

St. Thomas Aquinas's Treatment of the Name "Father" in *ST I*, q. 33, a. 2

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IN THE *Summa theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas's speculative analysis dealing with the relationships among procession, relation, and person (*ST I*, qq. 27–32) culminates in an understanding of the names of the divine persons given in Scripture. Gilles Emery observes that *the persons* are the organizational key to the *Summa theologiae*'s Trinitarian treatise and that Aquinas's consideration of the divine persons is an exposé of the divine personal names.¹ Having identified a divine person as a *subsisting relation* in the divine essence (*ST I*, q. 29), Aquinas then considers the person's name (qq. 33–38). In the question on the Father (*ST I*, q. 33), Thomas devotes two of the four articles to this naming: a. 2 on *whether* "Father" is

¹ Concerning the organizational key to the *Summa theologiae*: Gilles Emery, *Trinity in Aquinas* (Ypsilanti, MI: Sapientia Press, 2003), 134–37. Concerning the personal names ("Father," "Unbegotten," "Word" and "Son," "Image," "Holy Spirit," "Love" and "Gift"): Gilles Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Francesca Aran Murphy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 151. Gilles Emery, "Le Père et l'oeuvre trinitaire de création selon le Commentaire des Sentences de s. Thomas d'Aquin," in *Ordo Sapientia et Amour: Hommage au Professeur J.-P. Torrell*, ed. C.-J. Pinto de Oliveira (Fribourg: Éditions universitaires, 1993), 89, notes that although Aquinas carefully examines the names "Word," "Image," "Love" and "Holy Spirit" in the *Sentences Commentary*, there is no article on the name "Father." There Thomas treats of "*principle*" and "innascibility," exposing the priority of the personal aspect to that of the essential aspect concerning the term "*principle*." The *Summa theologiae* follows this logic concerning the name "Father" and establishes precisely that it is fitting to the Father to be a principle (*ST I*, q. 33, a. 1). In both the *Scriptum*, or commentary on the *Sentences*, and the *Summa theologiae*, the consideration of the Father is completed by the question on adoptive filiation (*In III Sent.*, d. 10, q. 2 and *ST III*, q. 23).

properly the name of a divine person, and a. 3 on whether “Father” is primarily a personal name. In the pages that follow, we will examine *ST* I, q. 33, a. 2 and its four objections in order:

- I. a name identifies a person uniquely (corp.),
- II. relation signifies a person (ad 1),
- III. “Father” is the best name for this person (ad 2),
- IV. “Father” is properly attributed to this person (ad 3),
- V. the Father is the prime analogue of paternity (ad 4).

The third objection will lead us to an extended reflection on Thomas’s use of analogy and metaphor, and the fourth objection to a detailed consideration of Thomas’s theology of generation and the procession of the Word.

I. A person’s Name Identifies Him Uniquely (*ST* I, q. 33, a. 2, corp.)

In keeping with the central placement of the concept of relation in his Trinitarian theology, Thomas shows in this article that the most proper name for the innascible Genitor is “Father”—a relational name. The Father is most properly named for his relation of fatherhood, by which he is constituted; he *is* this relation. Aquinas begins this article by confirming the intuitive understanding that a person’s name uniquely identifies him:

The proper name of any person signifies that by which the person is distinguished from all others. . . . Now that by which the person of the Father is distinguished from all others is paternity. Hence the *proper name* of the person of the Father is the name “Father,” which signifies paternity.²

² *ST* I, q. 33, a. 2, corp.: “Respondeo dicendum quod nomen proprium cuiuslibet personae significat id per quod illa persona distinguitur ab omnibus aliis. . . . Id autem per quod distinguitur persona Patris ab omnibus aliis, est paternitas. Unde proprium nomen personae Patris est hoc nomen *Pater*, quod significat paternitatem.” As a Christian theologian, Thomas not only appeals to the language of Scripture but also has the intention of showing speculatively why the language of Scripture is normative. Emery notes this concerning this second article of *ST* I, q. 33. Here Aquinas begins with an argument that a name should uniquely identify the one named. Emery remarks that if we do not understand Thomas’s intention, we might suppose that he should simply have begun with a consideration of the name “Father” in the New Testament. But, continues Emery, Aquinas’s intention here is precisely to *give an account* of the language proper to Scripture; he endeavors to show why the language proper to Scripture is imperative. Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 153.

Here in the *Summa theologiae*, moving with customary haste, Thomas offers a shorthand account of how "that by which the person of the Father is distinguished from all others is paternity." He gives a more detailed answer in *Compendium theologiae* I, ch. 57:

Three properties belong to the Father: one by which he is distinguished from the Son alone, and this is paternity; another by which he is distinguished from two, namely the Son and the Holy Spirit, and this is innascibility . . . ; the third is that by which the Father himself, with the Son, is distinguished at the same time from the Holy Spirit, and it is called common spiration.³

So, it should be noted that the Father is not distinguished only by paternity; rather, he is distinguished by all three of his properties. Now, it could be argued that according to the logic that a name must signify "that by which the person is distinct from all others," the Father would better be named "the Innascible" than "the Father" since innascibility distinguishes him from both the Son and the Holy Spirit while paternity distinguishes him only from the Son. But "the Innascible" proves not to be the most fitting name for the Father because innascibility does not *distinguish and constitute* the person of the Father. Innascibility, which is a denial of a relation, distinguishes the Father from both other persons, not by relative opposition but by the uniqueness of its character. That is, the Father alone has no origin, and this dignity enjoyed by the Father is not a relation but precisely a lack thereof. Innascibility and spiration both conceptually *presuppose paternity*, which constitutes and distinguishes the person of the Father. So, the Father can be said to be distinct from all other persons by reason of his paternity in that his other two properties presuppose his paternity, which *by itself* distinctly constitutes his person. Aquinas makes clear that common spiration is not subordinate to filiation, but if the person is viewed as a subsistent relation, as in Thomas's doctrine, the property that constitutes the person will inevitably enjoy a conceptual priority. The name "Father" is specifically referred to the Son, but to a Son who co-spirates: he is a Word "breathing forth Love."⁴ In this article

³ CT I, ch. 57: "tres oportet Patri conuenire: una qua distinguatur a Filio solo, et hec est paternitas; alia qua distinguatur a duobus, scilicet Filio et Spiritu Sancto, et hec est innascibilitas . . . ; tertia est qua ipse Pater simul cum Filio distinguitur a Spiritu Sancto, et hec dicitur communis spiratio." Unless otherwise indicated, all English translations of both primary and secondary sources are my own.

⁴ ST I, q. 43, a. 5, ad 2: "Verbum . . . spirans Amorem." In *Ioan.*, ch. 6:45 (lec. 5, no. 946).

from the *prima pars*, Thomas establishes with theological rigor the intuitive notion that a person's name uniquely identifies him.

II. Relation Signifies the Person (ST I, q. 33, a. 2, ad 1)

All four of the objections in ST I, q. 33, a. 2 deal with our attempt to name God by some kind of analogy or image in the created order, namely by our understanding of "relation" (objection 1), "father" (objection 2), "word" (objection 3), and "generation" (objection 4). The first objection suggests that "Father" is not the proper name of a divine person, because "Father" signifies a relation, whereas a divine person is an individual substance. In his reply, Aquinas exposes the objection's failure to appreciate the difference in the way that paternity exists in God and among creatures, and he concludes that the Father is best named for his relation of paternity:

Among creatures a relation is not a subsisting person. Therefore, among us the name "father" signifies not a person but the relation of a person. In God, however, this is not so, as some mistakenly opined. For the relation signified by the name "Father" is a subsisting person. Hence, as was said above [in q. 29, a. 4], the word "person" in God signifies a relation as subsisting in the divine nature.⁵

In qq. 27–29, Aquinas scrupulously constructs an argument showing that divine processions give rise to opposed real relations which constitute the divine persons. Here he applies that conclusion to the specific case of the Father: "Father" does not only signify the way this person is related to another person; it signifies the person himself. "Father" "signifies a relation as subsisting."⁶ In drawing our attention to the fact that God is not like created fathers, who are constituted as *human beings* and are only accidentally changed by their fatherhood, this reply impels us not to overlook the profound theological significance of the fact that the Father is named after *the relation* by which he is constituted. This affirmation can easily be extended to deal with other theological problems, such as Eunomius's

⁵ ST I, q. 33, a. 2, ad 1: "Ad primum ergo dicendum quod apud nos relatio non est subsistens persona: et ideo hoc nomen pater, apud nos, non significat personam, sed relationem personae. Non autem est ita in divinis, ut quidam falso opinati sunt: nam relatio quam significat hoc nomen *Pater*, est subsistens persona. Unde supra dictum est quod hoc nomen *persona* in divinis significat relationem ut subsistentem in divina natura." In *In I Sent.*, d. 26, q. 2, a. 1, corp. and *In I Sent.*, d. 33, q. 1, a. 2, corp., Thomas identifies the Porretans as mistakenly opining that the properties are in the persons as accompanying and are *not the persons themselves*.

⁶ ST I, q. 29, a. 4, corp.: "Persona igitur divina significat relationem *ut subsistentem*."

suggestion that the name "Father" concerns an *activity* of God and is not a proper personal name.⁷ In Aquinas's account, just as "Father" is not simply the way this person is related, so neither is it merely the way he acts.

III. "Father" Is the Most Proper Name for this Person (ST I, q. 33, a. 2, ad 2)

Thomas moves on to entertain an objection to the name "Father," in favor of a name like "Begetter," based on the idea that a more general name for God is always better than a more specific name. That is, on account of God's transcendence of our comprehension, the less specific we are, the less inaccurate. Thomas articulates this principle in ST I, q. 13, a. 11, where he confirms that for God, the most general title "he who is," is the most fitting. And in ST I, q. 33, a. 1, ad 1, Thomas reintroduces this principle in his determination that "principle" is superior to "cause" in describing the Father, since "principle" is a more general term than "cause."⁸ Here in ST I, q. 33, a. 2, ad 2, he explains why, despite this principle, when it comes to naming the Father, the more general name "Begetter" is not better than the more specific name "Father":

According to the Philosopher in book II of the *De Anima*, the name of a thing ought to come above all from its perfection and end. Now generation signifies something in the process of becoming, but paternity signifies the complement of generation. Therefore, "Father" is more properly the name of the divine person than "the One begetting" or "Begetter."⁹

In ST I, q. 40, a. 2, Thomas will rank the name "Begetter" below "Father" since origin is incapable of intrinsically distinguishing and constituting a hypostasis. Here he expresses the same idea less technically, in terms of perfection. "Father" is most properly the name of this divine person

⁷ Eunomius of Cyzicus, *Apologie*, ed. C. Mondésert, trans. Bernard Sesboüé, Sources chrétiennes, vol. 305 (Paris: Cerf, 1983), ch. 24 (p. 282, lines 26–28). Basil of Caesarea, *Contre Eunome*, ed. C. Mondésert, trans. Bernard Sesboüé, Sources chrétiennes, vol. 299, 305 (Paris: Cerf, 1982–83), bk. 1, ch. 24 (p. 256, lines 13–15), rejects Eunomius's position.

⁸ Admittedly, the more profound reason for rejecting the term "cause" is its implication of a dependence of the effect on the cause; but since a cause is a specific case of a principle, the argument that the broader term is better does follow.

⁹ ST I, q. 33, a. 2, ad 2: "Ad secundum dicendum quod, secundum Philosophum, in II *de Anima*, denominatio rei maxime debet fieri a perfectione et fine. Generatio autem significat ut in fieri: sed paternitas significat complementum generationis. Et ideo potius est nomen divinae personae *Pater*, quam *generans* vel *genitor*." For Aristotle's text, see Aristotle, *On the Soul*, ed. Walter Stanley Hett, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 288 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), bk. 2, ch. 4 (pp. 92–94, 416b24).

because paternity signifies not only the source of generation but generation's coming to completion and the fruit thereof, the very complement (*complementum*). "Father" signifies the person in himself and refers to the relation, which expresses formal completion. "Begetter" signifies the person in his act and refers to the action, which expresses origin. The distinction here concerns the mode of signification. Now, the Dominican master could simply have ruled in favor of "Father" because it is the name God himself reveals in Scripture; here Aquinas takes the trouble to show the harmony between faith and reason, demonstrating that this Scriptural name does not contravene theological principles that have been articulated in defense of the faith elsewhere.

IV. "Father" Is Properly Attributed—Analogously and Not Only Metaphorically

In this section, we will consider (A) the proper attribution of the name "Father" within the Trinity, which will entail an examination of Aquinas's understanding of (B) analogy and (C) metaphor.

A. Proper Attribution (ST I, q. 33, a. 2, ad 3)

As we have noted above, in q. 33, a. 2, ad 1, Aquinas observes that "among us the name 'father' signifies not a person but the relation of a person" while in God "the relation signified by the name 'Father' is a subsisting person." In ad 3, he again points out the difference between the created and uncreated orders, this time with respect to the Word. The objection argues that since in man a word does not subsist and is thus only metaphorically a "son," "offspring," or "something begotten," therefore any begetter is only *metaphorically* the "father" of a "word." But in the first question in the treatise on the Trinity of the *Summa theologiae* (q. 27), Aquinas establishes that "the Word proceeding proceeds as subsisting *in the same nature* [as the Father] and so is *properly* called the 'begotten' and a 'Son.'" ¹⁰ Here in q. 33, a. 2, he repeats that conclusion, adding that the name "Father" is *properly* attributed to him who speaks that Word subsisting in the same nature:

In human nature a word is not something subsisting, and hence cannot properly be called "begotten" or a "son." But the divine Word is something subsisting in the divine nature and hence is properly and not metaphorically called a "Son"; and his principle is called a "Father."¹¹

¹⁰ ST I, q. 27, a. 2, ad 2: "unde verbum procedens procedit ut eiusdem naturae subsistens. Et propter hoc proprie dicitur genitum et Filius."

¹¹ ST I, q. 33, a. 2, ad 3: "Ad tertium dicendum quod verbum non est aliquid subsistens in natura humana: unde non proprie potest dici genitum vel filius. Sed

Because the Word shares the same nature as the principle from which he proceeds, this procession qualifies for the definition of a "birth," and the names "Father" and "Son" are properly and not only metaphorically predicated.

In *ST I*, q. 13, a. 3, Thomas lays the groundwork for our *proper predication* of names for the God who transcends us. In order to grasp the significance of Thomas's deceptively simple assertion here in q. 33 that "Father" is "the *proper* name of the person of the Father,"¹² a brief consideration of Thomas's use of analogy and metaphor is in order.

B. Analogy

Univocal predication describes the use of the same word *in the same way* for different objects. For instance, Lassie and Snuppy (the first cloned dog) are both equally described by the term "dog." Equivocal predication describes the use of a word in completely different ways for the different objects. For example, a tree has one sort of "bark" and a dog has quite another. The richest exploitation of speech, however, stretches words beyond univocity but not to the point of the dissociation of equivocity. This powerful exercise of language is found in analogy and metaphor.

An analogy is a comparison that is neither univocal nor purely equivocal. It is somewhere between the two. Thomas's theological deployment of analogy is based on his understanding of creation as an *effect* of God, who is a universal cause. In his explanation of creation, Thomas employs the Aristotelian principle that every effect resembles its cause but imperfectly. The effect always possesses the cause's perfections less perfectly than the cause itself possesses them. Nevertheless, the effect resembles the cause, otherwise the cause would not be *causing* anything. So, there is a *real resemblance* between created things and the God who causes them, despite the fact that God and creatures are more dissimilar than similar. That is, God is uncreated, all-perfect, and eternal, while we are utterly dependent at every moment on God for our existence and, as mere participators in being, are ontologically more similar to non-existence

Verbum divinum est aliquid subsistens in natura divina: unde proprie, et non metaphorice, dicitur Filius, et eius principium, Pater." A mistranslation of *proprie* as "literally" instead of "properly" in the Benziger edition is unfortunately repeated in the Gilby edition. See *ST I*, q. 1, a. 9, on whether Scripture should use metaphors and *ST I*, q. 13, a. 3, on whether some names can be applied properly to God. A metaphor is an example of *literal speech* that is not *proper speech*. In Thomas's vocabulary, the opposite of the literal sense is the *spiritual sense*, as he makes clear in *ST I*, q. 1, a. 10.

¹² *ST I*, q. 33, a. 2, corp.

than we are to God's existence.¹³ Even so, our existence resembles God's because he is the cause of it, and we can thus conclude that created reality is *analogous* to God's reality: God *exists*, and created things *exist*. When we say that we exist and God exists, we use not an equivocal sense of "exist" but an analogical one:

Likeness of creatures to God is not said to be on account of agreement in form according to the same definition of genus or species, but only *according to analogy*, inasmuch as God is a being by his essence but others are beings by participation.¹⁴

It is therefore possible to know God through creatures. In fact, our knowledge of God, on this side of heaven, is only with reference to created things:

In this life we cannot see God in his essence; but through creatures we know him as their principle and by way of his excelling and transcending them. In this way therefore he can be named by us from creatures, yet not as if the name that signifies him expresses the divine essence as it is in itself.¹⁵

There is a flexibility in analogous concepts that reflects analogous reality. As a result, the lived use of concepts in judgment, and not formal logic, provides the necessary context for understanding analogy. The flexible usage of analogous concepts rests not merely on the content of the concept itself in our minds but also on the exercise of judgment.¹⁶ We are capable of signifying what we do not completely understand. Indeed, we must do so even concerning those things which do not naturally exceed our capacity to know, but about which we still have more to learn. For instance, when a child on a boat sees a whale and shouts "whale!" the child might have a very weak grasp of what a whale is, as

¹³ Cf. *De potentia*, q. 3, a. 1, ad 3.

¹⁴ *ST I*, q. 4, a. 3, ad 3: "Ad tertium dicendum quod non dicitur esse similitudo creaturae ad Deum propter communicantiam in forma secundum eandem rationem generis et speciei: sed secundum analogiam tantum; prout scilicet Deus est ens per essentiam, et alia per participationem." Cf. *ST I*, q. 13, a. 5, corp.

¹⁵ *ST I*, q. 13, a. 1, corp.: "Deus in hac vita non potest a nobis videri per suam essentiam; sed cognoscitur a nobis ex creaturis, secundum habitudinem principii, et per modum excellentiae et remotionis. Sic igitur potest nominari a nobis ex creaturis: non tamen ita quod nomen significans ipsum, exprimat divinam essentiam secundum quod est."

¹⁶ This is W. Norris Clarke's conclusion. See his "Analogy and the Meaningfulness of Language About God: A Reply to Kai Nielsen," *The Thomist* 40 (1976): 67–69.

compared to a dolphin, a shark, or even a crocodile. But the child does not signify a vague concept in his mind; he signifies that thing swimming in the water, that is indeed a real whale. And he signifies a whale no less than an expert marine biologist does.¹⁷ When we signify God the Father, we rely on divine revelation and not on our own firm grasp of the world by means of our five senses. But our ignorance of the transcendent God does not prevent us from speaking of him; that is, we are not relegated to speaking of our own ideas of God. If pressed to say whom we mean when we speak of God the Father, we would ultimately have to explain that we mean *the one Jesus was talking about*. And we are able to do this because with the power of judgment, we can extend analogous terms to signify beyond the range of our experience.¹⁸ Our intellect can make a judgment about the transcendent God, by way of analogy, based on a concept derived from the sensible realm. We name the effect but signify the cause.¹⁹ On this point, it is critical to distinguish the thing signified (*res significata*) as it is in itself, from the thing as understood conceptually in our limited minds (*ratio nominis*), according to our limited way of speaking (*modus significandi*).²⁰ The mind uses the *ratio nominis* to signify the *res significata*, comprehending all the while that the earthly *modus significandi* and *ratio nominis* cannot apply to God. By deliberately withholding the application of our *modus significandi* to God, we intentionally separate from God creaturely imperfections and the imperfect manner in which creatures possess perfections.²¹ Therefore, we can *properly* affirm truths about God, provided that we realize that our concepts and way of understanding cannot do justice to the truth we are affirming of God. Aquinas affirms that in this "negative" judgment, the intellect transcends its own mode of understanding:

¹⁷ I borrow this cogent example from Timothy Smith, *Thomas Aquinas' Trinitarian Theology: A Study in Theological Method* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 196.

¹⁸ Gregory Rocca, "Distinction Between Res Significata and Modus Significandi in Aquinas' Theological Epistemology," *The Thomist* 55 (1991): 80. Rocca has since published a monograph on this topic; see Gregory Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God: Thomas Aquinas on the Interplay of Positive and Negative Theology* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004).

¹⁹ ST I, q. 4, a. 3, corp. See Smith, *Thomas Aquinas' Trinitarian Theology: A Study in Theological Method*, 227.

²⁰ Two examples of our limited *modus significandi* are: (1) we cannot signify the abstract (such as fatherhood) and the concrete (such as Father) at the same time, and (2) we cannot avoid using words that suggest passivity in God in our description of the notional actions, such as when we say that "the Son is generated."

²¹ See Rocca, "Distinction Between Res Significata and Modus Significandi in Aquinas' Theological Epistemology," 182–85, 194.

Now our intellect understands being according to the mode in which it is found in things here below. . . . Although that which our language names “being” is signified by way of concretion, nevertheless our intellect in attributing being to God transcends the mode of signification, attributing to God that which is signified but not the mode of signification.²²

Analogy is employed precisely when the mind predicates the *ratio nominis* of God in an act of judgment about him who transcends the human mind’s quidditative ability. Since the analogical nature of predication about God rests on judgment, not on concept, no univocal core of meaning for both God and man has to be distilled to make *proper speech* possible.²³ For example, when we say that God is wise, we have our earthbound concept of “wise,” and we do not know all that it means for God to be wise. But the wisdom present in creatures, known connaturally by our intellect, is analogous to wisdom in God because he causes all wisdom. If we realize that our mode of signifying is shot through with human limitation, we can purify our predication with the extra step of denying all imperfections of God. Thus, we must proceed via negativa, but we are not simply babbling. To assert that all speech about God is equivocal is to claim that the connection between the statements “Socrates is faithful” and “God is faithful” is the same as the connection between the statements “this tree has bark” and “this dog has a bark.” Namely, there would be no correspondence at all between the terms. But since analogical stretching of terms is not only permitted but in fact reflects (analogous) reality as it is, man is capable of proper speech about God despite the overwhelming dissimilarity between created and uncreated wisdom. “The divine Word . . . is properly and not metaphorically called a ‘Son’ and his principle a ‘Father.’ ”²⁴

C. Metaphor

In both metaphor and analogy, terms are being juxtaposed so that despite their differences, a perceived similarity between them will afford a new insight into at least one of the terms. Analogy and metaphor differ in this:

²² *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 7: “Intellectus autem noster hoc modo intelligit esse quo modo invenitur in rebus inferioribus a quibus scientiam capit, in quibus esse non est subsistens, sed inhaerens. Ratio autem invenit quod aliquod esse subsistens sit: et ideo licet hoc quod dicunt esse, significetur per modum concreationis, tamen intellectus attribuens esse Deo transcendit modum significandi, attribuens Deo id quod significatur, non autem modum significandi.”

²³ Rocca, “Distinction Between Res Significata and Modus Significandi in Aquinas’ Theological Epistemology,” 194–96.

²⁴ *ST I*, q. 33, a. 2, ad 3: “Sed Verbum divinum . . . proprie, et non metaphorice, dicitur Filius, et eius principium, Pater.”

In an analogy, a judgment is made that there is an *objective* correspondence between the two terms. In a metaphor, a correspondence between the two terms is *suggested* in order to communicate something about one of the terms by means of the other, but no judgment is made that there is an objective correspondence between the two terms, as is made in an analogy. So, a metaphor is not *proper* speech. For example, in an analogy, *health* can be predicated of a person and of food: "Socrates is healthy" and "orange juice is healthy." Socrates and orange juice are not healthy in the same way, but the speaker makes a judgment that there is an objective correspondence in reality between health and each of these two terms. Now, Socrates' good health could be communicated metaphorically by saying that "Socrates is a rock." Here no judgment is made affirming an objective correspondence between a rock and Socrates. Rather, there is a suggested correspondence between the invulnerability of the rock and of Socrates' state of good health. Analogy, though between univocity and equivocity, is still *proper* speech. A metaphor, in contrast, does not use its terms according to proper predication.²⁵

Thomas explains that terms bound up with creaturely imperfection cannot be predicated of God except by way of metaphor. For instance, if God is said to be a "rock" and "fortress" (Ps 18:2) or "like a lion" (Jer 49:19), it cannot be taken properly, because rocks, fortresses, and lions necessarily possess the imperfection of being created:

Certain names signify perfections of this kind proceeding from God to created things in such a way that the imperfect mode itself in which creatures participate divine perfection is included in the very signification of the name, as "stone" signifies something existing materially; and names of this kind can be applied to God only metaphorically. But other names signify perfections themselves absolutely, without including in their signification any mode of participating, such as "being," "good," "living," and the like; and such names are properly said of God.²⁶

²⁵ Richard Swinburne has an intriguing explanation of how a metaphor can be transformed into an analogy through repeated usage. See Swinburne, *Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 42–44. Equivocal terms are exploited in puns and can thereby be transformed into metaphors. For instance, if a great hitter in baseball referred to himself as "a bat out of hell," he would be exploiting the identical spellings and pronunciations of two completely different words, namely the animal that sleeps hanging upside down and the cylindrical tapered stick used in baseball. Although these two "bats" would normally be equivocal, here they are being linked in metaphor by means of the power common to both to inspire fear.

²⁶ ST I, q. 13, a. 3, ad 1: "Ad primum ergo dicendum quod quaedam nomina significant huiusmodi perfectiones a Deo procedentes in res creatas, hoc modo quod ipse

Nevertheless, good metaphors still capitalize on the analogous real similarity between rocks or lions and God, albeit not properly. But terms that are not necessarily bound up with created imperfections can be predicated *properly* of God—not univocally but analogously. Thus, we speak properly when we say that God is wise, good, one, true, beautiful or Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thomas has no presumption of univocal predication, since he keeps the similarity between created things and God in the context of cause and effect.

Now, God is incomprehensible to us because he exceeds our limited capacity to understand; it is not that he is *intrinsically* incomprehensible. On the contrary, he is infinitely and unfathomably intelligible. Absolutely speaking, there is nothing more self-evident than God, but he is not so evident to us who cannot comprehend his essence.²⁷ God understands himself completely, but when we gaze on his blinding brightness, we are like the night owl staring into the sun.²⁸ So, the Trinity's transcendence must not be identified with the impenetrable darkness of irrationality, and man should not be regarded as relegated to metaphorical speech. Thomas's whole theology is based upon his faith in a benevolent creator of rational creatures who are capable of receiving the gift of the revelation of the creator's own self-knowledge. This allows Thomas to account for the inseparability of revelation and human verbal formulation. No consideration of what can be known or said of the mystery of God's Triune life can be authentic apart from the faith of the Church founded on the revelation of God himself. Theology proceeds from *revealed* principles, namely, God's own self-knowledge as communicated to believers. We could know by reason alone that God is one, but that God is triune is known only by faith.²⁹

Concerning the names of the divine persons revealed in Scripture then, "Father" is *properly* and not only metaphorically the name of the divine person who generates the Son; and "Father" *names a perfection* in God. The reality we signify is God the Father and not only our idea of God the Father. We signify the Father by purifying the earthly concept of fatherhood through the judgment that the Father is without imper-

modus imperfectus quo a creatura participatur divina perfectio, in ipso nominis significato includitur, sicut *lapis* significat aliquid materialiter ens: et huiusmodi nomina non possunt attribui Deo nisi metaphorice. Quaedam vero nomina significant ipsas perfectiones absolute, absque hoc quod aliquis modus participandi claudatur in eorum significatione, ut *ens*, *bonum*, *vivens*, et huiusmodi: et talia proprie dicuntur de Deo."

²⁷ ST I, q. 2, a. 1, corp.

²⁸ ST I, q. 1, a. 5, ad 1 and q. 12, a. 1, corp.

²⁹ ST I, q. 32, a. 1.

fection and far exceeds what we have in our created minds. Since we describe God by way of concepts drawn from the created order, some names cannot be applied to God properly; further, those which can be said properly must be understood as analogous. By means of analogy, Thomas steers between the rationalism of univocity and the agnosticism of equivocity.

V. The Father Is the Prime Analogate of Paternity (ST I, q. 33, a. 2, ad 4)

In this section, we will review: (A) ST I, q. 33, a. 2, ad 4, where Thomas shows that the name "father" applies more properly to God than to creatures, and (B) Thomas's descriptions of (1) the procession of the Word and (2) the generation of the Son. We will see that Thomas establishes that God the Father is the prime analogate of fatherhood, by arguing from the perfection of divine generation and paternity. This will lead us to a consideration of the procession of the Word and the generation of the Son.

A. Perfect paternity

As we have concluded above, ST I, q. 33, a. 2, ad 3 asserts that the Word is properly called a "Son" with a properly named "Father." The fourth objection challenges this. Observing that what is said properly of God must apply more to God than to creatures, the objection argues that the name "father" seems to apply more (*per prius*) to creatures than to God, because the best example of generation seems not to be found in God, where the Father and the Son share one numerically same essence and differ only by relation, but rather among creatures, where the sons generated are distinct from their fathers "not only according to relation but also according to essence."³⁰ In his reply, Aquinas counters that the prime analogates of "Father" and "generation" are indeed found in God, as regards the *res significata*:

The words "generation" and "paternity," as well as other words that are properly said of God, are said more properly of God than of creatures with respect to *the thing signified*, but *not with respect to the mode of signification*. Hence also the Apostle says in Eph [3:14], "I bend my knee to

³⁰ ST I, q. 33, a. 2, obj. 4: "non secundum relationem tantum, sed etiam secundum essentiam." As will become clear in the reply, when he says here in the objection that sons differ "according to essence," he means that they do not share one numerically same essence. Corporeal creatures of the same species possess the same essence specifically but not numerically, as they are individuated by matter (and not by relation alone).

the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom all paternity in heaven and on earth is named.”³¹

Even though we start with a human word for a human reality in order to name God the Father, the created fatherhood that we begin with is in fact derived from its divine exemplar—“from whom all paternity in heaven and on earth is named.” We apply “father” *analogously* to the *true instance* of a Father, since he exceeds our knowledge. And those fathers to whom we apply the term *univocally* are only *analogously* fathers in that they only feebly imitate the true Father.³² Thus, with respect to our mode of signifying, “father” applies more directly to creatures than to God, but since by analogy we can properly signify him who is the true exemplar of fatherhood, “Father” is indeed applied to God before creatures, and it is attributed properly.

Thomas continues this argument with an analysis of what perfect fatherhood is:

For it is manifest that a generation receives its species from its terminus, which is the form of the thing generated. And the nearer this is to the form of the one generating, the truer and more perfect the generation is—as a univocal generation is more perfect than a non-univocal generation—for by nature, the one generating generates something similar to itself in form. Hence, the fact that in divine generation the form of the one generating and the one generated is numerically the same, while among created beings it is not numerically but only specifically the same, shows that generation, and consequently paternity, is said more properly of God than of creatures. Hence, the fact that the distinction of the one generated from the one generating in God is only by relation pertains to the truth of divine generation and paternity.³³

³¹ ST I, q. 33, a. 2, ad 4: “Ad quantum dicendum quod nomen generationis et paternitatis, sicut et alia nomina quae proprie dicuntur in divinis, per prius dicuntur de Deo quam de creaturis, quantum ad rem significatam, licet non quantum ad modum significandi. Unde et Apostolus dicit, *ad Ephes. III*, ‘Flecto genua mea ad Patrem Domini nostri Iesu Christi, ex quo omnis paternitas in caelo et in terra nominatur.’”

³² Divine *paternity* includes what among creatures are unmistakably maternal perfections, such as conception and birth. In ScG IV, ch. 11 (no. 3478), Aquinas affirms, based on Ps 110:3 and Jn 1:18, that the Word is born from the Father’s womb (ex utero) and remains in the Father’s bosom (*in sinu*). For more on Aquinas’s handling of these images, see Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 156.

³³ ST I, q. 33, a. 2, ad 4: “Manifestum est enim quod generatio accipit speciem a termino, qui est forma generati. Et quanto haec fuerit propinquior formae generantis, tanto verior et perfectior est generatio; sicut generatio univoca est perfectior quam non univoca: nam de ratione generantis est, quod generet sibi

So, the nearer the son's form is to the father's form, the more perfect the generation, because the self-communication in the generation is more complete: "for by nature, the one generating generates something similar to itself in form." Therefore, the most perfect paternity, generation, and filiation are found in God, because in God the similarity between the Father and the Son is perfect. "Father," then, refers most perfectly, fully, and properly to God the Father. Here Aquinas pushes back against a creaturely bias. The more intense full and perfect generation is not one that appears to produce more by begetting *more richly diverse* sons. That would be true only where the father communicates a potency that he himself cannot realize, as is the case among creatures. But in fact, the most perfect generation possible is exemplified by a Father who possesses every perfection and is able to communicate *all that he is* to his Son. Thus, concludes Aquinas, it is a mark of divine paternity that the Father and Son are distinguished only by relation.

This theme of the perfect generation of a perfect paternity will continue to reappear in the treatise on the Trinity treatise of the *Summa theologiae* in support of the Son's perfect equality. For instance, in q. 33, a. 3, Thomas observes that "the perfect meaning (*ratio*) of paternity and filiation is to be found in God the Father and in God the Son, because one is the nature and glory of the Father and the Son."³⁴ And he notes in q. 39, a. 8, that since "it is the Son who has in himself truly and perfectly the nature of the Father" and "he is the expressed image of the Father," perfection and proportion are appropriated to the Son.³⁵ Then, contrasting the Son's filiation with creation's in q. 41, a. 3, he observes that "it is necessary that the Father not pour out part of the nature in himself by generating the Son, but rather that he communicate the whole nature to him, remaining distinct only according to origin."³⁶ Finally, in q. 42, a. 4, concerning whether the persons are equal in greatness, Thomas again contrasts divine

simile secundum formam. Unde hoc ipsum quod in generatione divina est eadem numero forma generantis et geniti, in rebus autem creatis non est eadem numero, sed specie tantum, ostendit quod generatio, et per consequens paternitas, per prius sit in Deo quam in creaturis. Unde hoc ipsum quod in divinis est distinctio geniti a generante secundum relationem tantum, ad veritatem divinae generationis et paternitatis pertinet."

³⁴ ST I, q. 33, a. 3, corp.: "perfecta ratio paternitatis et filiationis invenitur in Deo Patre et Deo Filio: quia Patris et Filii una est natura et gloria."

³⁵ ST I, q. 39, a. 8, corp.: "est Filius habens in se vere et perfecte naturam Patris. . . . [E]st imago expressa Patris."

³⁶ ST I, q. 41, a. 3, corp.: "Unde necesse est quod Pater, generando Filium, non partem naturae in ipsum transfuderit, sed totam naturam ei communicaverit, remanente distinctione solum secundum originem, ut ex dictis patet."

and human fatherhood, noting that human sons only gradually become equal to their fathers and that through a defect of the father's generation, a son may possibly never become equal to his father. This is not the case with divine paternity, which achieves a perfect generation:

Now by the definition of paternity and filiation, through generation a son should attain the possession of the perfection of nature that is in his father, as the father himself possesses it. . . . And it cannot be said that the power of God the Father was defective in generating.³⁷

Since the Father is named for and constituted by this perfect paternity expressed in a perfect generation, we now consider Aquinas's understanding of this most paternal notional act of generation.

B. The Generation of the Son and the Procession of the Word

In this section, we will consider (1) Aquinas's exploitation of the procession of the Word in order to interpret the meaning of the birth of the Son in God, and (2) elements concerning divine generation that are not addressed by the word analogy. In this first section, we will (a) briefly review various metaphors for divine generation in Aquinas, before (b) outlining the analogy of the word and (c) examining the texts in Aquinas, where he elaborates this analogy in reference to divine generation.

1. The Son's birth viewed as the procession of the Word

Thomas treats extensively of the generation of the Son and the divine power of generation in the *De potentia and the Sentences Commentary*. Although in the *Summa theologiae* he does dedicate one article (*ST* I, q. 27, a. 2) to generation and later deals specifically with the topic again where he considers the notional acts of generation and spiration with respect to the persons (*ST* I, q. 41, a. 1), the discussion in this mature work gravitates toward the procession of the Word. From the very beginning of the treatise on the Trinity in the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas describes divine generation *in terms of* the procession of the Word: "the procession of the Word in God is called a *generation*."³⁸ In the *Sentences*

³⁷ *ST* I, q. 42, a. 4, corp.: "Hoc autem est de ratione paternitatis et filiationis, quod filius per generationem pertingat ad habendam perfectionem naturae quae est in patre, sicut et pater. . . . Nec potest dici quod virtus Dei Patris fuerit defectiva in generando." We find this observation already in Athanasius, Hilary, and Augustine.

³⁸ *ST* I, q. 27, a. 2, corp.: "Respondeo dicendum quod processio verbi in divinis dicitur generatio." In *In I Sent.*, d. 15, q. 5, a. 1, q1a. 1, ad 3, Thomas notes that the name "Son" has a special affinity with the coming forth of creatures, since generation and creation designate a coming forth from a principle, whereas the name "Word" is

Commentary, an earlier work in which Thomas's theology of the Word is in its embryonic stage, his speech bears a more deliberate distinction between the procession from the Father of a Son who *has the Father's nature* and the procession of a Word that bears a certain *likeness in the divine intellect*:

Therefore I say that by reason of his procession he is the Image, both insofar as he proceeds as the Son, because the Son is named from the fact that he has the nature of the Father, and insofar as he proceeds as the Word, because the Word, as has already been said, is a certain likeness in the intellect of the thing itself understood.³⁹

Thomas does not use human birth and paternity as the image for grasping divine birth and paternity, because the idea of a son being generated is laden with physical imagery. The births we know are physical, and they take place in time and are completed. None of these conditions apply to divine birth, which is intellectual and eternal, without beginning or end. Also, human fathers are co-principles with mothers in their generation of offspring, whereas the innascible Father is the sole principle of the Son. In modeling an immanent intellectual procession that gives rise to a distinction of opposed relation alone, the relationship of a human father to his son cannot compare to that of a speaker to his word spoken. The analogy of a word conceived and spoken in the mind of man affords an intensely rich reflection on the unity of essence and the distinction of relative opposition in God. Indeed, in Thomas's judgment we have no better analogy for penetrating the mystery of the Trinity: "among all [the analogies], the procession of the word from the intellect represents more clearly that it is not posterior to that from which it proceeds."⁴⁰ The indispensability of the analogy of the word may be observed from the fact that discussion of the procession of the Holy Spirit—which lacks an equally clear analogy—is so much more difficult. Aquinas introduces the analogy of the word in the very first article of the treatise on the Trinity of the *Summa theologiae* and refers to it constantly

associated with the return of creatures as well as with the coming forth. For more on this point, see Gilles Emery, *La Trinité Créatrice* (Paris:Vrin, 1995), 407.

³⁹ *In I Sent.*, d. 28, q. 2, a. 3, corp.: "Ita etiam dico quod Filius ex ratione processio-
nis suae habet quod sit imago, et in quantum procedit ut Filius, quia Filius dici-
tur ex hoc quod habet naturam Patris; et in quantum procedit ut verbum, quia
verbum, ut dictum est [d. 27, q. 2, a. 1], est quaedam similitudo in intellectu ipsius
rei intellectae."

⁴⁰ *ST I*, q. 42, a. 2, ad 1: "Inter omnia tamen expressius repraesentat processio verbi
ab intellectu: quod quidem non est posterius eo a quo procedit."

throughout the treatise. Thomas never abandons the definition of generation as *producing a Son of the same nature*, and he will argue that the reference in John's Gospel (1:18) to the Son's being "in the bosom of the Father" affirms the Son's *consubstantiality*.⁴¹ But the procession of the word serves as his key analogy for understanding divine generation.

- a. **Various metaphors for divine generation.** Various patristic images for the Son's birth, like splendor in the light or a river and its source, do not illustrate unity and distinction at the same time, with the same clarity as the analogy of a spoken word. Aquinas mentions these but does not exploit them to explain generation.⁴² He does borrow Augustine's Johannine metaphors of *seeing* and *hearing* for divine generation although he does not develop them. We peruse those texts now before moving on to the analogy of the word.

These Johannine metaphors are based on Jesus' revelation that all has been given into his hands (Jn 3:35, 13:3) because he does what he sees and hears the Father doing (Jn 3:32, 5:19, 8:26).⁴³ When commenting on John 3:32, the Angelic Doctor aligns *seeing* with proceeding as the consubstantial Son and *hearing* with proceeding as the Word of the Father's intellect: "Therefore it is said that 'he sees' insofar as he proceeds from the Father's essence and that 'he hears' insofar as he proceeds as the Word of the paternal intellect."⁴⁴ Later in the same commentary, when interpreting John 5:19, Thomas repeats

⁴¹ *In Ioan.* 1:18 (lec. 11, no. 218).

⁴² For examples of Aquinas's reference to these images, see: ScG IV, ch. 14 (p. 56, col. 1, line 15; no. 3499): "splendor ex luce"; *In Ioan.* 17:24 (lec. 6, no. 2261): "splendor a luce"; ScG IV, ch. 10 (p. 30, col. 1, line 23; no. 3449): "aqua fontis effluit in rivum"; *Super Primam Decretalem*: "unam aquam esse in tribus rivis." For references in the Fathers concerning the splendor from the light, see: Ambrose of Milan, *De Spiritu Sancto*, ed. Claudio Moreschini, Sancti Ambrosii Episcopi Mediolanensis Opera, vol. 2 (Milan: Bibl. Ambrosiana, 1979), bk. 1, ch. 14, par. 163; Augustine of Hippo, *Sermones*, PL vol. 38 (Paris: Vrayet, 1865), Sermo 117 (col. 668, line 54); Augustine of Hippo, *Contra Aduersarium Legis et Prophetarum*, ed. Paulus Orosius and Klaus Daur, Corpus Christianorum [CCSL], vol. 49 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1985), bk. 1 (p. 45, lines 318–319); Augustine of Hippo, *Contra Maximinum*, PL vol. 42 (Paris: Vrayet, 1886), ch. 23 (col. 801, line 54). For references concerning rivers and their source, see Hilary of Poitiers, *La Trinité (De Trinitate)*, IX–XII, ed. P. Smulders, SC vol. 462 (Paris: Cerf, 2001), bk. 9, ch. 37 (p. 88, lines 3–5).

⁴³ Aquinas names Augustine in *In Ioan.* 5:19 (lec. 3, no. 754), as we document below.

⁴⁴ *In Ioan.* 3:32 (lec. 5, no. 534): "ideo dicitur 'Quod vidit,' inquantum procedit de essentia Patris, 'et audivit,' inquantum procedit ut Verbum intellectus paterni."

his description of generation in terms of vision, but here, as in *ST* I, q. 27, he reads generation not only in terms of consubstantiality but also in terms of an intelligible procession:

Rightly is the *generation* of the Son by the Father designated by *vision*, as the Son's seeing what the Father does is nothing other than to proceed from the acting Father by an intelligible procession.⁴⁵

Hence, according to Augustine, the Father's showing the Son is nothing other than the Father's generating the Son. And the Son's seeing what the Father does is nothing other than the Son's receiving his being and nature from the Father. Nevertheless, this showing can be said to be similar to seeing, insofar as the Son is the splendor of the paternal vision, as is said in Heb 1:3; for the Father, seeing and knowing himself, conceives the Son, who is the conception of this vision. It can also be similar to that which comes through hearing, insofar as the Son proceeds from the Father as the Word—as if to say that “the Father shows all things to the Son” insofar as he produces him as the splendor and the conception of his wisdom and as his Word.⁴⁶

Later still in the *Commentary on John* (15:15), Aquinas explains that “the Son's hearing the Father is the Son's receiving his essence from him.”⁴⁷ Then, in *ST* I, q. 42, a. 6, ad 2, Aquinas uses the images of the Son's seeing and hearing together as referring to nothing other than the Father's communication to the Son of both “knowledge as well

⁴⁵ *In Ioan.* 5:19 (lec. 3, no. 750): “Sed hoc [‘non potest Filius facere quidquam, nisi quod Patrem viderit facientem’] dictum est ut designetur communicatio paternitatis Filio per generationem, quae convenienter designatur hoc verbo *viderit*, quia per visum et auditum in nos ab alio scientia transfunditur. . . . Quia ergo visio designat derivationem cognitionis et sapientiae ab alio, recte per visionem generatio Filii a Patre designatur, ut sic nihil aliud sit Filium videre Patrem facientem, quam procedere intelligibili processione a Patre operante.”

⁴⁶ *In Ioan.* 5:19 (lec. 3, no. 754): “Unde, secundum Augustinum, demonstrare Patrem Filio, nihil aliud est quam Patrem generare Filium. Et Filium videre quae Pater facit, nihil aliud est quam Filium esse et naturam a Patre recipere. Potest tamen dici demonstratio illa similis visuali, inquantum ipse Filius est splendor visionis paternae, ut dicitur Hebr. I, 3: nam Pater videns se et intelligens, concipit Filium, qui est conceptus huius visionis. Potest etiam esse similis ei quae fit per auditum, inquantum Filius procedit a Patre ut Verbum. Ut si dicatur quod ‘Pater omnia demonstrat Filio,’ inquantum producit ipsum ut splendorem, et conceptum suae sapientiae, et Verbum.” For Augustine's text, see Augustine of Hippo, *In Iohannis Evangelium tractatus*, ed. Radbodus Willems, CCSL vol. 36 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954), tract. 23, par. 11 (p. 241, lines 56–57): “Sic autem demonstratio Patris Filii uisionem gignit, quemadmodum Pater Filium gignit.”

⁴⁷ *In Ioan.* 15:15 (lec. 3, no. 2017): “Filium ergo audire a Patre, est accipere essentiam eius ab eo.”

as essence.”⁴⁸ We can see then that Aquinas’s alignment of the Son’s seeing and hearing the Father with either consubstantial generation or intellectual procession may vary slightly, but he clearly takes note of this Johannine imagery.

- b. **The word analogy.** Thomas’s elaboration of the procession of the Word develops Augustine’s so-called “psychological model” of the Trinity, which is based on the image of the Trinity in man, in whom we find the immanent intellectual procession of a spoken word and the immanent volitional procession of love.⁴⁹ As Thomas understands it, the human knower, coming into contact with real objects in the world outside, is related to four things: (1) the thing known, (2) the intelligible form (*species intelligibilis*) that is abstracted by agent intellect, (3) the act of knowing, and (4) the concept.⁵⁰ The concept differs from the act of knowing in that the concept is *the terminus* in which the act of knowing is accomplished. The concept is what is properly named *the word*; this is what we signify with an exterior word physically pronounced.⁵¹ The act of knowing the object and the word that expresses this knowledge may be said to have two different origins. In us, the origin of the act of knowing the object is the object itself, which moves us intentionally from potentiality to act. For instance, when a man experiences an apple, the common sense unites the data from the five senses to produce a phantasm in the imagination, and the (agent) intellect shines on the phantasm and sees the apple in the

⁴⁸ ST I, q. 42, a. 6, ad 2: “Ad secundum dicendum quod in *demonstratione* Patris et *auditione* Filii, non intelligitur nisi quod Pater communicat scientiam Filio, sicut et essentiam.”

⁴⁹ See Augustine of Hippo, *De Trinitate*, ed. W. J. Mountain, CCSL vol. 50–50a (Turnhout: Brepols, 1968), bk. 9–10. Edmund Hill, *The Mystery of the Trinity* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1985), 124, points out that it is misleading to call the model “psychological,” since Augustine’s triad of memory, knowledge, and love does not refer to the powers of the soul (entitative habits) but to the activities of the mind (which are necessarily in act and have objects).

⁵⁰ See ST I, q. 85, a. 2 and *In Ioan.* 1:1 (lec. 1, no. 25). I am following and fleshing out Dondaine’s clear account of Thomas’s epistemology. See H.-F. Dondaine, “Renseignements techniques (Appendice II),” in *Saint Thomas d’Aquin: Somme théologique: La Trinité* (Paris: Éditions de la Revue des Jeunes, 1946), 217–19. G. Emery notes that in this account of the speaker producing a word, Thomas is reinterpreting an Aristotelian anthropology in light of Augustine. See Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 58. Thomas adopts a basically Aristotelian anthropology regarding reason’s governing the passions and regarding the intentional union of the knower and the known, which he reworks in light of revelation and the Christian tradition, especially that of Augustine.

⁵¹ See ST I, q. 34, a. 1, ad 3.

intellectual order, that is, as an idea in abstracted universal immaterial terms.⁵² This abstraction is the "intelligible form," whose origin was that particular apple as perceived by the senses. The origin of the *concept* of the apple, on the other hand, may be said to be the *intellect*! The intelligible form of the apple must be received by the (possible) intellect and expressed as a word. It is at this point that the knower actually knows the apple and can make judgments about it. And the origin of this intelligible form is the (agent) intellect.⁵³ Now, unlike us, God does not turn to anything outside himself for knowledge. He knows creatures through the divine essence, which is the very source of the creatures. For Aquinas, God knows himself, and he knows everything else by knowing himself.

- c. **Aquinas's application of the word analogy to divine generation.** With such distinctions, Thomas can clarify how "in God, 'Word,' if taken properly, can only be applied personally."⁵⁴ His reasoning is as follows. God knows himself by his intellect, and this self-knowledge bears fruit in a concept of the divine intellect. Now, the three persons of the Trinity share the one divine intellect, but the Father alone speaks the Word. The Father speaks his whole self (the divine essence) in a single Word, his Son. The Son, who is the divine essence on account of the Father's perfect speaking, is God's self-knowledge *conceived*. Indeed, all three persons are equally the divine intellect, which is God's self-knowledge. And there is no real distinction

⁵² See *ST I*, q. 85, a. 1, ad 4.

⁵³ Thomas analyzes human knowledge in terms of act and potency, two principles that Aristotle brilliantly introduced in order to account for change in the material world. The intellect is one power, but for the sake of analysis, it is of no small avail to distinguish act and potency in the intellect in the act of knowing. The agent intellect acts (on the phantasm), and the possible intellect is in potency (to the intelligible form that it receives). The possible intellect is reduced to act by the intelligible form. The possible intellect is ready to welcome whatever intelligible form has just been abstracted, as the knower comes into contact with the world. Once this distinction is established, it can be said that the origin of the *word* is the intelligible form rather than the object, on account of the difference between the material and immaterial orders. In this analysis, the object is the origin of the data but not of the word. Such an epistemological description affords us a better analogy of the Trinity, for of course the divine Word has no source outside of God the Father. See *ST I*, q. 54, a. 4, s.c.; *ST I*, q. 76, a. 2, corp.; *ST I*, q. 79, a. 4, corp. and ad 4; *ST I*, q. 84, a. 6, corp.; *ST I*, q. 85, a. 1, ad 3 and 4.

⁵⁴ *De potentia*, q. 9, a. 9, ad 7: "verbum in divinis non potest dici nisi personaliter, si proprie accipiatur." The same is affirmed in *ST I*, q. 34, a. 1 and *In Ioan.* 1:1 (lec. 1, no. 29). See also *ScG I*, ch. 53 (no. 442), *ScG IV*, ch. 11 (no. 3473); *Quodlibet V*, q. 5, a. 2; *De veritate*, q. 4, a. 2.

between what God is and what he knows. But there is a real difference between the speaker and the spoken Word, even when the speaker of the divine self-knowledge speaks a Word that is perfectly identical to him in everything except for the fact that one is the *speaker* and the other is the *proffered conception* of the speaker. Now this can be so only if the fruit of the divine intellect remains immanent to the intellect, as was already indicated in *ST I*, q. 27, a. 1.

A consideration of passages from *ST I*, q. 34, a. 1, supplemented with miscellaneous passages from the *Commentary on John*, the *De potentia* and the *Scriptum* should suffice to illustrate this reasoning. These will exhibit Thomas's understanding of the Word (1) as immanent, (2) as relative, and (3) as proceeding as the fruit of a procession in God.

1. In the treatise on the Trinity of *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas develops his theology of the Son as the Word of the Father in q. 27, a. 2, concerning generation in God, as well as in the first of the two questions on the person of the Son (q. 34). His most extended treatment appears in the first article of q. 34, which examines whether "Word" is a personal name.⁵⁵ There he observes that a concept is by nature immanent: "For the interior word proceeds from the one speaking such that it remains within him."⁵⁶ Thomas thus establishes that this analogy is metaphysically sound for describing a divine person. The word analogy illustrates an immanent procession, which satisfies the conditions for avoiding Arianism and Sabellianism, as outlined in the very first article of the Trinitarian treatise (q. 27, a. 1).
2. *ST I*, q. 34, a. 1 shows furthermore that a word is relational; it signifies "something proceeding from another":

Augustine says in VII *De Trinitate* that "as the Son is referred to the Father, so also is the Word referred to him whose Word he is. . . ."⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Whereas in the question on the person of the Father, Aquinas examines whether "Father" is the proper name of a *divine person*, in this article he ponders whether "Word" is the proper name of *the Son*. The Son had already been established as a divine person since, as he explains in the prologue of q. 34, "the meaning of 'Son' is already considered in the meaning of 'Father,'" who was treated in q. 33.

⁵⁶ *ST I*, q. 34, a. 1, ad 1: "nam verbum interius sic a dicente procedit, quod in ipso manet."

⁵⁷ *ST I*, q. 34, a. 1, s.c.: "Sed contra est quod dicit Augustinus, in VII *de Trin.*: 'Sicut Filius refertur ad Patrem, ita et Verbum ad id cuius est Verbum.'" For Augustine's text, see Augustine of Hippo, *De Trinitate*, bk. 7, ch. 2 (p. 249–250, lines 4–6).

Now, a word is properly said in God insofar as a word signifies a concept of the intellect. Hence Augustine says in XV *De Trinitate* that "whoever can understand a word, not only before it sounds but even before the images of its sounds have been clothed by thought, can already see some likeness of that Word of whom it was said, 'In the beginning was the Word.'" Now, the concept itself of the heart proceeds by nature from another, namely from the knowledge of the one conceiving. Hence insofar as it is said properly of God, a word signifies something proceeding from another—which pertains to the nature of personal terms in God because the divine persons are distinguished according to origin, as was said [in q. 27, Prol. and q. 32, a. 1, s.c.].⁵⁸

So, this interior word, at the same time immanent and relational, provides an analogy for essential unity in personal distinction. Since the interior word, or concept, does not leave a person's mind but remains in him, we have an analogy for the divine Word proceeding from the Father but remaining in the divine nature. And since this word can be distinguished from the intellect itself that conceives it, we have an analogy for the divine Word's distinction by relation from the Father who speaks him.

3. In the replies to the second and third objections of *ST I* q. 34, a. 1, which we will examine shortly, Aquinas articulates more precisely how a procession by way of intellect, which intellect in God is essential and on the side of unity, gives rise to a person, which is relative and on the side of distinction: the Word is the *fruit* of the conceiving intellect, and *not* the act of knowing or the intelligible form. The divine intellect is possessed equally by all three persons, but the Word as the concept in the divine intellect, spoken by the Father, is distinct from the Father (and the Holy Spirit) in the real order. This breakthrough, which first appears in the *Summa contra*

⁵⁸ *ST I*, q. 34, a. 1, corp.: "Dicitur autem proprie verbum in Deo, secundum quod verbum significat conceptum intellectus. Unde Augustinus dicit, in XV *de Trin.*, 'Quisquis potest intelligere verbum, non solum antequam sonet, verum etiam antequam sonorum eius imagines cogitatione involvantur, iam potest videre aliquam Verbi illius similitudinem, de quo dictum est: *In principio erat Verbum.*' Ipse autem conceptus cordis de ratione sua habet quod ab alio procedat, scilicet a notitia concipientis. Unde verbum, secundum quod proprie dicitur in divinis, significat aliquid ab alio procedens: quod pertinet ad rationem nominum personarum in divinis, eo quod personae divinae distinguuntur secundum originem, ut dictum est." In *ST I*, q. 40, a. 2, corp., Thomas clarifies that persons "are better said to be distinguished by relations than by origin." For Augustine's text, see *De Trinitate*, bk. 15, ch. 10 (p. 485, lines 64–73).

Gentiles, is original to Thomas.⁵⁹ Many of Aquinas's contemporaries held that the Word was only a personal name, but none explained why it did not also have to be an essential name, by means of this distinction. Clearly the Word must be personal, as it refers to the person of the Son, spoken by the Father. But since divine knowledge is not proper to any divine person, it would seem that the Word must also be essential. In the *Sentences Commentary* and the *De veritate*, Thomas describes the Word as both personal and essential. At this point, he had not yet sufficiently distinguished a *concept* from the *act of knowing* and from the *intelligible form* of the thing known. In the *Sentences Commentary*, Thomas rejects two positions in favor of the claim that the Word is only to be taken personally, arguing instead that "the concept of the intellect is either the form understood or the operation itself of understanding," both of which are essential. In that case, if the Word were taken only as personal, God's *self-knowledge* would be personal and not essential, so that "it would be necessary that the Father understand *by the Son, formally*"; and thus the Word would be *a principle to the Father*—which is impossible! Instead, he concludes, the Word must be taken "to signify something absolute and something relational simultaneously, such as the word 'knowledge.'"⁶⁰ In other words, as there is essential knowledge and begotten knowledge, so it would seem that there is the essential Word and the begotten Word.

⁵⁹ For a limpid account of Aquinas's original breakthrough in distinguishing *concept* from the *act of knowledge* in order to apply "Word" exclusively to the person and not to the divine essence, see Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 180–85, esp. 182. Cf. Yves Floucat, "L'intellection et son verbe selon saint Thomas d'Aquin," *Revue Thomiste* 97 (1997); Yves Floucat, *L'intime fécondité de l'intelligence: Le verbe mental selon saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Têqui, 2001); and Hyacinthe Pais-sac, *La théologie du Verbe: Saint Augustin et saint Thomas* (Paris: Cerf, 1951).

⁶⁰ I Sent, d. 27, q. 2, a. 2, q1a. 2, corp.: "Conceptio autem intellectus est vel operatio ipsa quae est intelligere, vel species intellecta. . . si non esset ibi nisi verbum personale, quod est Filius, oporteret quod Pater intelligeret Filio, quasi formaliter. . . sed imponitur ad significandum rem aliquam absolutam simul cum respectu, sicut hoc nomen *scientia*." There are two redactions of this article attested in the Mandonnet edition of the *Scriptum*. Footnote 3 on page 659 of this edition does not in fact reflect a variant addition found in some versions, as supposed by the editor. It is the last portion of an older shorter redaction of this article that was replaced by the text that now appears on pages 659–60. The last line of our quotation above comes from the later redaction. The first two lines appear in both redactions. See A. F. Von Gunten, "In principio erat Verbum: Une évolution de saint Thomas en théologie trinitaire," in *Ordo sapientiae et amoris: Hommage au Professeur J.-P. Torrell*, ed. C.-J. Pinto de Oliveira (Fribourg: Éditions universitaires, 1993), 121, n. 7.

The *Summa contra Gentiles* marks an advance in Thomas's thought on this question. In this and later works, Thomas finds a clearer articulation of the distinctions among a concept, the act of knowing and the intelligible form. For instance, at the very beginning of the *Commentary on John*, Aquinas refines his distinction between the word and the intelligible form, which is that *by which* (*quo*) the intellect understands:

The interior word is compared to the intellect not as that by which (*quo*) it understands but as that *in which* (*in quo*) it understands, because the intellect sees the nature of the thing understood *in what is expressed and formed*. That is what we mean by the term "word."⁶¹

In *ST I*, q. 34, a. 1, ad 2, Thomas describes this word as the fruit of the act of the intellect that is not to be taken as the act of the intellect or as one of its habits:

Nothing that pertains to the intellect can be said of God personally, except the Word alone; for only a word signifies something emanating from another. For that which the intellect forms by conceiving, is the word. Now the intellect itself, insofar as it is in act through the intelligible form, is considered absolutely. And similarly, *to understand*, which is to *the intellect in act* as *to be* is to *a being in act*, is considered absolutely. For *to understand* does not signify an action going out of the one understanding but an action remaining within him. Therefore when it is said that *a word is knowledge*, *knowledge* is not taken as the act of the knowing intellect or as one of its habits, but as *that which the intellect conceives by knowing*. Hence also Augustine says that the Word is *begotten Wisdom*, which is nothing other than the concept itself of the One who is wise. And in the same way this concept can even be called *begotten Knowledge*.⁶²

⁶¹ *In Ioan.* 1:1 (lec. 1, no. 25): "verbum interius; et ideo comparatur ad intellectum, non sicut quo intellectus intelligit, sed sicut in quo intelligit; quia in ipso expresso et formato videt naturam rei intellectae. Sic ergo habemus significationem huius nominis *Verbum*."

⁶² *ST I*, q. 34, a. 1, ad 2: "Ad secundum dicendum quod nihil eorum quae ad intellectum pertinent, personaliter dicitur in divinis, nisi solum Verbum: solum enim verbum significat aliquid ab alio emanans. Id enim quod intellectus in concipiendo format, est verbum. Intellectus autem ipse, secundum quod est per speciem intelligibilem in actu, consideratur absolute. Et similiter intelligere, quod ita se habet ad intellectum in actu, sicut esse ad ens in actu: non enim intelligere significat actionem ab intelligente exeuntem, sed in intelligente manentem. Cum ergo dicitur quod verbum est *notitia*, non accipitur *notitia* pro actu intellectus cognoscentis, vel pro aliquo eius habitu: sed pro eo quod intellectus concipit

Here Aquinas distinguishes the intelligible form, the intellect, and the act of understanding from the concept, or word. He notes that as regards what pertains to the intellect in the Trinity, only the Word can be said personally or attributed properly to one person; everything else that pertains to the divine intellect must be taken absolutely, or essentially. Only the Word can be said to come forth from the Father in such a way as to be related to him by an opposed relation. The Son is *personally* the Word of the Father's intellect.⁶³ The Father communicates his essence and his knowledge to the Son through an eternal generation so that the Word is the "doctrine of Father."⁶⁴ The Word is the perfect and complete reflection of the Father within the divine intellect, distinct only by relation of opposition on account of its procession from him. The Word is not simply wisdom or knowledge, which is essential; he is *begotten* Wisdom and *begotten* Knowledge, which are personal.

Now, because the Word is begotten, the Father cannot be said to be wise *by his Word*:

But the Son is called the Wisdom of the Father, because he is Wisdom *from the Father* who is Wisdom. For either of them is of himself Wisdom, and both together are one wisdom. Hence the Father is not wise by the wisdom that he has begotten, but by the wisdom which is his essence.⁶⁵

Thomas's clarification of this point underscores the fact that the Word is personal. God's self-knowledge is essential, but his concept of that self-knowledge is personal—indeed this concept is the person of the Son. When the Father speaks his Word of self-knowledge, we have a notional act, a Trinitarian procession. Now, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are all wise by essential wisdom; the Father is not wise because of the Word but because of himself, namely by his divine essence. But while each

cognoscendo. Unde et Augustinus dicit quod Verbum est *sapientia genita*: quod nihil aliud est quam ipsa conceptio sapientis: quae etiam pari modo *notitia genita* dici potest." For Augustine's text, see Augustine of Hippo, *De Trinitate*, bk. 15, ch. 7 (p. 477, lines 69–70).

⁶³ For example, *In Ioan.* 3:32 (lec. 5, no. 534) and 14:6 (lec. 2, no. 1869); *ST I–II*, q. 93, a. 1, ad 2.

⁶⁴ *In Ioan.* 7:16 (lec. 2, no. 1037): "Si enim intelligatur de Christo Filio Dei, sic cum doctrina uniuscuiusque nihil aliud sit quam verbum eius, Filius autem Dei sit Verbum eius: sequitur ergo quod doctrina Patris sit ipse Filius."

⁶⁵ *ST I*, q. 39, a. 7, ad 2: "Sed Filius dicitur sapientia Patris, quia est sapientia de Patre sapientia: uterque enim per se est sapientia, et simul ambo una sapientia. Unde Pater non est sapiens sapientia quam genuit, sed sapientia quae est sua essentia."

of the three persons is of himself wise, only the Father (who is unbegotten Wisdom) speaks the Word, who is *begotten* Wisdom.

In q. 34, a. 1, ad 3, Thomas extends the insight of ad 2, distinguishing the essential action of *understanding* from the notional action of *speaking*, that *produces a word*. He marks his theological advance here with an explicit reference to Anselm, who overlooked this distinction:

For the Father, by understanding himself, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and all other things contained in this knowledge, conceives the Word, so that thus the whole Trinity, and even every creature, is spoken by the Word—as a man's intellect speaks a stone by the word he conceives in understanding a stone. Indeed Anselm improperly took "to speak" as "to understand," but they are different. For "to understand" implies only the relation of the one understanding to the thing understood, in which *no sense of origin* is implied, but only a certain informing of our intellect—as our intellect is reduced to act by the form of the thing understood. But in God "to understand" implies complete identity, because in God the intellect and the thing understood are altogether the same, as was shown above [q. 14, aa. 4–5]. On the other hand, "to speak" principally implies the relation to the word conceived; for "to speak" is nothing other than uttering a word. But by means of the word, "speaking" implies a relation to the thing understood which is manifested to the one understanding, in the word uttered. And thus in God, only the person who utters the Word is the one speaking, although each person understands and is understood, and consequently is spoken by the Word.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ ST I, q. 34, a. 1, ad 3: "Pater enim, intelligendo se et Filium et Spiritum Sanctum, et omnia alia quae eius scientia continentur, concipit Verbum: ut sic tota Trinitas Verbo dicatur, et etiam omnis creatura; sicut intellectus hominis verbo quod concipit intelligendo lapidem, lapidem dicit. Anselmus vero improprie accepit *dicere* pro *intelligere*. Quae tamen differunt. Nam *intelligere* importat solam habitudinem intelligentis ad rem intellectam; in qua nulla ratio originis importatur, sed solum informatio quaedam in intellectu nostro, prout intellectus noster fit in actu per formam rei intellectae. In Deo autem importat omnimodam identitatem: quia in Deo est omnino idem intellectus et intellectum, ut supra ostensum est. Sed *dicere* importat principaliter habitudinem ad verbum conceptum: nihil enim est aliud *dicere* quam proferre verbum. Sed mediante verbo importat habitudinem ad rem intellectam, quae in verbo prolato manifestatur intelligenti. Et sic sola persona quae profert Verbum, est dicens in divinis: cum tamen singula personarum sit intelligens et intellecta, et per consequens Verbo dicta." For Anselm's text, see Anselm of Canterbury, *Monologion*, ed. Franciscus Salesius Schmitt, Opera Omnia, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. Nelson, 1946), ch. 62 (p. 72).

God understands himself essentially, and this includes an understanding of creation, because it is by knowing himself that God knows everything of which he is the source. In other words, the whole Trinity understands itself (and creation) essentially, and each person of the Trinity understands the whole Trinity (and creation) essentially. Now, this self-knowledge is not only understood but also spoken. God's speaking his knowledge is the Father's speaking his Word. Only the Father speaks the Word. And in the speaking of the Word, the whole Trinity is spoken, because the Father's knowledge is of the whole Trinity. The Word is the concept of the divine essence, of the whole Trinity, spoken only by the Father:

The Father speaks himself and every creature by the Word that he begets, insofar as the Word begotten sufficiently represents the Father and every creature.⁶⁷

Thus, the Son himself is the terminus of this notional act of speaking. And the same applies to the Holy Spirit, whose procession presupposes the speaking of the Word. For Aquinas, the Son is the divine essence as spoken in the Word of knowledge, and the Holy Spirit is the divine essence as breathed forth in the Gift of love.

2. The Generation of the Son

As we have noted above, in the *Summa theologiae*, the article specifically dealing with generation (*ST* I, q. 27, a. 2) elaborates the discussion in terms of the procession of the Word. Issues for which Aquinas does not appeal to the analogy of the Word, such as the Father's will in generation, and generation as a power of the divine essence, appear later in the *Summa theologiae*, in the questions on the relationship of the persons to the notional acts (q. 41). In the *Sentences Commentary*, the *De potentia*, and the *Summa contra Gentiles*, by contrast, these same issues are handled in questions specifically dealing with generation.⁶⁸ To complete our consideration of the Father's generation of a Son, we will examine: (a) Aquinas's definition of generation in *ST* I, q. 27, a. 2, and (b) his treatment of (i) the Father's will in generation and (ii) the Father's communication to the Son of the power to generate.

- a. **Definition of generation.** The Nicene Creed professes Christians' belief in "one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, *eternally begotten*

⁶⁷ *ST* I, q. 37, a. 2, ad 3: "Pater dicit se et omnem creaturam Verbo quod genuit, in quantum Verbum genitum sufficienter repraesentat Patrem et omnem creaturam."

⁶⁸ On the Father's will: *In I Sent.*, d. 6; *ScG* IV, ch. 11 (no. 3477); *De potentia*, q. 2, a. 3; q. 10, a. 2, ad 4 and 5. On the communication of the power to generate: *In I Sent.*, d. 7; *De potentia*, q. 2, a. 2.

(γεννηθέντα) of the Father." Here the Creed recalls Acts 13:33 and Heb 1:5 and 5:5, all of which apply Ps 2:7 to Christ: "You are my Son; today I have begotten you."⁶⁹ In the very first question of the Trinitarian treatise (*ST I*, q. 27), Aquinas considers how "generation" might apply to God. He begins by distinguishing a general definition of begetting from begetting *among living things*:

Generation has a twofold meaning. In one sense, it is common to everything subject to generation and corruption, in which sense generation is nothing but change from non-existence to existence. In another sense it is proper and belongs to living things, in which sense it signifies the origin of a living being from a conjoined living principle; and this is properly called birth.⁷⁰

So, among non-living things, there is corruption and generation but not a communication of the same nature, as for instance, when paper is burned it becomes ash, and when graphite is subjected to extreme pressure and high temperature it becomes diamond. But if a larger stone is simply broken into smaller stones, this is not recognized as a generation. Living beings, by contrast, produce offspring of the same nature. Indeed, anything that a living being produces that is not of the same nature is not called a son, as "a hair does not have the aspect of a son or one begotten, but only what proceeds according to the aspect of a likeness."⁷¹

⁶⁹ Jn 1:14, 1:18, 3:16, 3:18, and 1 Jn 4:9 can be cited as referring to Christ as the "only-begotten" (μονογενή) Son if γενή is interpreted as coming from γεννᾶω (to be born) instead of from γένος (genus), in which case μονογενή is read as "only" Son. In his *Commentary on John*, Aquinas accepts μονογενή as "only-begotten," whereas the more modern versions of the Bible, such as the RSV, translate μονογενή as "only son."

⁷⁰ *ST I*, q. 27, a. 2, corp.: "*generationis dupliciter utimur. Uno modo, communiter ad omnia generabilia et corruptibilia: et sic generatio nihil aliud est quam mutatio de non esse ad esse. Alio modo, proprie in viventibus: et sic generatio significat originem alicuius viventis a principio vivente coniuncto. Et haec proprie dicitur *nativitas*."* In II *In de Anima*, lec. 7 (no. 312), Aquinas refers to this twofold meaning of "generation" without specifying one as common and the other as proper. Reporting on Aristotle's comment that reproduction "is the activity most natural to all living things," Aquinas explains that this is "because in a certain way the process of generation is common to all beings, even to inanimate things." "Of course," continues Aquinas, "the latter are generated differently; still, they are generated." The distinction in Aristotle himself is only vaguely hinted at where he allows that reproduction may not be the most natural activity for things that are "spontaneously generated." See Aristotle, *De anima*, bk. 2, ch. 4 (pp. 84–86, 415a27–b1).

⁷¹ *ST I*, q. 27, a. 2, corp.: "Unde pilus vel capillus non habet rationem geniti et filii, sed solum quod procedit secundum rationem similitudinis."

Thomas then contrasts generation among created living beings *from that in God*: creatures “proceed from potency to the act of life,” while God’s “life does not proceed from potency to act.”⁷² Thus, inanimate creatures are simply generated from nothing into existence, and living creatures are generated from nothing into existence through a parent of the same nature, “a conjoined living principle.” But in God, generation is *only* according to a conjoined living principle. As Thomas observes in *ST I*, q. 33, a. 2, ad 4, which we have examined above in section V, this is the truest generation, and it applies to creatures analogously.

Thomas reaffirms this definition with respect to divine generation in *ST I*, q. 41, mining our common manner of speaking for a theological insight. He observes that we do not describe the relationship between maker and made as “father” and “son”; rather, a son is he who proceeds from his father *by nature*, that is, of the same nature. Thus, concludes Aquinas, God the Son cannot proceed out of nothing; otherwise he would not properly be the Son of God the Father, whose nature it is to be uncreated:

Therefore, if the Son were to proceed from the Father as out of nothing, then he would be related to the Father as a thing made to its maker, which manifestly cannot be named filiation except by a kind of likeness. Hence, it follows that if the Son of God were to proceed from the Father as out of nothing, he would not truly and properly be called the Son.⁷³

Ultimately the more general definition of “generation” that describes inanimate creatures proves inapplicable to God, and Thomas has recourse immediately to the analogy of the Word, for divine generation. Although it might seem obvious today that we must understand divine generation to be immaterial and eternal, this was a real concern of Christian theologians in the earliest centuries of the Church.⁷⁴ For instance, Origen was reluctant to speak of a Son *generated from* the Father’s substance (οὐσία), because of materialist interpretations.⁷⁵ In

⁷² *ST I*, q. 27, a. 2, corp.: “de potentia in actum vitae procedunt. . . . vita non exeat de potentia in actum.”

⁷³ *ST I*, q. 41, a. 3, corp.: “Si ergo Filius procederet a Patre ut de nihilo existens, hoc modo se haberet ad Patrem ut artificiatum ad artificem: quod manifestum est nomen filiationis proprie habere non posse, sed solum secundum aliquam similitudinem. Unde relinquitur quod, si Filius Dei procederet a Patre quasi existens ex nihilo, non esset vere et proprie Filius.”

⁷⁴ Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 186.

⁷⁵ Lewis Ayres, *Nicea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 23–24.

order to be perfectly clear, Thomas affirms that "the Father did not exist before generating the Son"⁷⁶ and that "the action by which the Father produces the Son is not successive."⁷⁷ Rather, "the Son is always being begotten, and the Father is always begetting."⁷⁸ And when the Son is said to be born *of* the Father, "the preposition 'of' signifies a consubstantial generating principle, and not a material principle."⁷⁹ Revising slightly the words of the Council of Ephesus, Thomas makes specific reference to the contribution of the term "Son" for indicating identity of nature and the term "Word" for securing immateriality:⁸⁰

To show that he is of the same nature as the Father, he is called the Son; to show that he is coeternal, he is called Splendor; to show that he is altogether similar, he is called the Image; to show that he is begotten immaterially, he is called the Word.⁸¹

⁷⁶ ST I, q. 36, a. 3, ad 3: "unde non prius fuit Pater quam gigneret Filium." In *In Ioan.* 1:2 (lec. 1, no. 61), Aquinas observes, as Origen had, that the Father was never without his Word—although Martin Sabathé, "La Trinité rédemptrice: Processions et missions trinitaires dans le Commentaire de l'évangile selon saint Jean par saint Thomas d'Aquin" (Diss., University of Fribourg, 2009), 213, note 598, explains that this passage will be struck from the Leonine Commission's critical edition since it appears in only one manuscript.

⁷⁷ ST I, q. 42, a. 2, corp.: "Et iterum, quod actio qua Pater producit Filium, non est successiva."

⁷⁸ ST I, q. 42, a. 2, ad 3: "Unde Filius semper generatur, et Pater semper generat."

⁷⁹ ST I, q. 41, a. 3, ad 1: "Ad primum ergo dicendum quod, cum Filius dicitur natus *de Patre*, haec praepositio *de* significat principium generans consubstantiale; non autem principium materiale."

⁸⁰ Here Thomas adds the name "Image" and substitutes "immaterial" for "impassible" concerning the Word. In ST I, q. 42, a. 2, ad 1, Aquinas quotes a Christmas sermon of Theodotus, bishop of Ancyra (d.c. 445), that was read at the Council of Ephesus. See Theodotus, *Homilia II in die Nativitatis Domini*, PG, vol. 77 (Paris: Vrayet, 1864), col. 1376–77. See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, Questions 33–43*, ed. Thomas Gilby, trans. T. C. O'Brien, 60 vols., vol. 7 (London: Blackfriars with Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1976), 194, note 7. But, note 7 bears a typographical error: Theodotus's homily appears in the fifth and not the sixth volume of Theodotus, *Eiusdem homilia altera lecta in Synodo G.L.*, ed. Giovanni Domenico Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima Collectio*, vol. 5 (Paris: H. Welter, 1901), 210. J. Weisheipl notes that Thomas was the first medieval author to cite the first five ecumenical councils verbatim. See James A. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought and Works* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974), 164–65. See also Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 103.

⁸¹ ST I, q. 34, a. 2, ad 3: "Nam ut ostendatur connaturalis Patri, dicitur *Filius*; ut ostendatur coaeternus, dicitur *splendor*; ut ostendatur omnino similis, dicitur *imago*; ut ostendatur immaterialiter genitus, dicitur *Verbum*." Also *In Ioan.* 1:1 (lec. 1, no. 42): "Ut enim ostendatur connaturalis Patri, dicitur Filius; ut ostendatur in

From our consideration of the Word above (section V.B.1), it should be clear that Aquinas is not content to accept the analogy of the Word merely as a supporting model to help interpret the generation of a consubstantial Son. For Aquinas, the procession of the Word is the generation referred to in the Creed. Since a generation in God must indicate an *origin from a conjoined living principle*, Aquinas demonstrates that the Word has an origin from a conjoined living principle:⁸²

Therefore, the procession of the Word in God has the nature of a generation. For he proceeds by way of an intelligible action—which is an activity of a living being—and from a conjoined principle, as was already said above [in a. 1]; and he proceeds under the aspect of a likeness—because the concept of the intellect is a likeness of the thing understood—and as existing in the same nature, because in God to know and to be are the same, as was shown above [in q. 3, a. 4 and q. 14, a. 4]. Hence the procession of the Word in God is called a generation and the Word himself proceeding is called a Son.⁸³

It is by means of the *speaking of the Word* that Aquinas intends to show what the generation of the Son in God is.

- b. **The concomitant will and the communication of the power to generate.** We now examine two questions concerning the Son's generation that are not addressed in the word analogy: (i) the Father's concomitant willing to give birth to the Son, and (ii) the Father's communication of the power to beget to this Son who is begotten.
 - i. *The Father's concomitant will in generation.* In Thomas's discussion of the Father's will in the Son's generation, he steers between two poles that must be rejected. On one hand, the Son is generated *by nature*, not by the Father's will; on the other hand, the Father does not beget by necessity. At stake is the Son's equality with the Father, on one hand, and the Father's freedom from coercion, on

nullo dissimilis, dicitur imago; ut ostendatur coaeternus, dicitur splendor; ut ostendatur immaterialiter genitus, dicitur Verbum.”

⁸² A more abbreviated form of the same argument appears in *ST I*, q. 34, a. 2, corp. and *In Ioan.* 1:1 (lec. 1, no. 29).

⁸³ *ST I*, q. 27, a. 2, corp: “Sic igitur processio verbi in divinis habet rationem generationis. Procedit enim per modum intelligibilis actionis, quae est operatio vitae: et a principio coniuncto, ut supra iam dictum est: et secundum rationem similitudinis, quia conceptio intellectus est similitudo rei intellectae: et in eadem natura existens, quia in Deo idem est intelligere et esse, ut supra ostensum est. Unde processio verbi in divinis dicitur generatio, et ipsum verbum procedens dicitur Filius.”

the other. Thomas demonstrates that the Son's generation does not depend on the Father's willing it; rather, the Father begets the Son by nature. In other words, it is *God's nature* to be a Trinity. Here we must look all the way back past creation to a divine action that is not freely willed. There is no reason to be sought to explain generation as if it were the Father's choice. He generates because he is the Father; that is simply the way God is. In the *Summa theologiae*, Thomas repeats the straightforward presentation he makes in the *Sentences Commentary* concerning this question.⁸⁴ In *ST I*, q. 41, a. 2, he distinguishes willing as *desiring* and willing as *causing*. The Father indeed *desires* the Son to be generated, but he does not *cause* the Son to be generated. In other words, the Father does not generate the Son by choice, but neither is he forced to do so.

If the Father had begotten the Son by will, the Son would be a creature; this was Arius's erroneous claim:

When something is said to be *by will*, or to come about by will, it can be understood in two senses. [1] In one way, it can be understood as the ablative ["*by will*" (*voluntate*)] designates only concomitance, as I can say that I am a man *by my will* because I will to be a man. And in this way it can be said that the Father begot the Son by will: as he is God by will because he wills to be God, so also he wills to beget the Son. [2] In another way, it can be understood that the ablative implies the relation of a principle, as it is said that the craftsman works by will, because will is the principle of his work. And according to this sense, it must be said that God the Father did not beget the Son by will but produced creatures by will. . . . And therefore the Arians, wishing to establish that the Son was a creature, said that the Father begot the Son by will, insofar as *will designates a principle*. But we must assert that the Father begot the Son not by will but by nature.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ See *I Sent.*, d. 6, q. 1, aa. 1 and 2. Although he uses "necessary absolutely" (*necessarium absolute*) and "conditionally" (*ex conditione*) in a. 1 in the *Sentences Commentary* and "necessary of itself" (*necessarium per se*) and "by reason of another" (*per aliud*), respectively, in the *Summa theologiae* (*ST I*, q. 41, a. 2, ad 5), Thomas's argument is the same.

⁸⁵ *ST I*, q. 41, a. 2, corp.: "Respondeo dicendum quod, cum dicitur aliquid esse vel fieri voluntate, dupliciter potest intelligi. Uno modo, ut ablativus designet concomitantiam tantum: sicut possum dicere quod *ego sum homo mea voluntate*, quia scilicet volo me esse hominem. Et hoc modo potest dici quod Pater genuit Filium voluntate, sicut et est voluntate Deus: quia vult se esse Deum, et vult se generare Filium. Alio modo sic, quod ablativus importet habitudinem principii: sicut dicitur quod *artifex operatur voluntate*, quia voluntas est principium operis. Et secundum hunc modum, dicendum est quod Deus Pater non genuit Filium voluntate; sed

In the *Summa theologiae* and the *Sentences Commentary*, Aquinas describes the will *in desiring* as being *concomitant* with an existing reality and the will *in causing* as being the *principle of an action*. Thus, the Father generates the Son by will only in the sense of concomitance.⁸⁶ That is, the Father wills the Son in the same way that the Father wills to be God. It is not because he wills it that he is God, nor does he first discover that he is God before willing it. He simply is God by nature and has always willed this pleasing truth concomitantly.

In the *De potentia*, the Common Doctor adds more precisely that “the generation of the Son can be related to the will as the will’s object, for the Father wills both the Son and the Son’s generation from all eternity.”⁸⁷ That is, the Father loves the Son with essential love, as the object of the concomitant divine will, when he gives birth to him through the notional action of generation. The *De potentia*, which is more developed than the *Summa theologiae* in its consideration of the concomitant will, describes nature as the principle of generation and spiration.⁸⁸ Thus, the notional acts are acts of nature, whereas creation is an act of the will. Even so, God wills the notional acts concomitantly. The divine will is not a principle of generation or spiration, but generation and spiration are still *objects* of the divine will, willed concomitantly. Aquinas distinguishes here between the will as a principle and the will as a faculty with respect to its object.

Now, the fact that the Father wills generation only concomitantly does not mean that he begets the Son by necessity. In other

voluntate produxit creaturam. . . . Et ideo Ariani, volentes ad hoc deducere quod Filius sit creatura, dixerunt quod Pater genuit Filium voluntate, secundum quod voluntas designat principium. Nobis autem dicendum est quod Pater genuit Filium non voluntate, sed natura.”

⁸⁶ The Angelic Doctor refers to the distinctions among the concomitant will, the agreeing or consequent will, and the antecedent will that theologians of his time commonly observed (*ST I*, q. 19, a. 6, ad 1; *De potentia*, q. 2, a. 3, ad 2; *In I Sent.*, d. 6, q. 1, a. 2, corp.). He specifies that the agreeing will and the antecedent will are not in God, because anything God ever wills he has willed from eternity. The concomitant will, on the other hand, is said only according to the relation to the will’s object, and thus it is in God with respect to the generation of the Son.

⁸⁷ *De potentia*, q. 2, a. 3, corp.: “Dicendum, quod generatio Filii potest se habere ad voluntatem ut voluntatis obiectum: Pater enim et Filium voluit et Filii generationem ab aeterno.” *The Scriptum* (*In I Sent.*, d. 6, q. 1, a. 2, corp.) too speaks of the Son as the object of the divine concomitant will.

⁸⁸ *De potentia*, q. 2, a. 2.

words, the Father is not in any way coerced to generate or in need of generating in order to achieve some other purpose:

Something is said to be necessary either of itself or by reason of another. Something is necessary by reason of another in two ways: in one way, as by an efficient and coercive cause, and thus *necessary* describes that which is violent; in another way, as by a final cause, as when something is said to be necessary as the means to an end, insofar as without it the end could not be attained or at least not well attained. But divine generation is necessary in neither of these ways, because God is not the means to an end, nor is he subject to coercion. Now, something is said to be necessary of itself that cannot *not be*. And it is *necessary* for God to be thus. And in this way it is necessary for the Father to beget the Son.⁸⁹

So, it is necessary that the Father beget the Son in that God necessarily is what he is, but not as if the Father is subject to some superior external principle. The concomitant will also explain how, while the Father's love for the Son is not the cause of the Son's goodness, neither is the Son's goodness presupposed to the Father's love: the Father's love for the Son is simultaneous and concomitant with the Son's goodness. In the *Commentary on John*, Aquinas contrasts divine love with love among creatures, for whom the Father's will is the cause of goodness and for whom goodness is presupposed to love.⁹⁰

- ii. *Communication of the power to generate.* Aquinas deals with the question of the communication to the Son of the power to beget, in the *Summa theologiae*, the *De potentia*, and the *Scriptum*. Although he does show development in his understanding of generation by the time of the writing of the *Summa theologiae*, Thomas had already determined the problem and the outlines of his solution in the *Commentary on the Sentences*. The discussion revolves around the question whether the power to generate is essential or

⁸⁹ ST I, q. 41, a. 2, ad 5: "Ad quantum dicendum quod necessarium dicitur aliquid *per se*, et *per aliud*. Per aliud quidem dupliciter. Uno modo, sicut per causam agentem et cogentem: et sic necessarium dicitur quod est violentum. Alio modo, sicut per causam finalem: sicut dicitur aliquid esse necessarium in his quae sunt ad finem, inquantum sine hoc non potest esse finis, vel bene esse. Et neutro istorum modorum divina generatio est necessaria: quia Deus non est propter finem, neque coactio cadit in ipsum. *Per se* autem dicitur aliquid necessarium, quod non potest non esse. Et sic Deum esse est necessarium. Et hoc modo Patrem generare Filium est necessarium."

⁹⁰ In Ioan. 5:20 (lec. 3, no. 753).

personal. If it is essential, then it must be possessed by the Son, who possesses the divine essence perfectly. If it is personal, then it belongs to the Father's incommunicable paternity. Now, there are difficulties that accompany either position. If the power to generate is essential and is possessed fully by the Son, then it seems that the Son himself should generate a Son. On the other hand, if this notional power is personal and is not possessed by the Son, then there would seem to be a difference in power between the Father and the Son. The Dominican master settles the matter by determining that the power to generate is *principally essential* and *indirectly personal*. He affirms that this power is given to the Son, and he espouses Albert's distinction between power (of the essence) and act (of a person) in order to explain how the Son can possess this power and not generate a Son of his own.⁹¹ This solution is already indicated by Lombard, who articulates the distinction in terms of property rather than act.⁹² Thomas explicitly rejects Bonaventure's position that the power to beget is strictly relative. In this section, after (1) considering the subtle evolution of Aquinas's view concerning the power to beget, we will (2) briefly review Bonaventure's position and Aquinas's critique of it before (3) moving on to Aquinas's argument that the power to beget is principally essential.

1. *An evolution in Aquinas's view of notional power.* In God there is no real distinction between power, person, and act; God simply is his act and his power:

Generation is not something in between the Father and Son *in the real order*, since generation taken passively in the real order is filiation itself . . . ; and taken actively it is paternity itself, which is in the Father and is the Father himself.⁹³

But there is a *logical* distinction between the power of begetting and the act of begetting, just as there is a logical distinction between essence and notional act.

⁹¹ Albert, *In I Sent.*, d. 7, a. 10: "The power is one under the aspect of a *natural* power, but it is not one under the aspect of a power to act."

⁹² Lombard, *I Sent.*, d. 7, ch. 6: "For the Son has fully *the same power* as the Father, by which the Father can generate and the Son can be generated. . . . But if you say that the Father can have one property or notion by which he is genitor and the Son a *different* property by which he is generated, then it is true."

⁹³ *In I Sent.*, d. 4, q. 1, a. 1, ad 4: "generatio realiter non est aliquid medium inter Patrem et Filium, cum generatio secundum rem passive accepta sit ipsa filiatio . . . ; accepta vero active est ipsa paternitas quae est in Patre et est ipse Pater."

Here again, the theologian's task is to distinguish according to the mode of signification. Aquinas explains that, on one hand, the power of generation is not absolute, as are the essential attributes, because "if the persons are mentally abstracted, the power of generation does not remain," whereas the essential attributes like will and intellect would remain.⁹⁴ On the other hand, "the power to generate is *not relational* except under the aspect of being joined to the act."⁹⁵ The *Commentary on the Sentences* describes the power of generation as being between essence and operation, between the essential and the personal, and between the absolute and the relative.⁹⁶ Although the *De potentia* suggests in one objection that the power of generation is between essence and operation, the *Summa theologiae* does not offer this description.⁹⁷ In the *Summa theologiae*, Thomas concludes that this notional power signifies the *essence principally* and *relation indirectly*. In comparison to the *Sentences Commentary*, the *De potentia* and the *Summa theologiae* reflect a gradual shift in Thomas's view of the power of generation. Emmanuel Perrier documents the de-emphasis of *notional power* as a topic of discussion from the *Sentences Commentary* to the *Summa theologiae*; the emphasis shifts toward "act" and away from "power."⁹⁸ In the *De potentia*, Thomas more frequently refers to the "act of generation" than to the "power of generation."⁹⁹ The *Sentences Commentary* speaks of this notional power as the divine essence *insofar as it is a productive capacity* "between essence and operation," but the *De potentia* and the *Summa theologiae* refer to it as the essence *insofar as it is a principle of operation*. In the *Sentences Commentary*, there is much more attention devoted to the power to generate simply *as a power*; in ruling out any passion in God, Thomas associates divine power with divine impassibility, going so far as to suggest that divine power is not prejudiced by act but is above it: "divine power is in no way passive, nor even truly

⁹⁴ *In I Sent.*, d. 7, q. 1, a. 2, ad 1: "[potentia generandi] non remanet, subtractis personis."

⁹⁵ *In I Sent.*, d. 7, q. 1, a. 3, ad 2: "potentia generandi non est ad aliquid nisi ex parte illa qua conjungitur actui."

⁹⁶ *In I Sent.*, d. 7, q. 1, a. 1 and 3; d. 7, q. 1, a. 2; d. 7, q. 1, a. 2, ad 3, respectively.

⁹⁷ *De potentia*, q. 2, a. 4, obj. 10.

⁹⁸ Emmanuel Perrier, *La fécondité en Dieu: La puissance notionnelle dans la Trinité selon saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2009), 12. My analysis here follows the conclusions of Perrier's thorough and careful exposition; see Perrier, 12, 23–24, 27–28, 58, 89, 93–94.

⁹⁹ Perrier, *La fécondité en Dieu*, 58.

active, but above act.”¹⁰⁰ In the *De potentia*, although Aquinas repeats that divine power is “neither passive nor properly active,” the power to generate is associated very clearly with the principle of operation:¹⁰¹

Therefore, if the common nature is the principle of some operation that belongs only to the Father, the common nature must be a principle insofar as it belongs to the personal property of the Father. And on account of this, in a certain way, *paternity is included in the meaning of the power [of generation]*, even as far as it is the principle of generation. And on account of this, we must affirm with the others that the power of generation signifies essence and notion at the same time.¹⁰²

As Thomas’s reflection on the person of the Father deepens, he becomes increasingly sensitive to the danger that an emphasis on generation simply as a power might lead one to view the essence as a pre-relational fontal plenitude that comes to fruition in the persons.¹⁰³ Thus, although divine *power* must be said to be principally on the side of *essence*, Aquinas makes clear that the power *to generate* is not the essence taken as some pre-paternal productive capacity.

¹⁰⁰ *In I Sent.*, d. 7, q. 1, a. 1, ad 3: “potentia divina nullo modo passiva est, nec etiam vere activa; sed superactum.”

¹⁰¹ *De potentia*, q. 2, a. 1, ad 1.

¹⁰² *De potentia*, q. 2, a. 2, corp: “Et ideo oportet quod si natura communis sit principium alicuius operationis quae solum Patri convenit, oportet quod sit principium, secundum quod competit proprietati personali Patri. Et propter hoc in ratione potentiae includitur quodammodo paternitas, etiam quantum ad id quod est generationis principium. Et propter hoc cum aliis dicendum est, quod potentia generandi simul essentiam et notionem significat.” We find the same idea affirmed in the *De 108 articulis*, q. 21: “if [the divine essence] is understood to be the principle of the notional acts as *that by which*, then it concurs with the words of the Master in *I Sent.*, d. 7, where he says that the power to generate is the divine essence” (si intelligatur essentia esse principium huiusmodi actuum ut generans vel spirans; sed si intelligatur esse principium actuum notionalium ut quo, consonat dictis magistri, in VII dist. Primi Lib., ubi dicit, quod potentia generandi est divina essentia). For Lombard’s text, see Peter Lombard, *Sententiae in IV libris distinctae*, ed. Fathers of St. Bonaventure College, 3d ed., Specilegium Bonaventurianum, vol. 1–2 (Rome: St. Bonaventure College, 1971–1981), bk. 1, d. 7, ch. 2 (p. 93, line 22).

¹⁰³ Aquinas is sometimes accused of proposing such an “essentialism” by treating the divine essence before the persons in the *Summa theologiae*. For a definitive rejection of this mistaken interpretation, see Gilles Emery, “Essentialism or Personalism in the Treatise on God in Saint Thomas Aquinas?,” *The Thomist* 64 (2000).

2. *Bonaventure on notional action.* Aquinas's subtle shift in articulation concerning notional power in God is markedly anti-Bonaventurian. According to his hierarchical understanding, Bonaventure holds that the Father does not communicate to the Son the power to generate. Although he accepts that *divine power* is in the divine essence, which of course is in the Son, Bonaventure asserts that the *power to generate* is a personal reality, belonging properly to the person of the Father. This accords with his understanding of the Father as a fontal plenitude, distinguished as a hypostasis even without reference to the Son. While Bonaventure recognizes the plausibility of the position that the power to generate is essential and only exercised distinctly by distinct persons, he settles in favor of the position that the generative power is a *personal power*.¹⁰⁴ Bonaventure thus distinguishes the *power to create*, which he recognizes as an essential power, from the *power to generate*, which he maintains is personal.¹⁰⁵

Now, Bonaventure would agree with Thomas's assertion that "the divine essence is not more the Father's than the Son's."¹⁰⁶ As to what concerns the divine essence, Bonaventure affirms the perfect equality of the three persons; he clearly holds that all of the persons are one numerically same divine essence. But he maintains that the persons are *related* in a hierarchy.¹⁰⁷ Bonaventure is thus faced with a more strained explanation of the relationship between the (hierarchical) personal properties and the (equally shared) essence, whereby power must be divided into personal power (to generate and to spirate) and essential power (knowing, loving, creating, etc.). This demands an explanation of what gives rise to the distinction of a "personal power." In Thomas's view, only opposed relations (such as Father to Son) can account for

¹⁰⁴ Bonaventure, *I Sent.*, d. 7, a. un., q. 1, sol., tert. opin. (p. 136, col. 1): "There was thirdly the position of the more modern theologians who said that of itself the power of giving birth expresses relation in God. And the reason for this is that power expresses the relation of the original principle to the principled. . . . This position is the more probable." See Emery, *La Trinité Créatrice*, 185.

¹⁰⁵ Bonaventure, *I Sent.*, d. 20, a. 1, q. 1, sol. opp. 1 and 3 (p. 369, col. 2).

¹⁰⁶ *ST I*, q. 42, a. 1, ad 3: "essentia divina non magis est Patris quam Filii."

¹⁰⁷ Through the application of appropriation, Bonaventure will even associate a different order of angels with each of the divine persons (highest to the Father, middle to the Son, lowest to the Holy Spirit). Bougerol observes that with this "dangerous move" Bonaventure has strayed far from the thought of Dionysius. Jacques Guy Bougerol, "S. Bonaventure et la Hiérarchie dionysienne," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 36 (1969): 145.

real distinction in the Trinity, and relative opposition does not distinguish *power*; all power that the Father possesses is communicated to the Son. Furthermore, relative opposition can account for distinction only by order of origin and not by order of hierarchy. Thomas's doctrine of relations defends the equality of the Son not only as co-possessor of the essence but specifically as he is related to the Father. That is, distinction by relation alone accounts for how the one who receives everything in generation is equal to the one who gives everything in generation but himself receives nothing from anyone. The Son possesses the power of generation as *one who is generated* and not as one who generates.¹⁰⁸

At first glance, the evolution in Aquinas's thought regarding notional action might seem to move him closer to Bonaventure's position. That is, by describing generation less as simply a productive capacity and more as the principle of operation, Aquinas associates power more closely with the property of the person who acts: "in a certain way, paternity is included in the meaning of the power [of generation]." ¹⁰⁹ And this is to move notional power more toward the relative and thus toward Bonaventure's position, which is that notional power is strictly relative and not essential. But a closer examination reveals a sharpening of Thomas's position against Bonaventure's. For Aquinas, (1) innascibility is a pure negation, (2) the Father is constituted by his paternity, and (3) the divine person is a subsisting relation, whereas for Bonaventure, (1) innascibility signifies primacy positively and (2) constitutes the Father's hypostasis in a certain way, and (3) relation manifests but does not constitute the divine hypostasis. Because of this foundational difference, Aquinas's closer association of notional power to operation in fact develops a more certain rejection of the position, held by Bonaventure, that the Father possesses the power to generate and the Son does not. Aquinas's subtle shift in emphasis toward the relative rules out even more decisively the idea of a pre-paternal productive capacity in God, whereby the Father, constituted as a hypostasis by his innascibility irrespective of the Son, would alone possess the notional power of generation.

3. *The power to beget is principally essential.* In *ST* I, q. 41, Thomas argues from basic metaphysical definitions to the conclusion

¹⁰⁸ *ST* I, q. 42, q. 6, ad 3.

¹⁰⁹ *De potentia*, q. 2, a. 2, corp: "in ratione potentiae includitur quodammodo paternitas."

that the power of begetting must signify the essence *principally*. He begins with a clarification of terms concerning how an agent is said to act:

Some have said that the power to beget signifies a relation in God. But this cannot be. For in any agent, that by which the agent acts is properly called a "power."¹¹⁰

Thomas continues the argument with the observation that between the begetter and the begotten, there must be a likeness in form:

Now, everything that produces something by its action, produces something similar to itself with respect to the form by which it acts, as a man begotten is similar in human nature to the one begetting, by virtue of which a father can beget a man. Therefore in anything that begets, it is the begetting power in the begetter that makes the begotten like the begetter.¹¹¹

Thus, since what makes the Son like the Father is the divine essence and not the relation of paternity, which is incommunicable, that by which the Father begets the Son *must be the essence* and not the relation of paternity. Consequently the power of begetting is said to signify *principally* the essence and not, as Bonaventure suggested, the property of paternity:

Therefore it ought to be said that the power of begetting signifies principally the divine essence, as the Master says in I Sent., d. 7, [ch. 2], and not relation only. . . . Hence neither can paternity be understood as that by which the Father begets, but as constituting the person begetting: *otherwise the Father would beget a Father*. Now that by which the Father begets is the divine nature, in which the Son is like him. And

¹¹⁰ ST I, q. 41, a. 5, corp.: "quidam dixerunt quod potentia generandi significat relationem in divinis. Sed hoc esse non potest. Nam illud proprie dicitur potentia in quocumque agente, quo agens agit." Aquinas has Bonaventure especially in mind as one of the Parisian doctors identified here as "some." See Bonaventure, I Sent., d. 7, a. un., q. 1. William of Auxerre, on the other hand, allows that the power to beget is in the Son insofar as it is taken as an impersonal gerundive (*gerundivum verbi impersonalis*). See William of Auxerre, *Summa Aurea*, ed. Jean Ribailier, Spicilegium Bonaventurianum, vol. 16 (Grottaferrata: St. Bonaventure College, 1980), bk. 1, tract. 8, ch. 3 (p. 130).

¹¹¹ ST I, q. 41, a. 5, corp.: "Omne autem producens aliquid per suam actionem, producit sibi simile quantum ad formam qua agit: sicut homo genitus est similis generanti in natura humana, cuius virtute pater potest generare hominem. Illud ergo est potentia generativa in aliquo generante, in quo genitum similatur generanti." Cf. ST I, q. 41, a. 4, corp.

for this reason Damascene [in *De Fide Orthodoxa*, bk. 1, ch. 8] says that begetting is the work of the divine nature, not as if the divine nature is the one begetting but as the divine nature is that by which the one begetting begets. Therefore the power of begetting signifies *the divine nature directly and relation indirectly*.¹¹²

Since an agent acts by its power, and in a true generation the agent-begetter begets a son of like nature with the same power as the agent-begetter, if the Father were to generate *by his paternity*, then he would beget another Father! If the generation is perfect, then the one generated must possess completely *that by which* he is generated. Otherwise, we would be impelled to agree with the Arians that the Father begets a Son imperfectly, that is, one who does not have the same power as the Father. The only way to account for both the incommunicability of paternity and the Father's perfect full self-communication to the Son is to recognize that paternity is distinguished from filiation only *as a relation of origin*. The power possessed by the Son is the same power possessed by the Father; they possess the very same essence. Thomas advances this particular argument only in the *Summa theologiae*.¹¹³ Appealing to authorities as diverse as Lombard and Damascene, Thomas makes the case that the traditions of the East and the West stand together on this point.

¹¹² ST I, q. 41, a. 5, corp.: "Sic igitur dicendum est quod potentia generandi principaliter significat divinam essentiam, ut Magister dicit, VII dist. I Sent.; non autem tantum relationem. . . . Unde neque paternitas potest intelligi ut quo Pater generat, sed ut constituens personam generantis: alioquin Pater generaret Patrem. Sed id quo Pater generat, est natura divina, in qua sibi Filius assimilatur. Et secundum hoc Damascenus dicit quod generatio est *opus naturae*, non sicut generantis, sed sicut eius quo generans generat. Et ideo potentia generandi significat in recto naturam divinam, sed in obliquo relationem." For Damascene's text, see John Damascene, *Expositio Fidei*, ed. Bonifatius Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. 2 = *Patristische Texte und Studien*, Vol. 12 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1973), bk. 1, ch. 8 (p. 21, lines 67–68).

¹¹³ The same is stated in the *De Concordantiis Suiipsius*, also known as the *Concordantiae* "Pertransibunt Plurimi," which though attributed to Thomas is of doubtful authenticity: "Hence a personal property [like paternity] cannot be the principle by which something is produced because its likeness is not made, since it is incommunicable." Thomas hints at this argument, in *In Ioan.* 16:15 (lec. 4, no. 2114), where he notes that *that by which* the Father gives and *that which* the Father gives to the Son are the same in the real order; but he does not draw any conclusions concerning the communication of paternity. Gilles Emery, "La procession du Saint-Esprit a Filio chez saint Thomas d'Aquin," *Revue Thomiste* 96 (1996): 567–68, treats this question with respect to the Holy Spirit.

Having established that the power of begetting signifies the essence (principally), Thomas appeals to the Trinitarian order without priority to explain how the Son possesses the power to beget. Since all three persons share the same divine essence, all share the same power, but each in the way that is proper to him. The essence is in the Father as generation and in the Son as nativity. Thus, the terms for what is common and for what is proper must be sorted out according to the mode of signification:

As the same essence that is paternity in the Father is filiation in the Son, so is the power by which the Father begets the same as that by which the Son is begotten. Hence it is manifest that whatever the Father can do, the Son can do. Nevertheless it does not follow that he can beget, barring substance being changed into relation; for generation signifies a relation in God. Therefore, the Son has the same omnipotence as the Father but with another relation, because the Father has it as the one giving; and this is signified when it is said that he can beget. But the Son has it as the one receiving; and this is signified when it is said that he can be begotten.¹¹⁴

Here Aquinas distinguishes generation, "which signifies a relation in God,"¹¹⁵ from the power to generate, which "signifies the divine nature directly and relation indirectly."¹¹⁶ This explains how the Father and the Son can have one same essence and power despite the fact that the Father generates the Son but the Son does not generate the Father.

Now, it might seem odd to describe omnipotence as the power *to receive* the divine essence or *to be begotten*. Thomas anticipates this difficulty in q. 41, a. 1. There he explains that the assertion that the Son is begotten implies *no passivity in the Son*;

¹¹⁴ *ST I*, q. 42, a. 6, ad 3: "Ad tertium dicendum quod, sicut eadem essentia quae in Patre est paternitas, in Filio est filiatio; ita eadem est potentia qua Pater generat, et qua Filius generatur. Unde manifestum est quod quicquid potest Pater, potest Filius. Non tamen sequitur quod possit generare: sed mutatur *quid* in *ad aliquid*, nam generatio significat relationem in divinis. Habet ergo Filius eandem omnipotentiam quam Pater, sed cum alia relatione. Quia Pater habet eam *ut dans*: et hoc significatur, cum dicitur quod potest generare. Filius autem habet eam ut accipiens, et hoc significatur, cum dicitur quod potest generari." Thomas repeats this argument in q. 41, a. 6, ad 1 and in q. 42, a. 4, ad 2. He offers a foreshadowing hint of the argument in *ST I*, q. 41, a. 5, ad 3.

¹¹⁵ *In I Sent.*, d. 20, q. 1, a. 1, ad 1 and 4; *De potentia*, q. 2, a. 5, ad 8; *ST I*, q. 42, a. 6, ad 3. We should recall that origin is signified by way of action, such as "generation," but relation by way of form, such as "paternity" (*ST I*, q. 40, a. 2, corp.).

¹¹⁶ *ST I*, q. 41, a. 5, corp.

rather, our grammar is not sufficient for describing the Son's nativity except in the passive voice. Instead of concluding that such an assertion implies that the Son is somehow less than the Father, we should instead recognize that the problem lies in our limited ability to lay bare the Trinitarian mystery in human language. The weakness should be ascribed to us and our mode of signification, not to God the Son:

Action, insofar as it implies origin of motion, necessarily involves passion; and action is not thus attributed to the divine persons. Hence passions are not attributed here except grammatically, as far as the mode of signification—as we attribute “to beget” to the Father and “to be begotten” to the Son.¹¹⁷

Thomas's clear account of the analogous character of human speech allows him to develop a theology that is respectful of both the limitations of human language as well as its power to assert the truth that has been revealed to us.

Conclusion

In *ST I*, q. 33, a. 2, Aquinas considers whether the name “Father” is properly the name of any divine person. Explaining that the Father is uniquely identified by the name “Father” because his person is distinguished and constituted by his paternity, Aquinas concludes that “Father” is the most proper name for this divine person—better, for instance, than the “Innascible” or the “Genitor” or the “Spirator.” “Father” is the most perfect name since paternity signifies the completion and the complement of the generation of the Son. The Angelic Doctor determines as well that the Father is the prime analogate of fatherhood, in which all other fathers share to a lesser degree. For that reason, the name “Father” applies more properly to God than to creatures. That is, perfect paternity expressed in perfect generation, in which the Father's being is perfectly communicated to the Son, best fulfills the definitions of paternity and generation.

In the replies to the four objections of this article, Aquinas purifies our earthly understanding concerning four terms, “relation,” “father,” “word” and “generation,” in order to show how they can apply to God. Regarding the first of these terms, Thomas shows that although relations among creatures are merely accidental, the Father *is* the relation of fatherhood as

¹¹⁷ *ST I*, q. 41, a. 1, ad 3: “Ad tertium dicendum quod actio, secundum quod importat originem motus, infert ex se passionem: sic autem non ponitur actio in divinis personis. Unde non ponuntur ibi passiones, nisi solum grammaticae loquendo, quantum ad modum significandi; sicut Patri attribuimus generare, et Filio generari.”

subsisting. "Father" is a relational name. He *is* this relation. With respect to the second term, Aquinas establishes that "Father" is the most fitting name for the person who gives birth to the Son, because this name best expresses the perfectly complete generation that takes place only in God.

As concerns "word," Thomas refashions Augustine's analogy of the word to exploit the analogy of a human word so as to lay hold of the mystery of the Trinity, insofar as possible. The Common Doctor deploys the procession of the Word in order to illustrate what the birth of the Son in God is. A comparison of the *Scriptum* to the *Summa theologiae* reveals a gentle gravitation away from a double image of (1) generation as the communication of the divine nature and (2) the procession of the Word as a likeness in the divine intellect, toward the procession of the Word as the best analogy for grasping divine generation. Since the procession of a word is immanent and gives rise to a distinction of opposed relation alone, the analogy of the word does not bear the physical and temporal connotations that birth does. For that reason, it proves superior in helping us to conceive of divine generation in some small measure. Indeed, in the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas opines that the analogy of the word is the best means we have for grasping the procession of the Word in God.

There is also an evolution in Aquinas's thought as he comes to articulate the divine persons more clearly as *the fruit* of the notional processions. In the *Scriptum*, Aquinas takes the Word as both essential and relative. In the *Summa theologiae*, he distinguishes the Father's (essential) understanding from his (notional) speaking, which signifies the procession of the Word. The Father speaks his whole self (and all creatures) in his Word, which is his perfect reflection, distinct from him only by opposed relation.

As regards "generation," Aquinas purifies examples found among creatures in order to formulate a definition that can apply to God. In a true generation, a son must be of the same nature as his father, who must be "a conjoined living principle"; in divine generation, the perfect communication of the divine nature results in a distinction between the begetter and begotten of opposed relations only. Aquinas's growing preference for the analogy of the Word does not mean that he simply abandons the description of the Son's procession as a birth. In particular, there are two questions regarding generation for which Aquinas does not appeal to the word analogy. The first of these concerns the Father's will in generation. Thomas affirms that the Father's will is concomitant in generation. The divine will cannot be the principle of the action of generation, for then the Son would be a freely willed creature. The generation of the Son must rather be understood as necessary; the Son cannot *not be* and could *not not have been*. This necessity does not, however, imply that the Father

acts under any kind of coercion. The Father wills to generate as he wills to be God. The Father is not forced to generate the Son, but he does not freely choose to beget him either. He concomitantly desires the Son's generation; generation is the object of the concomitant will.

The second issue that does not lend itself to being explicated by the analogy of the word is the communication to the Son of the power to beget. On this point, we witness a subtle shift in Aquinas's thought from regarding the power to beget as a *productive capacity* in the *Scriptum* to viewing it as *the principle of action* in the *Summa theologiae*. This shift sharpens the articulation of Aquinas's rejection of the idea of a pre-paternal productive capacity in God, such as the conception of the Father as an innascible fontal plenitude. Aquinas settles on the opinion that notional power signifies the divine essence *directly* and relation *indirectly*. This resolution explains how the Son can have all the power that the Father has but not generate a Son of his own: the Son receives the whole divine essence with all its power, but he receives it according to his proper relation of filiation. So, the Son possesses the power of generation as *the one receiving*. That is, in the Son, this notional power is the power *to be begotten*. Despite our inability to express it with an active verb, it is *an action*. The divine essence, and not the relation of paternity, must be *that by which* the Father begets. Otherwise, since in a perfect generation all of the Father's power is communicated to the Son, if he were to beget *by his paternity*, he would beget another Father! But the power to beget does signify relation indirectly, as in a certain way paternity is included in the power to beget—because the essence *as the principle of active generation* belongs to the Father alone.

The two major theological observations Thomas makes in *ST I*, q. 33, a. 2 are that the name "Father" is not only metaphorically but *properly* attributed by us to this divine person and that the name "Father" applies first of all to this divine person and only by analogy to creatures. In this second article of the question in the *Summa theologiae* devoted to the person of the Father in the Holy Trinity, Aquinas's treatment is undertaken via an examination of the name "Father," which has been given to us by Christ in Sacred Scripture. N V