

The Thomist and the Palamite: Reflections on *The Trinity: On the Nature and Mystery of the One God**

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It scarcely needs repeating that Fr. Thomas Joseph White's book is a monumental achievement. It is a splendid and paradigmatic instance of Thomistic *ressourcement*, amply showing the power of Aquinas's thought and work to animate, shape, and inspire Christian reflection on the past, present, and future of Trinitarian theology. While not conceived as a theology "on one's knees" (6), it is certainly a work oriented on the divine wisdom. Aquinas began all of his major works with the theme of wisdom and this salutary practice is emulated by Fr. Thomas Joseph in his introduction, which nicely sets up wisdom as something of a master theme of the whole volume (even though the word "wisdom," oddly, does not appear in the index). The book is a deeply revealing account of Christian Trinitarian theology through the ages. It is profoundly helpful on the question of analogy in general and the "psychological analogy" in particular. It also contains some bracing and, I think, largely merited critique of figures such as Karl Barth and Karl Rahner, on the one hand, and Hans Urs von Balthasar and Jürgen Moltmann on the other. I also found the writing not unlike that of Aquinas—limpid, painstakingly reasoned, clearly structured, and disciplined albeit with occasional notes of delicious exuberance and the odd slightly mischievous aside. It is also, of course, a huge tome—even

* Fr. Thomas Joseph White, O.P., *The Trinity: On the Nature and Mystery of the One God* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2022); citations of this volume will be made by page numbers in parentheses in main text. Unless otherwise accredited in citations, English translations are my own.

a kind of *summa* in itself. I would say it was un-put-down-able were it not for its considerable weight. All in all, and speaking as a mere outsider to the Catholic Thomist tradition, I would say it is a worthy tribute to the Angelic Doctor himself.

The book is of course a capital-C Catholic and specifically Thomist account of the Trinity. Even so, I was a little taken aback to see Thomas, along with various modern interlocutors, take up well over five hundred pages, and the first two thousand years of biblical, patristic, and early medieval reflection on the nature and mystery of God reduced to a mere 130 pages or so. The twelve pages bridging the eight hundred years between Augustine and Aquinas were particularly disorienting in their rapid pace. It seems to me—and I shall explain why later—a good deal of highly significant Trinitarian theology is lost sight of in the process. It can, at times, read like a bit of a theological juggernaut or perhaps the hurtling *troika* at the end of Nikolai Gogol's *Dead Souls* with alternative viewpoints swatted away and other ecclesial traditions scattering before the relentless perfection and implacable progress of the Thomist machine. That said, I do want to recognize the author's expressed desire to pursue Thomistic ressourcement with "collegiality" and ecumenical sensitivity (7). While he does indeed swat away many alternative viewpoints, he does try to give those "vibrant" viewpoints their due and, in general, gives far more credence to non-Catholic writers than would have been conceivable in a Thomist work written, say, a century ago. From the Orthodox standpoint, this includes some brief discussion of Sergius Bulgakov and John Zizioulas, along with occasional references to figures such as Vladimir Lossky, Dumitru Stăniloae, and John Meyendorff. Perhaps more significantly, his patristic references expressly include some of the Greek Fathers, notably the Cappadocian Fathers—although I shall query what he means by "the Cappadocian Fathers" later in this essay. St. Maximus the Confessor receives some attention, and even later Roman (commonly if inaccurately called Byzantine) theologians such as St. Gregory of Cyprus and St. Gregory Palamas get a look-in. This appeal to the Greek patristic tradition is made, I suspect, with something of an eye on the Orthodox. As Aquinas himself recommended, when speaking with "the Greeks," one must argue not only from Latin but also from Greek patristic sources. There are, nonetheless, many important elements and insights from the Eastern Christian tradition that are simply left out and one is left wishing that the reflection on Greek patristic and modern Orthodox sources had been much expanded—for the book, in other words, to be a little more universal, a little more lowercase-c catholic.

In what follows, I shall begin with a point-by-point discussion before

turning to a more substantive argument concerning a significant trajectory in patristic Trinitarian theology that I find to have been entirely overlooked in this book. I will then conclude with a very brief comment of the very question of “Trinitarian ontology” (rightly given a question mark in the title given to the colloquium in Rome devoted to this book: “Trinitarian Ontology? An Ecumenical Issue”).

Let me begin with a theme I have already mentioned: wisdom. The introduction distinguishes three ascending forms of wisdom corresponding to philosophy, theology, and the supernatural gift of infused wisdom. What we do not find here, although it does crop up elsewhere, is the idea of God as himself as wisdom. Infused wisdom is presented, after Aquinas, as above all affective, “as a connatural knowledge born of affective love” (3). Happily, and unlike many of his contemporaries, Aquinas resisted the temptation to disassociate wisdom from knowledge (*sapientia* from *scientia*)—and Fr. Thomas Joseph follows him in this respect.¹ But there is a nonetheless in Western Scholasticism, including the Thomist tradition, an undeniable tendency to juxtapose and contrast, if not separate, the intellective-cognitive and affective-mystical aspects of approach to God. This is a tendency that the Orthodox tradition has, I suggest, been comparatively free from. One result of this bifurcation is a functional downgrading of mystical experience as a potentially normative source of theological reflection, and indeed dogmatic formulation. I was, for example, astonished to read: “Mystical union with God, however exalted, is not a substitute for genuine philosophical or theological understanding” (4). I could not help but recall the starkly different claim expressed by Lossky in the introduction to his *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*: “Far from being mutually opposed, theology and mysticism support and complete each other. One is impossible without the other.”² While Fr. Thomas Joseph is surely right to warn against taking any and all claims of mystical experience at face value, it is, for this Orthodox theologian at any rate, shocking to see scholarly theologians elevated above the mystics, the latter serving as mere “reference points” for the former (4). While mystical experience must certainly be received within and weighed against the overarching scriptural, theological, liturgical, and ascetic inheritance of the Church, it seems very odd to me to deny that those who experience direct union with God are anything but the highest, truest, and most “genuine” of theologians.

¹ See the discussion of this point in my *Wisdom in Christian Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 215–21.

² Vladimir Lossky, *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1957), 8.

All this comes as part of a distinctly Thomistic commitment to Catholic Christianity, which is commended as “the living practice of natural reasoning about God” (45). As such, Catholic Christianity is seen to offer the best antidote to the *acedia* of the modern, liberal, secular sphere and the best answer for the highest yearnings of the human being. Catholic Christianity is furthermore declared (31) to be of all religions “the most reasonable and the most mystical, that is to say, the religion that is the most compelling for human rationality, and at the same time presents us with a truth about God as Trinity that wholly surpasses the natural powers and acquisitions of human rationality.” “Mystical” here pertains chiefly to the revealed character of knowledge of God as Trinity, a knowledge that will always surpass our ability to comprehend or express. What we do not find here, however, is any developed theology of mystical union or deification, or any treatment of the *nous* or spiritual intellect—that supra-rational faculty in man capable of direct and unmediated apprehension of God. These are all themes beloved of the Greek Fathers and certainly also to be found in the Latin tradition. I wonder what Thomas himself might have said about this functional downplaying of mystical union given his own experience of mystical encounter. As reported by Reginald of Piperno, his companion and author of the earliest *Life* of Thomas, on the December 6, 1273, Aquinas had a vision at the conclusion of Mass for the feast St. Nicholas that led to his abandoning of the *Summa theologiae* project and his recognition that all his labored work of rational enquiry was as “straw” (or “chaff”; *paleae*) compared with what he had seen.³ Is it really true, then, that “mystical union with God, however exalted, is not a substitute for genuine philosophical or theological understanding”?

One may also note that the book pays relatively little attention to Thomas’s historical context, ascetic background, or liturgical compositions. It is also very restrained in its use of his scriptural commentary and makes no use, so far as I can see, of his *Catena aurea*. I mention the *Catena aurea* because it is something of a showcase for Thomas’s own immersion in the Greek patristic tradition from the early 1260s onwards.⁴ This increasing immersion, which I have elsewhere called his “Greek patristic turn,” goes, I

³ There are, of course, many different ways this vision can be taken. For a good, if somewhat deflationary, example, see Marjorie O’Rourke Boyle, “Chaff: Thomas Aquinas’s Repudiation of His *Opera omnia*,” *New Literary History* 28, no. 2 (1997): 383–99.

⁴ Cf. my *Orthodox Readings of Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 17–20, and now Jane Sloan Peters, “Greek Patristic and Byzantine Exegesis in the Works of Thomas Aquinas” (PhD diss., Marquette University, 2022).

think, much deeper than this book allows.⁵ Take, for example, the treatment of the Transfiguration. This is briskly dealt with in a few sentences being summed up as follows: “Jesus is illumined from within, by the miraculous glorification of his body and soul, so as to indicate proleptically the future mystery of the resurrection” (75). This comment looks rather thin compared to what Thomas himself says on the topic, leaning especially on St John of Damascus’s *Homily on the Transfiguration*. The Damascene is the leading authority on the Transfiguration cited in the *Catena on Luke* and is also behind much of what Thomas says on the topic in question 45 of the third part of the *Summa theologiae* (not long before he abandoned the whole project). The light of Thabor, Thomas asserts on the authority of the Damascene, “derived from his divinity” and even “overflowed from his divinity into the body” (*ST* III, q. 45, a. 2). He supplements John’s emphasis on the divine character of the light of the Transfiguration with a reference from Augustine in a different context concerning the outpouring of light from the glory of the soul at the resurrection. He does not, in my reading, fully reconcile the two accounts. And while tolerating a certain level of paradox here, he clearly takes the Transfiguration as far more than a *prolepsis* of the resurrection glory of the saints emphasizing rather the revelation of the godhead in the effulgence of divine light. Little of this comes through in the book’s rather brief account (which does not even reference Thomas on this point). This gives rise to a more general query: is the Thomas of this book a little too neat? On the question of the Transfiguration, Thomas is more expansive, more broadly patristic, and less tidy than he is generally presented. One might even suggest that his “Greek patristic turn” contributed in some way to his shattering mystical experience at the end of 1273. Any suggestion of that kind would, of course, be rank heresy for most modern Thomists.

One cannot, naturally, move too far in the area of Trinitarian theology without encountering the problem of the *Filioque*. I must pay tribute to the many helpful clarifications this book provides as to the nature of the teaching and the question of its place on the Creed. The book preserves something of St. Augustine’s sense of the procession of the Holy Spirit *principaliter*—“as to principle”—from the Father (whom the author calls the “fontal principle” of the Trinity). It also emphasizes that the addition should be understood more in liturgical terms than as an act of raw papal authority over and against that of an ecumenical council. There is much here, in other words, that allays

⁵ For this and what follows, see further my “Thomas Aquinas and John of Damascus on the Light of the Transfiguration: Can we speak of a Greek Patristic turn in Thomas?” in *Thomas Aquinas and the Greek Fathers* ed. Michael Dauphinais, Andrew Hofer, and Roger Nutt (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2019), 206–20.

some of the cruder Orthodox charges against the *Filioque* even if it remains utterly uncompromising in its commitment to the doctrine of double procession “as if from one principle.” That said, I was a little surprised to find that St. John the Evangelist clearly teaches the doctrine and that the Cappadocians’ stance on the question remains simply moot. This perspective leans heavily on the principle that temporal missions necessarily reflect eternal processions. This is not, by the way, Rahner’s “The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and *vice versa*”—White does a great job in dismantling that particular old chestnut. But it remains problematic to put so much stress on temporal missions given that the Holy Spirit in some sense “sends” the Son at the Annunciation, “coming upon” and “overshadowing” Mary so that “the one born of her shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). Surely this particular mission has some bearing on Trinitarian theology—but I did not see it so much as referenced in the book.

Staying with the *Filioque*, and here in support of some of the book’s outreach to the Christian East, White rightly associates St. Gregory Palamas with St. Gregory of Cyprus in terms on the eternal “manifestation” or “shining-forth” of the Spirit through the Son articulated at the Council of Blachernae in 1285 as part of its repudiation of the reunion Council of Lyons in 1274 (499–500). This is indeed far from the rigid monopatrism (that is, procession from the Father *alone*) of St. Photius of Constantinople. But Palamas’s contribution is hardly limited to the formulations of Blachernae.⁶ In chapter 36 of his *150 chapters*, he likens the Holy Spirit to “an ineffable love” of the Begetter towards the Begotten.⁷ The affinity to St. Augustine is tangible here and indeed we know that Palamas had access to Augustine’s *De Trinitate* in Greek translation. The Son, writes Palamas, “possesses this love as co-proceeding from the Father and himself and as resting connaturally in him.” Thus the Holy Spirit is not only “of the Father” but also “of the Son.” This does not, he is careful to emphasize, detract in any way from the fact that the Spirit “proceeds from the Father alone according to his existence.” To do so, as he explains in the anti-Latin *Apodictic Treatises*, would be to make a single hypostasis of Father and Son. But we can nonetheless, he affirms, speak of the Spirit’s being from the Father through the Son or from the Father and the Son in terms of the eternal divine life and not only in terms of the economy. By virtue of the consubstantiality of Father and Son, the Spirit may even be said to be “naturally from the Son and from his

⁶ Palamas’s contributions on this score are discussed in my *Orthodox Readings of Aquinas*, 36–39.

⁷ St. Gregory Palamas, *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, ed. R. Sinkewicz (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1988).

essence,” manifesting thereby the Spirit’s own consubstantiality with the Father and the Son.⁸ All this amounts to what I have called an “Orthodox *Filioque*” that might constructively be brought into dialogue with Fr Thomas Joseph’s presentation of the *Filioque* question. In that presentation, Thomas is proposed as a kind of “conceptual bridge” (485) between Greek East and Latin West in the matter of the *Filioque*. I suggest Palamas might also serve in that same function.

Let us turn to the early Church—to what Fr. Thomas Joseph at one point (11) calls, somewhat to my surprise, “the early Catholic Church” (with a capital C). Here I want to query the consistent rendition of the Nicene formula ὁμοούσιον τῷ Πατρὶ as “one in being” with the Father rather than the more literal and accurate “same in essence.” While no one can say precisely what the Fathers at Nicaea intended by the term—save perhaps that they knew Arius and his supporters could not accept it—the prefix ὁμο- denotes without question not oneness but sameness.⁹ Sameness is not the same as oneness and its use with the dative τῷ Πατρὶ (to or with the Father) emphasizes in the first instance not so much the oneness of divine being as the Son’s relation to the person of the Father as the sole fount and causal principle of the godhead. All this is very delicate, but important to dwell on here, since the book routinely uses the form “one in being” in a very particular sense to convey not only oneness of nature or essence but also oneness of individual being—something more clearly implied in the Latin *substantia* than in the Greek *ousia* (the Latin *substantia* being etymologically equivalent to the Greek *hypostasis*).¹⁰ While this may well be an accurate reflection of Thomas’s teaching, “one in individual being” certainly should not be taken as an accurate gloss of the credal term itself. The fact that the Council of Chalcedon in the following century uses ὁμοούσιος of the Son in relation to us humans according to his humanity further undermines the association of the term in its credal setting with oneness of individual being.

There is so much more that could be said about multiple aspects of this tremendous book. I found that White keeps the oneness and threeness of God in wonderful simultaneity and much appreciated the spirited defense of divine impassibility. I also found the treatment of various modern theologies

⁸ St. Gregory Palamas, *Apodictic Treatise* 2.67, in vol. 1 of Γρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμᾶ συγγράμματα (critical edition of entire Palamite corpus), ed. P. Chrestou (Thessalonica, 1962), 138–39.

⁹ And while the term came to be most commonly rendered in Latin as *consubstantialis*, the older form “*eiusdemque substantiae qua Pater est*” arguably reflects the Greek better.

¹⁰ For examples, see White, *Trinity*, 111, 112, 129, 148, 177, 380, and 385.

in the wake of Kant quite compelling. Fr. Thomas Joseph brilliantly exposes the flaws in Barth and Rahner, and in Balthasar and Moltmann. Many of these flaws are alleged to derive from the medieval period, with the Franciscans John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham singled out as particularly problematic forebears. Taking their cue from Hegel, history somehow becomes constitutive of God in these modern thinkers, none of whom is able to escape fully from Kant's effective prohibition of properly Trinitarian thinking. The notion of "inverted monophysitism" in this context is a particularly striking contribution. Only the psychological analogy (of knowledge and love), on Fr. Thomas Joseph's account, offers a tangible and trustworthy way of breaking through the Kantian impasse. It is his contention that the Thomist solution, and especially the psychological analogy, is the only real way out of this impasse and that this solution has not really been tried in the modern context. But is the psychological analogy really all we have to go on? Are there other ways of talking about God in his eternal divine life that might prove even more effective than the Thomist solution?

Here I turn back to the Cappadocian Fathers. The term "Cappadocian Fathers" as a way of grouping Ss. Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa is a late usage going back only as far as the nineteenth century. Much more ancient in Orthodox practice is the grouping of St. Basil, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, and St. John Chrysostom as the "Three Holy Hierarchs." The West of course adds St. Athanasius in its own list of the Four Great Greek Doctors of the Church. St. Gregory of Nyssa—the great saint of modern systematic theology—is missing. But my main point here is that, when Fr. Thomas Joseph speaks of the "Cappadocian Fathers," he invariably means St. Gregory of Nazianzus, whom he once describes on a particular point as more "agreeable" than St. Gregory of Nyssa (148). There is of course nothing wrong with honoring St. Gregory of Nazianzus—he is, after all, hailed by the Christian East as "the Theologian." It is even refreshing to see Gregory the Theologian getting the lion's share of attention when so much of the focus in modern theology has been on Gregory of Nyssa. But it *is* problematic to focus on the Theologian in a way that elides some of the significant differences that exist in the Cappadocian Fathers' approaches to the mystery of God. Here I advert in particular to the notions of divine simplicity and divine unknowability.

In their reaction to Eunomius, who claimed a degree of certain knowledge of the divine, all three Cappadocians were led to emphasize the utter unknowability of the divine essence (*ousia*). In Basil and Gregory of Nyssa—but not so obviously in the Theologian—this radical apophaticism was balanced by a sense of the partial knowability of divine attributes or "glories

pertaining to the essence” (wisdom, power, goodness, etc.). The essence is to be distinguished from the three hypostases or persons to whom the essence is common and in whom the glories pertaining to the essence are manifest. As Basil puts it in his Letter 236:

The Only-Begotten is the image of the invisible God, and image not of bodily form, but of the very divinity and of the glories pertaining to the essence of God an image of power, an image of wisdom, as Christ is called “the power of God and the wisdom of God.”¹¹

Basil here maintains that God remains unknown in his essence while making himself known in the “glories that pertain to the essence”—most notably his power and his wisdom. God reveals himself in these various “glories” for good reason: “No one name suffices to denote all the glories of God at the same time nor can any name be used without danger.”¹²

In Letter 234 Basil insists that to know God in his various attributes is in no way to exhaust the divine mystery:

We say that we know the glory of God, his power, his wisdom, his goodness, his providence over us, and the justness of his judgment; but not his very essence; . . . he who denies that he knows the essence does not confess himself to be ignorant of God, because our conception of God is gathered from the many [appellations] which I have enumerated.¹³

God remains unknowable in essence even as he makes himself known in the “glories pertaining to the essence.” Basil goes on to affirm that to know God in such attributes does not undermine divine simplicity. The attributes are not to be understood as names of the essence. They are distinct from the essence, and the fact that they make known the essence of God in various ways does not make God in any way multiple. God reveals himself in his operations while remaining perfectly simple. As he continues in Letter 234:

¹¹ *Saint Basile: Lettres*, ed. Yves Courtonne, vol. 3 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1966), 48. This section re-works material from my *Wisdom in Christian Tradition*, 140–51; translations from Basil’s letters are adapted from that of Blomfield Jackson in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd ser., vol. 8, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1895.)

¹² St. Basil, *On Faith* (PG, 31:684AB).

¹³ *Saint Basile: Lettres*, 3:42.

The energies are various, and the essence simple, but we say that we know our God from his energies, but do not undertake to approach near to his essence. His energies come down to us, but his essence remains beyond our reach.¹⁴

We find a very similar set of formulations in St Gregory of Nyssa. The divine attributes make known both the unity and distinction of Father, Son, and Spirit: “One goodness, wisdom, justice, providence, power, incorruptibility—all other attributes of exalted meaning are similarly predicated of each [Person] and each [Person] has in a certain sense his strength in the other.”¹⁵ It is through contemplations of such divine attributes that we gain a notion of God, but this is a notion of his wisdom, goodness, and so forth and not of his essence, which remains utterly hidden to us: “For God who is by nature invisible is visible in his energies, being perceived in the attributes that pertain to him.”¹⁶ Gregory makes the same point in *To Ablabius. On Not Three Gods*—all fitting terms make known not the divine essence itself but some aspect of that which pertains to it.¹⁷

Such formulations are not an obvious feature of St. Gregory Nazianzen’s work. He does make use of some form of essence–energies framework on occasion, claiming that we do not know the essence of God but do know something of him from his operations.¹⁸ In such cases, however, I think Gregory is most likely speaking of created effects and not uncreated attributes pertaining to or “around” the essence. In any event, my chief point is that, in focusing so much on St. Gregory of Nazianzus, Fr. Thomas Joseph misses this highly significant distinction between the essence and the “glories pertaining to the essence” that is a key feature of the Cappadocian *brothers’* Trinitarian theology.

This distinction between the unnamable, unknowable, and ineffable essence and the at-least partly nameable, knowable, and “effable” (or expressible) attributes or “glories pertaining to the essence” sets up a highly significant trajectory within the Greek patristic tradition. Without, for the sake of time, going into all the details, I suggest this basic distinction lies behind Dionysius the Areopagite’s “beneficent processions,” St. Maximus

¹⁴ *Saint Basile: Lettres*, 3:42.

¹⁵ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 3.5.47 (*Gregorii Nysseni Opera* [GNO], 2:177).

¹⁶ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Beatitudes* 6 (GNO, 7/1:141).

¹⁷ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *To Ablabius* (GNO, 3/1: 43).

¹⁸ See, for example, Oration 28 (*Second Theological Oration*), no. 3 (*Sources Chrétiennes*, 250:106): we do not presume to speak of the first nature but have some inkling of God from his glory manifested among the creatures.

the Confessor's higher and more exalted *logoi*, and St. Gregory Palamas's famous—or, perhaps in a Dominican context, infamous—divine energies. While these teachings are by no means identical in all respects, they all maintain a clear distinction between the utterly unnamable and unknowable divine essence (or *ὑπερούσια*, as it is often called) and the various glories or processions or *logoi* or energies by which God makes himself known in the realest possible way, incorporating human beings into the very divine life. This distinction, I must emphasize, is in no way a derogation of the divine simplicity any more than is the distinction between the divine persons. On the contrary, the distinction is presented in these theologians as a necessary feature of Trinitarian theology in which union always goes hand in hand with distinction. Such “union in distinction and distinction in union,” as Dionysius puts it, is rightly seen as a necessary underpinning of the doctrine of mystical union or deification.¹⁹

Let us turn to Palamas here as we move towards a conclusion. “The divinity,” insists Palamas, “is one and simple and undivided and does not abandon the divine simplicity on account of the pious distinction according to the activities.”²⁰ But simplicity itself—and here he draws on Gregory of Nazianzus—is to be acknowledged as among the attributes or energies of God, since the essence remains utterly unnamable. Indeed, God is simplicity itself: “He alone is not only perfectly simple *but simplicity itself*. This is also evident when one examines all the divine names, for he is not only living and wise and good but goodness and wisdom and life.”²¹ None of these names, Palamas insists are properly names of the essence, but of the attributes—what the Cappadocian brothers call the “glories pertaining to the essence.” They nonetheless reveal something of the Trinitarian nature of God in that the energies are always and inescapably a Trinitarian operation. Indeed, the energies give us a grammar of Trinitarian revelation. The energies are not impersonal emanations, but come from the Father through the Son and are made known in the Spirit. To quote from *Apodictic Treatises*: “The Spirit eternally flows forth from the Father into the Son and becomes manifest in

¹⁹ See Dionysius, *Divine Names* 2.4 (*Patristiche Texte und Studien*, 33:127).

²⁰ St. Gregory Palamas, *Dialogue of an Orthodox with a Barlaamite* 17, in vol. 2 of Γρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμᾶ συγγράμματα, ed. P. Chrestou (Thessalonica, 1966), 179. A more extensive account of Gregory's teaching on this score (on which this section is based) may be found in my “Divine Simplicity in St Gregory Palamas,” *Modern Theology* 35, no. 3 (2019): 508–21.

²¹ St. Gregory Palamas, *Dialogue* 55 (Γρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμᾶ συγγράμματα, 2:216–17; emphasis mine).

the saints from the Father through the Son.”²² The energies are, to repeat, always Trinitarian in character. To quote from a slightly later work:

[The Trinitarian persons] not only possess mutually the superessential essence which is entirely unnameable, unrevealed, and incommunicable (for it is above every name, manifestation and participation), but the grace, the power, the operation, the brightness, the kingdom, the incorruption, and to put it simply, all the means by which God communicates, and by which, according to grace, he is united with the holy angels and humans; without being deprived of his simplicity either as a result of the divisibility and distinction of the hypostases or as a result of the divisibility and multiplicity of the powers and operations.²³

This is of course a very different path from that followed by Augustine and, after him, Aquinas, whose understanding of divine simplicity demands that God be identical with his attributes and that the attributes be identical with one another. Doubtless the two approaches are formally incompatible. But, as I say, this alternative patristic trajectory of divine simplicity (largely missed in this book) gives us a robust basis on which to speak about God as both one and three—not only on the basis of the psychological analogy, but on the arguably rather firmer basis of God’s own self-revelation to the saints, to the mystics, and to all of us.

Does this amount to a “Trinitarian ontology”? Strictly speaking, the answer must be “no”—there can be no logos, no discourse, about the being of God qua essence. We can speak about God only on the basis of the Trinitarian self-disclosure qua energy (or attributes, actualizations, operations, etc.). But I do not want to end on a negative note. It seems to me that Fr. Thomas Joseph White’s rigorous patristic-Thomist presentation of Trinitarian theology based on Aquinas can serve as an ally to the patristic-Palamite tradition I have sketched very briefly today. We both have serious qualms about the trajectory of much modern theology, and indeed of the modern world more generally. I do not want to say that we are pre-modern, and indeed the book shows admirably how fresh and timely Thomism can be in the contemporary theological scene. Perhaps we are best described as “un-modern,” for all that

²² St. Gregory of Palamas, *Apodictic Treatises* 2.58 (Γρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμᾶ συγγράμματα, 1:131).

²³ St. Gregory of Palamas, *Confession of 1351* (PG, 151: 763D–768C; trans. adapted from A. Papadakis, “Gregory Palamas at the Council of Blachernae, 1351,” *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 10 [1969]: 333–42).

we wish to engage the modern world closely. But whatever we might call ourselves, I believe patristic-Palamites and patristic-Thomists have a great deal to gain from working together as devotees of a shared biblical and patristic tradition. 