and based on His procession from them and His entrance into the creature” (MC 172). The “bond and seal” that one receives from the Spirit’s indwelling unites the soul to God in the same way that the Spirit “is the bond and seal of the absolute unity of the Father and the Son” (MC 170). Substantial unity with God occurs through the Spirit’s indwelling, which brings about a proper relationship with him, and through him as the substantial unity of God, with the Father and the Son. The hypostatic gift of the Spirit deifies by bringing about a co-possession of the divine substance, so that the soul shares in the mutual possession of the divine life in the Trinity.

Evaluating Scheeben’s Position

I began this article by referring to the classical text of the Church’s teaching on deification in 2 Peter 1:3–4. Though Scheeben makes reference to this passage often, another key passage he relies on is John 17:20–26:

I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them,

⁵⁹ Ibid., 166. Ralph del Colle explicates the importance of the proper presence of the Spirit hypostatically: “With respect to the Holy Spirit, he is not only *donum Dei* but *donum hypostaticum* as well. By the latter is meant that the Holy Spirit is not just the channel of divine love or is present through gifts, but that the Spirit is present in the creature as a hypostatic identity. Scheeben therefore proposes that the Spirit is not only the efficient and exemplary cause of our sanctification through the mediation of sanctifying and created grace, but also the formal cause in terms of divine giftedness (pledge of the divine love between Father and Son) and indwelling—i.e., uncreated grace. This proper or formal indwelling is not separable from union with Christ, for it makes us sons and daughters in the Son (*fili in Filio*)” (*Christ and the Spirit: Spirit-Christology in Trinitarian Perspective* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1994], 44).

that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one . . . [and] that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them. (Jn 17:20–23a, 26b)⁶⁰

This passage is remarkable in that it specifies how one becomes a partaker of the divine nature by being in the divine persons, sharing their unity and their love. This is the significance of being a “partaker of the substance of the divine nature” rather than simply partaking of the divine nature through imitation.

For taking this bold position, Scheeben has certainly been criticized. Fraigneau-Julien accuses him of “exaggerations in his expressions.”⁶¹ Scheeben’s position is also accused of doing violence to “established metaphysical principles, to Scripture, and to the Fathers,”⁶² and as being “hazardous and venturesome.”⁶³ He is criticized, most significantly, for his “leap from substantial presence to substantial union.”⁶⁴ It is easy to understand hesitations about certain of his formulations of substantial union with God.

The case against Scheeben’s articulation of substantial union is that it blurs the distinction between the Creator and the creature.⁶⁵ In particular, it may be possible to see divergences from the classical articulation of deification, as Daniel Keating has articulated it. First, Keating lays out that “the two basic principles of the concept of participation as found in the Fathers and in the Christian tradition are: (1) that which participates is necessarily distinct (and distinct in kind) from that which is participated in; (2) that which participates possesses the quality it receives only in part.”⁶⁶ And further down: “We never become consubstantial (one in being) with the

⁶⁰ Another text with parallels to Scheeben’s argument might be seen in 1 Cor 6:17: “But he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.”

⁶¹ Fraigneau-Julien, “Grâce créée et grace incréée dans la théologie de Scheeben,” 358.

⁶² Donnelly, “The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit according to M. J. Scheeben,” 248.

⁶³ Del Colle, *Christ and the Spirit*, 47.

⁶⁴ Donnelly, “The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit according to M. J. Scheeben,” 246.

⁶⁵ The concern of blurring the distinction between Creator and creature, and also of a distinct personal union with one of the divine person, while not addressed particularly to Scheeben, can be found in Pius XII’s *Mystici Corporis Christi*: “But let all agree uncompromisingly on this, if they would not err from truth and from the orthodox teaching of the Church: to reject every kind of mystic union by which the faithful of Christ should in any way pass beyond the sphere of creatures and wrongly enter the divine, were it only to the extent of appropriating to themselves as their own but one single attribute of the eternal Godhead. And, moreover, let all hold this as certain truth, that all these activities are common to the most Blessed Trinity, insofar as they have God as supreme efficient cause” (§78).

⁶⁶ Daniel A. Keating, *Deification and Grace* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2007), 98.

Father as he is; rather we are inserted by grace into the divine communion of Persons.”⁶⁷ Although Scheeben certainly does not deny the distinction of the Creator and the creature, or the only partial possession of divinity by the creature, or that the creature does not become fully consubstantial, some of his statements do give this impression.

On the other hand, one could appreciate the depth and spiritual significance of Scheeben’s account of substantial union. One becomes like God because God has given himself to the soul to be one with it. The soul becomes God insofar as it has its life solely in God, which is necessary if it is to live a life beyond the confines of created nature. To share in God’s own happiness, his eternal and infinite knowledge and love of himself, the creature must be infused, not just with God’s nature, but also with God’s inner communication of himself. God gives his entire self as gift, a gift that, when accepted, makes God and the soul co-possessors both of God’s life and of the creature’s. The two become one in an eternal marriage, where their natural substances are not confused but belong to each other in mutual possession. This is the goal of substantial union: the eternal life of the soul existing in God as one with him forever. While speaking of the Eucharist, Scheeben points to this reality: “This natural, or essential, substantial union of men with Christ, and through Christ with the Father, is necessarily connected with the union of glory” (MC 491). This eternal union of glory is so profound and so far beyond the confines of the creature that only substantial union with God can account for it. The soul does not simply exist alongside of God for eternity, but exists in and through his life. The significance is that Scheeben’s articulation of substantial union not only affirms that we partake of the divine nature but describes how. God places his substance in the soul, uniting the soul and God as one.

Is there a middle position that accomplishes what Scheeben proposes without entering into metaphysical difficulties? Francis Cunningham proposes that Thomas Aquinas holds to a position of substantial union, by which the soul is united to God in a real and even physical union.⁶⁸ This union, however, occurs by God presenting himself as the supernatural object of the intellect and will. Aquinas, himself explains the difference between this kind of union, based on operation, and one that is based on

⁶⁷ Ibid., 102. Gleason notes that there is ambiguity in Scheeben’s thought for wanting to insist on a substantial union, but then hesitating to accept the consequences of this position. He asserts that Scheeben, in the end, only asserts a moral union (77). However, Scheeben made clear, as referenced above, that he was asserting a union that was not merely moral, but also physical. Nonetheless, ambiguity over the precise nature and extent of a substantial union with God remains.

⁶⁸ Cunningham asserts that this is the common position among the scholastics. See Cunningham, *The Indwelling of the Trinity*, 80.

being: "Moreover, human nature is lifted up to God in two ways: first, by operation, as the saints know and love God; secondly, by personal being, and this mode belongs exclusively to Christ, in Whom human nature is assumed so as to be in the Person of the Son of God."⁶⁹ Thomas Gilby, commenting on Aquinas, lays the metaphysical foundation for this union of operation. Speaking of how the mind is considered physical and how it enters into union with things known, he states:

The mind, for [Thomas], is physical, that is, it is part of nature, for by *physical* a Thomist does not mean *bodily* chiefly. It is the highest form of life, not some camera; a noble energy by which the subject, unlike a material substance which is imprisoned in itself and can never be anything but a stone or a block of wood, goes out and mingles in the life of others without ceasing to be itself. It is the power of possessing them, not caging them in concepts. *Knower and known become one, and this is true of all forms of knowledge.* The perfection of the knowledge is in proportion to the immediacy of the union, a partial union in the lowest forms of knowledge, complete identity in the highest knowledge.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ ST III, q. 2, a. 10, corpus. It should also be noted, however, that Aquinas does use the language of substance in relation to the Spirit's indwelling in the soul: "The Holy Spirit, of course, since He is God, dwells in a mind by His substance and makes men good by participation in Himself" (*Summa contra Gentiles*, trans. Charles J. O'Neil [New York: Hanover House, 1957], IV, ca. 18). In treating the divine missions, Aquinas further explains the nature of the indwelling in a way that clarifies that this substantial presence is by way of operation: "For God is in all things by His essence, power and presence, according to His one common mode, as the cause existing in the effects which participate in His goodness. Above and beyond this common mode, however, there is one special mode belonging to the rational nature wherein God is said to be present as the object known is in the knower, and the beloved in the lover. And since the rational creature by its operation of knowledge and love attains to God Himself, according to this special mode God is said not only to exist in the rational creature but also to dwell therein as in His own temple" (ST I, q. 43, a. 3, corpus). In addition to the natural mode of God's presence to the creature and that of grace, Barthélemy Froget adds that there is a third, the highest substantial union of man and God, which is found in Christ alone by virtue of the hypostatic union. He quotes St. Thomas in his *Commentary on the Sentences* as follows: "In the third mode of union, namely that of Christ's humanity with the divinity, the creature attains to God no longer by its operation but also in and by its very being" (*The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Souls of the Just according to the Teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Sydney A. Raemers [Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1952], 64, quoting *Sententiae*, lib. I, dist. xxxvii, q. 1, a. 2). Thus, full substantial union of God and humanity is found in Christ alone.

⁷⁰ Thomas Gilby, O.P., *Poetic Experience: An Introduction to Thomist Aesthetic* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1934), 20–21. Emphasis original.

Knowledge creates a union, which Gilby says can even be understood in terms of substance: "The mind desires to hold substance immediately and completely, and will not rest until it does."⁷¹ This union through knowledge also necessarily entails the will's movement toward the substance of the thing: "He who is drawn toward something desirable does not desire to have it as a thought but as a thing. . . . The object is present to reason as a representation existing in a spiritual way, but this is not enough for love, the likeness of its object must at least be present in a physical manner of existence."⁷² The will completes the union of knowledge by drawing the knower into a loving union with the object known.

What Gilby has said thus far applies to all knowledge, but he also relates that these same principles apply to knowledge of God: "God is experienced because He is physically present in the mind. . . . [M]ystical knowledge of God is by affinity and nature, and comes about by a real not representational assimilation of the mind to divine things. The mind does not mirror divine truths, it lives them. Knowledge by sympathy demands real union of lover and beloved."⁷³ The beatific vision, the highest form of knowledge attainable by the human subject, results in the most profound union. Gilby explains that "perfect knowledge implies perfect union. This is achieved in the vision of God and nowhere else. Only God can flood the mind wholly, only by knowing Him in perfect immediacy can our knowledge be really ultimate."⁷⁴ This ultimate union is understood in terms of substance: "No substance can enter the mind entirely except God."⁷⁵ The soul becomes one with God through this knowledge, sharing in his substance, without ceasing to be itself.

Cunningham, drawing upon the same understanding of knowledge, summarizes St. Thomas's position on substantial union in the life of faith as follows: "In the divine indwelling, the Most Holy Trinity is really and substantially present in the souls of the just by reason of sanctifying grace: not precisely insofar as it is an effect of God, but by reason of the operations (or habits) of love and knowledge of which grace is the root, the presence of immensity being presupposed."⁷⁶ This indwelling is "real and substantial," though attained through the operations of the intellect and

⁷¹ Ibid., 31.

⁷² Ibid., 34–35.

⁷³ Ibid., 59.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 66.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Cunningham, *The Indwelling of the Trinity*, 191–92. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange states that "grace makes us participate really and formally in this Deity, in this eminent and intimate life of God, because grace is in us the radical principle of essentially divine operations that will ultimately consist in seeing God immediately, as He sees Himself, and in loving Him as He loves Himself" (*Christian Perfection*

will, which attain “the Persons as objects *present* to us and *within* us.”⁷⁷ God, by presenting himself as an object of the intellect and will, enables the soul to share in his own perfect knowledge and love of himself. This sharing in God’s knowledge and love is a participation in his Trinitarian life. Whereas this happens most fully in the beatific vision, this substantial union begins even in the theological life of the soul on earth.

Conclusion

Scheeben’s thought, centered on a theology of deification, can provide fruitful stimulus in understanding how the soul enters into union with the Triune God by participating in his Trinitarian life through grace and enjoying the fruits of the Incarnation in the Eucharist. These claims deserve attention, even though Scheeben’s description of the manner in which deification occurs aroused the suspicion of his critics by its boldness and his pushing of established boundaries. Thomas Aquinas may provide the means of evaluating Scheeben’s position and incorporating what is of lasting value, while not overstepping the limits of the theological tradition and metaphysical truths. N V

and Contemplation according to St. Thomas Aquinas and St. John of the Cross, trans. M. Timothea Doyle, O.P. [Charlotte, NC: TAN Books, 2010], 56).

⁷⁷ Cunningham, *The Indwelling of the Trinity*, 197, 198, emphasis original.