

Thomas Aquinas and Georg Hegel on the Trinity

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By

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INTRODUCTION

The Trinity is reconciliation in itself, for it is affirmation, negation and negation of negation. To know that God is three is to know that otherness is in God himself, and that it is overcome there. This truth is the absolute truth in itself and for itself. It does not constitute a mystery, for ‘what is directed towards rationality is not a mystery for it; it is a mystery only for the senses and their way of looking at things.’¹ All the activity and content of philosophy consists in knowing that God is the Trinity. We saw it earlier in the system, particularly the Logic, where this notion of the absolute Idea, of the God One-and-Three, was elaborated without express reference to religion. From all this we cannot conclude, except with much caution, that any philosophy, at any time, could have reached this conception. Philosophy is reflection on experience. And Hegel knows very well that the notion of a Trinitarian God is born of the experience of Christianity.² But for him the experience is not contingent. As with reflection, it is the work of Reason, the manifestation of Spirit in history. Each philosophy, as each religion, comes in its time. The privilege of Hegel is to have been born at the moment when absolute religion had reached maturity and to have been able from then on to reflect on human experience in its totality. Also, in his eyes, the affirmation of the Trinitarian God is neither a “theological” affirmation (in the sense of St. Thomas) nor a thesis of “Christian philosophy” (improperly rational, because inspired by faith), but it stems directly from the philosophical order, and the task of showing the truth of it belongs to philosophy.³

This passage from the late Professor Van Riet’s regrettably neglected and courageous study of 1965 or earlier (it was first presented in Latin at a conference of Thomistic philosophers and theologians at Rome in the 1950’s) suitably opens our theme and illustrates our purpose here. He might seem to be presenting an account of the differences in presuppositions of Hegel and of St. Thomas here. Without prejudice to Van Riet’s other more general affirmation that “In Saint Thomas there seem to be two partial, complementary systems” one can ask whether Hegel and Saint Thomas are

¹ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. III, p. 17; cf. SW, t. 16, p.233.

² *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 99, - SW, t. 16, p. 308.

³ Georges van Riet, “The Problem of God in Hegel”, Parts II-III: *Philosophy Today*, Vol. XI, Number 2/4, Summer 1967, pp. 75-105 (81). French original in *Revue Philosophique de Louvain*, Vol. 63, August 1965. Pp. 353-418 (i.e. incl. Part I).

not in close agreement nonetheless regarding this to many astonishing affirmation that the Trinitarian affirmation concerning God “stems directly from the philosophical order”, not least because “the task of showing the truth of it belongs to philosophy”.

Thus it is conceded that “Hegel knows very well that the notion of a Trinitarian God is born of the experience of Christianity”. But once born in this way it is up to philosophy alone to either demonstrate it or give reasons for not finding it demonstrable. We find in St. Thomas, it is true, repeated statements that the Trinity or some other doctrines are above or beyond “natural” or human reason. But how clear is this statement? Does it mean that we could never have found it out without the life and work of Jesus Christ and our assimilation of it? Hegel surely agrees with that. Or does Saint Thomas mean that the Trinity remains in itself an impenetrable mystery? I would submit that his treatise precisely on the Trinity, from the *Summa theologiae*, proves that he does not mean that, leaving us with the view defended by Hegel.

The difference here is rather that Saint Thomas is writing as a confessional theologian and just in that capacity he tends to content himself with showing the reasonableness of the doctrine, rather than with anything one might call proof. Hegel, however, arrives at the same position but from the opposite end. We can see this if we study his (posthumous) *Lectures on the Proofs of the Existence of God*, in an unfinished state though they be. Here he takes distance, for the reasons he supplies, from the idea as such of proof of God. Naturally this includes proof of the Trinity. But he does this by an appeal to the greater certainty of God in himself, as upholding the whole of his own system, “science”, of Logic mainly.

One may appreciate the force of this consideration better by considering how it is upheld a few pages on in Van Riet’s text, where one gets the very feel of *The Science of Logic* and related Hegelian texts.

The absolute truth, we have seen, is that God is Trinity, or again that the God-man died and rose again. To be acquainted with this truth is to conform it to oneself, to unite it to the self-consciousness is to perceive that “*in this truth, the relation of man to this truth is also posited*”⁴. In a word, it is to discover that not only God’s essence, but also man’s essence is to be spirit, reconciliation of contraries. On one side man is nature, finiteness, mortality; on another he is a going beyond nature, an aspiring to infinity and to eternal life. He is a being divided, contradictory, who endlessly negates himself, who never is what he is; from this interior contradiction come the sorrow and unhappiness of his conscience. In the “Kingdom of the Spirit” man finally

⁴ Cf. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, tr. J. Sibree, p.324.

understands that this contradiction is constitutive of his very being, and that it can be overcome (*aufgehoben*). He does not have to resign himself to it, as if it (contradiction) found its origin in an irreducible dualism (of being and nothingness, of good and evil). He does not have to wait for it to be lifted by another (as in Judaism) or in another life (as in the Platonic conception of heavenly beatitude). *It can be reconciled without being suppressed*, for it clings to the very essence of reality. True being is identity with oneself in difference. It is spirit. God himself includes finiteness, death, and surpasses them. Man is God's image, God's son, reconciliation. He knows that not only the history of Jesus, but also his own history, grasped in all the depth of their meaning, are the manifestation of the eternal history of the Trinitarian God.⁵

This passage breathes the atmosphere of, employs the concepts that Hegel first exhibits in *The Phenomenology of Mind* through analysis and employment of which he there arrives at his position, undoubtedly Trinitarian, as set out at length in Chapter VII C of that work. A question requiring immediate investigation, however, is whether dependence on the so to say home-bred concepts (but are they? That is also a question, perhaps the same one) gives us a Hegel using the language of Trinitarianism, and even of Christianity, for alien purposes, as some charge. McTaggart, himself a professed atheist and yet profoundly Hegelian, levelled this charge. The ground on which he and the others there stand, however, is that of an unspiritual adherence to the mortiferous *letter* of old texts concerning which they may express either belief or unbelief indifferently. They conspire thereby, I regret to say, in that "certainty against the spirit" that Hegel found almost the unpardonable "sin" (cf. the 1830 Preface to his *Encyclopaedia*). He himself does not say "sin" and I use the term in the first place analogically. The attitude, the procedure, is against the whole notion of the "development of doctrine" which, after Newman, the modern Church clearly espouses. Honest or covertly malicious disagreement can reign unchecked here and the only solution is to seek to demonstrate whatever can be demonstrated. It is, further, impossible or simply undesirable to attempt to judge between the so to say reflex atheism of McTaggart and this "certainty against the spirit" of those professing belief "against the spirit" in this way. Both have refused journey's "end", whether they get off the train earlier or later. Or, we may regard the atheism as a form of apophatic theology, in one who acknowledges the Hegelian Idea in its fullest force and speaks in terms of "heaven" where, according to him, we are now but without, in our regular system of misperception, realising it. "Realising" here has an inbuilt ambiguity in unity similar to that found in "end". Thus in Hegel the "end of time" and perfect achievement

⁵ Van Riet, *op. cit.*, p.82.

or, again, realisation, coincide, whether in fact or, for just that reason (the factual as normative), in sense.⁶

What we have so far achieved, then, is to point to a coincidence of approach in Hegel and Aquinas transcending the difference of method, scholastic or discursive. It may, more fundamentally, be seen as a transcendence (in “sublation”) by Hegel of the duality of systems and approaches in the medieval theologian, duality in the first place of theology and philosophy, the one being the other and conversely. This may also be viewed as an Aristotelian reintegration after the difference introduced by Christian theology, in fulfilment, it is claimed, of the latter’s own “grace”, philosophy having a dignity able to “hijack” also this seemingly most theological term. There is no other way, after all, of showing what, along with absolute idealism, is surely a quasi-dogma of philosophy, as it is of reason itself, namely that “reality is friendly”⁷.

*

But have we, after all, achieved this? Is the synthesis legitimate, i.e. true?

Among the historical religions Saint Thomas is only interested in Christianity or, more exactly, in Judeo-Christianity, i.e. Christianity understood as the extension and result of Judaism. If he directs his attention in an exclusive manner to only one religion, it is not from a rational choice, motivated by the specific content of this religion, but for a quite different reason: Christianity (or already Judaism before it) is the only true religion; it is “revealed” by God, due to a free and gratuitous initiative of God. All other religions – pagan religions – are only the work of men. Judeo-Christianity is therefore not formally considered as the best or the purest of religions, the one which would respond to man’s aspirations, but as the only one which takes its origin from God himself. Saint Thomas studies it formally as such, he studies it as a theologian, starting with an appropriate “first principle”: faith in a divine revelation.⁸

⁶ The apparent blindness of both Anscombe and Geach to this complex univocity of “end”, they did not so much deny it as fail to see it, is regrettable, showing however the limits, the shortcomings, of “fideism” as an attitude. Intended as putting philosophy in its (subordinate) place, it merely falls away from it altogether, not granting to it the perfect or “highest” form of “the content” as the Idea.

⁷ I borrow this phrase, as sharing its intention, from the Thomist metaphysician Leo Elders SVD, to whom I also owe much else.

⁸ Van Riet, *op. cit.* p.75.

Here we have the ground, precisely stated, for a discipline (is that really the right word?) held apart from philosophy as “sacred” theology. It would be false, however, to say that there is no recognition of this principle in Hegel’s thought, his philosophy if you will. Rather, he states, in all seriousness, that philosophy is *der höchste Gottesdienst*, the highest worship, while Christianity, Hegel claims, giving his reasons, is “the absolute religion”. Therefore it is incumbent upon him to identify this religion with the true philosophy or, if it is preferred, to thus, since maintaining its status as a religion specifically, present it as swallowing up human philosophy in its old sense. Precisely here, however, the doubt presents itself as to whether philosophy can allow itself to be thus finitely characterised. Was not, rather, thought from the first divine or absolute? How else does the Augustinian demonstration of God from truth as necessarily in the mind function? The connecting link is, precisely, **Necessity**, as is highlighted in Hegel’s development of the categories, where necessity is equated with the perfection of what is, consequently, divine or absolute freedom.⁹ In view of this connection, anyhow, we have equally to say, to concede, that true philosophy, as highest divine service, coincides with true religion, identified by Hegel as “the absolute religion”, i.e. with “religion itself” (Henri de Lubac, who prefaced this identification of Christianity with the disclaimer that it is, nonetheless, “not a religion”, with implicit emphasis upon the indefinite article. In Hegel’s case we have no right to judge this identification weakened by his procedural treatment of Christianity along with the other religions of mankind, since, again, he is explicit that it is “the absolute religion” and here the *definite* article might well seem to ask to be omitted, though this is scarcely possible in German linguistic usage. The absolute, namely, is absolute simply. Or, there is concealed here, but concealed as lying open, the characteristic resolution of Christian faith and practice into unqualified “spirit and truth”. Hence the saying (by the Son) that sins against the Son shall be forgiven, but not sins against the Spirit. Even such sins, however, are not easy to distinguish from simple immaturity, e.g. of the neophyte with his or her characteristic “certainty against the spirit” singled out by Hegel in the later 1830 Preface to his *Encyclopaedia*, as mentioned above.

So Hegel can be found to be professing faith as the highest, even transcendent principle, functioning precisely, however, as unlocking ever more truth or, in a word, *sophia*, listed by Thomas as an intellectual virtue, the highest, which faith, a “theological” virtue, perfects. Thus does Hegel announce his own ambition, his felt need rather, to transcend mere *philo-*

⁹ For **Necessity**, the category, cf. Hegel, *Enc. I* (“The Science of Logic”), 147 to 244 or end of the Logic.

sophia towards *sophia* itself. He clearly sees *faith* as the agent of this (*theoria*) as, for example, he saw it as the agent (*praxis*) cleansing Europe (and eventually, after his time, North America and those states involved in “the slave trade” generally) from the infamy of human slavery.

The universal in its true and comprehensive meaning is a thought which, as we know, cost thousands of years to make it enter into the consciousness of men. The thought did not gain its full recognition till the days of Christianity. The Greeks, in other respects so advanced, knew neither God nor even man in their true universality ... Man as man was not then recognised to be of infinite worth and to have infinite rights. ... the real ground why there are no more slaves in Christian Europe is only to be found in the very principle of Christianity itself, the religion of absolute freedom. Only in Christendom is man respected as man, in his infinitude and universality.¹⁰

Add to this, though, in confirmation of our general thesis of development, that, once proposed, this idea finds acceptance world-wide. Similarly faith both proposes the philosophical agenda and, as *virtus*, enables its fulfilment, overcoming “the world”, as it was said. Thus, whatever an individual’s capacity to know the truth of God’s being, as the Vatican Council of 1870 declared it can be known or “proved”, yet both the historic creeds enjoin belief, i.e. faith, in God as their first article: *credo in (unum) Deum*. Thus if any individual, or philosophy as such, does know the truth of the being of the incomprehensible God he may, as some of Van Riet’s expressions seem to indicate, in that respect have advanced from faith to the, analogously, heavenly estate, nonetheless the virtue of faith or, in religion, its precepting, is there to fall back on as also to enliven or possibly restore that knowledge, in old age for example. One may recall the words: “Because you have seen me you believe”, suggesting that faith and knowledge are compatible while adding, “Blessed are they who have not seen and yet believe”. A normal philosophy of faith as a virtue, necessary therefore to human flourishing, in “virtue” of the unity of the virtues, is quite compatible with this. Thus Peter Geach, in his set of lectures on the virtues, includes the three theological virtues with the four cardinals as one set, without demur or apology. Regrettably, however, he condemns the Thomistic thesis of the unity of the virtues as “a monstrous doctrine”. One should, I would argue, rather be prepared to see how the unconventional act, whatever it be, of a virtuous man might yet instance the virtue with which an opposite precept is, let us say, conventionally associated, just or rather as periods of inebriation, or even a compulsive habit the subject might wish to be rid of, patiently

¹⁰ Van Riet, *op. cit.* p.75.

suffered or whatever, might be included in the respective virtue, concerning which, anyhow, no mortal can finally judge. In general everyone thinks what he or she does is right (for him), though that is surely not the final judgment either. So much for ethics.

*

Van Riet continues:

This recourse to a new first principle distinct from reason brings about two important consequences. The first is that theology will form a closed system requiring its own intelligibility or its own light. Revealed truths stem from an order other than the natural order of reason; these are “mysteries” freely communicated by God and proposed to the acceptance or obedience of Faith. Their object is a gift, a grace, of a “supernatural” order. The fact of the Alliance, its content, its development in history, remain “contingent”, “irrational” (or more exactly, “supra-rational”) data, knowable solely by revelation, whose ultimate “reason” is found in the absolute freedom of God. Sacred History is a *history* that is learned *a posteriori* and whose principal author is God. Judaism paves the way for Christianity, for there is a continuity between the Old and New Testaments, such that it is a question of a single revelation which God progressively bestows according to his good will. Faith itself – Jewish faith as much as Christian faith – is God’s work in man, the realization by God of his mysterious purposes. Theology locks up and forms a system, it is only understood from the inside of the system, it is the intelligence of the believer.¹¹

The underlying point here is that faith too is a virtue and therefore, as does God himself (it is why we worship him), it falls under “right reason” as precisely what extends and further enlightens it. Grace, as perfecting nature, in *this* sense belongs to nature. Hence we speak of unregenerate nature, implying nature’s transcending destiny, to be “born (*natus*) again”. This position, in general terms, clearly belongs, however, with the stress laid by Saint Duns Scotus, he having now been “raised to the altars” of the Catholic Church, upon the *necessity* for man of divine incarnation, independently of any supposedly contingent “fall”, more clearly than we find in St. Thomas or St. Augustine. The reconciliation here should proceed by way of recognition that a *felix culpa* is not a *culpa* simply speaking as separable from finitude generally, i.e. it is not as such personally imputable. The “rebirth” of baptism is hence our true birth (a point stressed by Herbert McCabe OP, e.g. in his *The New Creation*¹²). This, of course, is Hegel’s

¹¹ Van Riet, pp. 75–76.

¹² He there points out, as I recall at least, that baptism is not the sacrament of

interpretation of the *Genesis* narrative of “the fall” at *Enc.* 24, the *Zusatz* (third part), from which it is difficult to dissent though it certainly implies a calling in question of traditional doctrine concerning the four “preternatural” gifts. There does not seem cause, however, to attach to this tradition greater authority than until recently was seen as belonging to that of Limbo, now “officially” discarded. Philosophy, anyhow, if it is regarded as heavenly, cannot import into its purity such extrinsic considerations. The *regula fidei* does not belong to it in its first quality, to “first philosophy”. Rather, faith itself tells the faithful one, the believer, to adhere to and exercise also the intellectual virtue of wisdom, *sophia*. Such considerations are in harmony of course with the assimilation, in *Aufhebung*, of religion, especially where “absolute”, to philosophy. It is quite natural, of course, that this is not understood immediately or, hence, by all and so “ways of behaving” in the Christian community, of faith, namely, continually arise, not to speak of individual acts, that are contrary to the Gospel. That community, nonetheless, cannot fail, appearances notwithstanding, and may not, just therefore, be abandoned. The gates of Hell may seem to be prevailing against it, wrote Hegel a bit despondently, citing Scripture¹³, during the flurry of “enlightenment” he so scornfully castigates, but only to affirm his faith that they will not do so, pointing out that it is our duty to turn, precisely to adapt this same philosophical “critical” current, to the movement of spirit and truth. This was precisely his achievement and it parallels the work of Thomas Aquinas in relation to the Aristotelian philosophy in what was a revolutionary confrontation with Augustinianism, Augustine remaining all the while his highest authority. Nowhere is this more apparent than in his virtues-based *moral* theology.

*

Van Riet continues (p. 76):

There is a second consequence. If faith is a first principle and, under this heading, source of a systematic insight, nevertheless it should be reconciled with reason which also is a first principle. Saint Thomas maintains the duality of first principles, the distinction of reason and faith, of philosophy and theology, of nature and grace. And he does not succeed in reconciling the two

membership of the Church; it *is* membership of the Church, I recall especially the stressing of “is”. One asks, then, what else it is a sacrament of, surely something after all, and this is doubtless not hard to answer. Birth or rebirth indifferently suggest themselves as candidates.

¹³ *Matthew* 16, 18 (the “Petrine” prophecy, in fact).

systems in a positive manner, but only in a negative way. They are negatively compatible, as two partial and complementary systems; they do not oppose each other, but neither do they invoke each other. No doubt, it is the same man who elaborates them and, in each of them, it happens that he is handling the same things. But, as systems, they each form an autonomous whole; neither englobes nor “takes up” the other. Let us insist on this, for it is important.

The clear implication is that Hegel, by contrast, does “succeed in reconciling the two systems in a positive manner”. Meanwhile Van Riet continues his critique and it is necessary to see it whole here:

First of all, it is certain that we do not find in Saint Thomas what would constitute a fundamental project for a philosophy of Christian religion, a “*reprise*” of faith in the system of reason. For him, the philosophical order is abstract in relation to the order of faith. It does neither include it nor exclude it, it simply makes an abstraction from it. The only philosophical affirmation that establishes a bridge between the two orders and assures the complementarity of the two systems is that of the natural desire to see God in his essence. Yet it is necessary to understand this well. If we reduce the natural desire, not only – as it proceeds from itself – to an inefficacious desire, but to a simple openness or to a non-impossibility, all anchoring of the supernatural in nature and all connection between the two orders would be suppressed.

I have changed “abstraction of” to “abstraction from” in the above text, suspecting a mistranslation of the French *de* or similar in context. The philosophical order simply abstracts from faith, for Saint Thomas, a clear difference from Hegel and what lies behind all the stultifying talk of philosophy as the handmaid, *ancilla*, of theology or even of faith, as if the latter did not of itself invite to contemplation, to study, and that with zeal, for its fulfilment. Avicenna, Ibn Sina, shall have given away all his fortune in thanksgiving to God for enlightenment upon a point of philosophy.

Van Riet’s singling out the “natural desire for God” as the only possible bridge “between the two orders”, assuring the complementarity of them, is interesting. It is, I believe, one of the most contested points of Thomism among theologians, for whom the supposed gratuitousness of God’s gift of participation in his own supernatural life must make such a desire non-natural, not to say non-existent. They reduce it, as he says, to an “inefficacious” desire, of which the souls in the now discredited limbo in particular were to be either kept in supreme ignorance or have the pain of its inefficaciousness lulled by this and that. But, as he says, the affirmation of this desire, in all its strength, in art, in religion, in philosophy, assures “the complementarity of the two systems” for anyone who would read them aright, reading Saint Thomas, for example, in, as we say, “the right spirit”. He touchingly laments

the anguish of the great souls among the “pagan” philosophers of old, who “sought in vain and with *angustia* for the true knowledge of God”, recalling his equally touching pages, in fact, on the state of the souls in Limbo, again. This means he admits to their having a natural desire here, though pointedly “inefficacious”, which is not unproblematic since there are plenty of passages in his writings suggesting efficacy, rather, of good will, which must surely include this desire, wherever found. Or what price “Abraham’s bosom”, say, or any who “rejoiced to see my day”, as the Gospel text has it. Yet one needs to take seriously the point Thomas or Augustine, though not the great philosophers mentioned, make about such souls, as having died without reaching the age of reason, say, i.e. as babies, so that they nowhere, it is assumed, made the necessary choice of the good and true. Yet that, too, is quite an assumption, to say no more.

Many commentators of Saint Thomas think that they find in him a “*reprise*” of reason in a single system, theology, whose first principle is faith. Theology, they say, starts with faith and resorts to reason to understand faith better. It uses reason to show the connection of the mysteries with the whole of philosophical truths. It uses reason, not only in its minor function as a source of coherence but in its power of taking hold of natural truths. In the heart of theology there is a philosophy that has its own value. Although its first principle is faith in revelation, it can “take up” with reason without the latter appearing as a foreign body, for revelation, as does reason, itself teaches that God is the author of nature as well as of grace, of reason as well as of faith.

The whole Humean idea of faith as somehow the contrary of reason seems absurd. Faith is trust in the teachings of one or more found trustworthy, than which nothing is more reasonable. Or how can theology resort to reason if theology, as a *logos*, theo-logy, be other than reason *in actu* or the reasonable? Thus acceptance of authority, understood as the “weakest form of argument”, is precisely this, argument.

But does it follow that Thomistic theology constitutes a single system that covers or assumes philosophy? To us it seems not. For if it were true that philosophy thus incorporated into theology maintains a specific value, it is also true that the ultimate foundation of this value is no longer found *in it*, but in faith. It is faith which assures that God is the author of reason, and that *consequently* the latter is valid in its order. It is clear that finally we say that we trust reason. We *believe* in reason. From then on, while still a value, reason no longer keeps all its value; it is no longer a first principle, it becomes a second, derived principle. Perhaps one will object that, guaranteed by faith, the value of reason is not only conserved, but confirmed, grounded in an even better way. But precisely, to “ground” reason is rather to contest it, to rob it of something of its own autonomy. In fact, in Saint Thomas, it seems that

reason is a first principle in the full sense of the word. If he holds that we cannot believe what we know, how could he concede that we *believe* in reason?¹⁴

But does he hold that, I ask again? Can one say both that we believe in reason and that it is reasonable to believe? What we say in fact is the latter, that it is reasonable to believe, while if we should utter the expression “I believe in reason” we, quite consistently, add under our breath, “because it is reasonable thus to believe”. If it were not reasonable to believe in reason there would be no virtue in doing so, supposing the expression to have sense. The sense, however, would be of the order of believing that my cat is a teapot. It is only that the former declaration is quite naturally recognised as *an idiom* merely or “figure of speech”. But because it is so natural we easily pass over the need for making explicit recognition of this. This, all this, is what has to be born in mind should we want to declare that all Christians, say, believe in God, even or especially those who know Him as truth, as the Idea absolute in Hegel’s phrase.

Behind this phrase, next point, lies recognition of the difficulties, which Hegel and others have brought out, in making of Existence the final category, something recognised in Neoplatonism, also the Christian variety thereof, already. In Hegel’s system of logic, for example, **Existence** is a finite category, together with **Thing**, in the intermediate “Doctrine of Essence”, mediating, that is, between the doctrines of being and of “the notion”. The final category, it is rather brought out, in the earlier *Science of Logic* particularly, viz. the Absolute Idea, is the true account of logic’s *initial* category, viz. **Being**, with which he says “science must begin” and, we there find, must end, but Being as now identified with the Absolute Idea. We can call it God, so long as we are clear that this is not pantheism of the “everything is God” type but rather the converse of this, that God is everything in the sense that being as such is “had” “in” God, sometimes called “panentheism”. As Aquinas had put it, every idea is divine as identical each one, with God and conversely.¹⁵ Hegel expresses this as that each idea is logically *aufgehoben* such that it is, in its difference, one with or the same, and yet not the same, as the divine or absolute Idea, “the world in a grain of sand” as the poet has it. The kinship with the “religious” or sacramental principle is obvious, while it underlies equally the precept of loving the other nearby, or far off, “as self”, though there, in that notion, it takes leave of any supposed world “of things”. It is thus supplemented, by way of explanation, by the Pauline “All things are yours”. Hegel’s thought,

¹⁴ Van Riet, *Ibid.*, pp. 76-77.

¹⁵ Cp. Aquinas, *Summa theol.* Ia, Q 15.

his philosophy if you will, may thus be viewed, and judged, as a thinking through, a reasoned “sublation” (*Aufhebung*) of these “religious” data. Hence his saying that “The business of philosophy is religion and nothing but religion”. Could he have said this of Art, the first in this trilogy of Absolute Spirit? I think we would have to concede this, although a comprehensive philosophy of what we call sense-cognition then calls for exposition, one that would entail, again, the necessity of incarnation. Matter, that is, is itself (a) *created* necessary being, along with angels, should they “exist”, and human souls, in the teaching of Aquinas, while it can well be claimed that this doctrine, of created necessary being, is implicit in the system of Hegel’s Logic as the “method” thereof. And yet if matter too *is* the Idea, as the Idea is matter, then there is no matter. The thought, idea, of it was a mere moment (of representation) in thought’s ascent, its unstoppable Advance, to the Idea as the true Being entirely, though yet again, and thereby, the Idea is *what Being is*. This is the truth, necessarily, behind as supporting what for religion at its abstract highest, was mere paradox, viz. the assertion that with creation we have *ens sed non plus entis* or, similarly, that *viventibus esse est vivere*. Yet it is not, being only itself or only thinking itself, as philosophy has it, life being found nowhere else, since there is nowhere else for it to be found. This is the final unity, but of being and nothing: i.e. it is not pantheism, since the “everything” that is supposed, absurdly, to be God has or is vanished. Rather, “in God we live and move and have our being” (*Acts of the Apostles*), “as even your own poets have said”, poetry being the highest Art, Hegel affirms.

Van Riet continues:

Further, rather than a single system, issuing either from reason or from faith, in Saint Thomas there seem to be two partial, complementary systems, negatively compatible with each other. This negative compatibility, this non-incompatibility, is expressed in the celebrated adages: faith does not contradict reason, but enriches it; grace does not destroy nature but raises it. One also finds it again in the methodological rules concerning relations between the two orders: although revealed mysteries always remain undemonstrable in their value as truth, they can be understood and even elaborated on by reason in their meaningful content; on the other hand, although they have been obtained by the work of an autonomous reason, philosophical statements that contradict a truth of faith must be considered as false and worked out again. This negative compatibility is finally expressed in the very strange case of certain statements that come materially from the two orders, but formally, for a given subject, from one or the other of these two. There are the truths that man can discover with his reason alone, but which God has revealed so that all may know them with certitude, without delay and without risk of error. Whoever does not know them from knowledge

has to believe them, but he who knows them can no longer adhere to them by faith.

I have touched on this supposedly “very strange case” above, expressing my doubt as to whether it is correct interpretation of Thomas to say that he or she “who knows” a given truth “from knowledge”, even though God “has revealed” it, can no longer simply believe it, as exercising faith, it is implied. Possibly Van Riet does not mean this, thinking or implying rather that one does not know anything and cannot ever know it with the same “certitude” as faith, here as a virtue primarily, provides, the “keeping faith” under difficulties, which might seem to conflict with the initial act of faith as breaking with previous habits, all of them even. Some of Hegel’s texts speak for this, although in general the problem does not arise with quite the same starkness within the outlook, the system rather, of absolute idealism. Faith as such is rather sublated towards *absolute knowledge* as being the “final” truth as to *what faith itself* is, viewed, like all ideas, “timelessly”. This after all is quite simply reflected in the Pauline statement that now I know in part but then shall I know as I am known, while “now” we “see as in a glass darkly”, *in aenigma*. This “now”, darkly glassed, namely, is there diagnosed as the very theatre of mere representation, the shadow-world of Plato’s cave virtually. The limitations within that world (i.e. “this” world) are not therefore attributable to faith, which is *itself* fulfilled in “the Idea” (McTaggart’s “heaven”) but to the object, this being an object in part concealed. By this it is faith itself which, by thought, wins through to absolute knowledge. Thought here includes the whole process up to and including that “entry into spirit” which is Hegel’s characterisation of our death. Here I take death, as thus conceptually employed, not to be without more ado read as a mere biological event or even as any sort of event at all, whatever we say of Hegel’s “entry”. *Media vitae in morte sumus*, sing the monks in Lent at Compline: in the midst of life we are in death, perhaps “devoutly to be wished” after all as being more than just the end of “heartache and the thousand natural shocks”, as if by sleep merely, of whom, after all, Shelley tells us, death is “sister”. But what a sibling!

Rather than a reconciliation in an authentic synthesis, here we find a kind of exchange between two partial and complementary systems. Duality prevails over unity. Also is it not amazing that those with a strong feel for synthesis have so often tried to transcend this duality by explaining one of the systems from the other? Here are all the attempts to reduce Saint Thomas’ philosophy to a “Christian philosophy” or to present his theology as a rationalisation of mysteries.

Van Riet does not say here (p.77) why he finds this amazing. Also, it is important to notice that the alternative he concludes this paragraph with is one between opposites, as one might overlook. People either invent the improper notion of a Christian philosophy, in saying which one does not mean to exclude a proper notion of this, as when we speak of Greek philosophy (though it occurs to me one could make a strong case for the impropriety even of that!), or they see St. Thomas as already on the Hegelian path, as they misconceive also that, of improper “rationalisation”, by which would be meant a making of concessions to the finite Understanding, just what Hegel sets himself to overcome.

Van Riet himself, then, claims that only the middle path, conceding a duality, is reasonable; amazing must be then that people who, so to say, more than admire Saint Thomas, compromising themselves in such great numbers by their denial of this duality. For Van Riet it is clear that this duality, the two as he calls them “partial” systems, exist side by side, without, he surely means to say, contamination of one by the other. We shall not enquire too closely for the moment into whether he proves his case, whether, rather, Saint Thomas is not actually more Hegelian than might at first appear, as I, for one, have argued elsewhere.

In reality, we think that there *are* two systems in saint Thomas, for there are two first principles, of which neither judges the other. Faith does not have intrinsic authority over reason, and reason does not establish a radical critique of revelation.

In saying this, one wants to ask, how far does Van Riet recognise, or recall, from the Hegelian thought he is presenting, such as that faith and reason are indeed there put as one principle. The child begins by believing his parents and that is his entry into “the true reason world”. He is, that is to say, from the first a member, an inhabitant of it, as he more and more comes to see these truths of faith for himself, see, that is, how reasonable and true they are. For that, after all, is the meaning, the intelligibility, of believing them. We will see how this works out when we come to consider the two thinkers on the Trinity. Meanwhile,

In each system we find a fundamental affirmation that limits it and which refers to the other system as to a complement. From the theological side there is the affirmation of one single God, creator and sanctifier, author of nature as well as of grace; from the philosophical side, there is the natural desire to see God in his essence. But they are both very undetermined in their content; the first guarantees that the conciliation of the two orders is possible since they proceed from the same source, the second assures that it will be realised at the

end of human life, in blessedness, when faith and reason will be surpassed in the vision of what we believe and know today.

We need to bear in mind that Van Riet is himself, following Hegel, saying that these two orders are one. Why, then, may we not acknowledge, find, rather, that equally for Saint Thomas these two orders are one, as Van Riet's words above rather strongly suggest? If we start with Saint Thomas then we naturally should go beyond him to the position of Hegel and on to whatever shall lie beyond in theology's and/or philosophy's development and even, I dare say, aesthetically.

This complementarity of the two systems is facilitated by the symmetry of the schemas of thought and the harmony of conclusions. The notion of supernature is traced onto that of nature, the notion of grace faithfully reproduces that of creation. From the two sides, we come to the same total independence of God, to the same contingency in the effects of divine action.

So here not, first, the "harmony of conclusions", in the plural, but the first-mentioned, viz. the schemas *of thought*. We will find in Hegel, namely, that it is thought, the Idea, that is the "Speculative or Absolute Idea" (*Enc.* 235) that holds all together, not merely as the "master category" but as having done with categories altogether, with "the advance", as the last which is a first and conversely. Here life has "returned to itself from the bias and finitude of cognition".

Thus the truth of the Good is laid down as the unity of the theoretical and the practical idea in the doctrine that the Good is radically and really achieved, that the objective world is in itself and for itself the Idea, just as it at the same time eternally lays itself down as End, and by action brings about its actuality. ... The Idea, as unity of the Subjective and Objective Idea, is the notion of the Idea, - a notion whose object (*Gegenstand*) is the Idea as such, and for which the objective (*Objekt*) is Idea, an Object which embraces all characteristics in its unity. This unity is consequently the absolute and all truth, the Idea which thinks itself, - and here at least as a thinking or Logical Idea. (Hegel, *Enc.* 236)

"This is the *noesis noeseos*, the knowing of knowing, Aristotle long ago termed the supreme form of the Idea" (236, *Zus.* In Hegel's text this Greek phrase is in Greek lettering, as we find also Aristotle's own Greek text from *Metaphysics* XII, 7 concluding or, for some editors, appended to, the final paragraph 577 of the whole *Encyclopaedia*). So we may note that Hegel was positing (and not merely aiming at) the same reconciliation of Aristotelian with Patristic or Scholastic thought as we, with Georges van Riet, attempt

here between the latter, in the thought of Thomas Aquinas, and Hegel. In this for that time (1830) final presentation of Absolute Spirit as thought, as philosophy, we find that creation, along with incarnation, features as representation, *Vorstellung*, of the Idea Absolute. In believing these, therefore, we believe what they represent, viz. God himself, the Idea Absolute, such as he would not otherwise be. There is therefore, despite first appearance, no presentation of a created world as eternal, as something eternally accompanying God, such as religion has rejected. Rather the world, though mentioned in Hegel's paragraph here, is negated, along with all else, inasmuch as ever put as something, anything, independently of the Idea, of God, and "objective" in that sense. This says no more than that Greek poet quoted, cited rather, by St. Paul, as by us above here, in *Acts of the Apostles*: "In God we live and move and have our being", i.e. only. Concerning incarnation, as considered in final *sophia*, things may seem a bit more complicated, but not more so than as presented in our Biblical and hence "religious" texts, to preserve Hegel's threefold division of Absolute Spirit (Art, Religion, Philosophy in ascending order), starting with the Christ's adopted title of "Son of Man", underlined by the citing, in a sense out of any original context, though attributed to Pilate, "Behold the man", *ecce homo*. To which I add that the implicit objection here, as if Hegel were subtracting from the uniqueness, the individuality, of the incarnation, is dissolved by Hegel's own logical theory, whereby all "categories", e.g. Part and Whole, Individual and Universal, ultimately dissolve as being taken up into, indeed identified with, the Idea, as we find Aquinas also teaching in his treatment of "the divine ideas" (at *Summa theol.* Ia q.15: there each and any such idea is "identical with the divine essence": Hegel goes no further than that if he even gets so far). Hegel anyhow insists, and even this on the plane of ideas, for him the ultimate plane, on the uniqueness of "the incarnation", of the Mediator, between God and man, as a necessity, of course of thought first of all, in every sense of "thought" as being, firstly, the most actual and, in fact, Actuality itself at one point (*Enc.*142) of or in thought's own Advance, an advance in or of what he calls logic's "method".

In short, orthodoxy has given no final verdict with respect to Hegel's philosophical system, which we may rather expect, with confidence, it will ultimately embrace in order, though, as follows from the same philosophy, to go, in thought, in contemplation, beyond it and ever on till we come to that heaven we will, and by our faith as "overcoming" the world, *do* realise in and with the Word, as our faith is required to confirm, as in the prophetic text: "I have loved thee from before the foundation of the world", which, this humanity of God, finds its final expression and confirmation in the historical phenomenon, of what is necessarily supra-historical, of

incarnation. It is supra-historical seeing as God as God does not take on or assume anything he did and does not have, actually, *in actu*, not merely before, but as having and being eternally human, just as Word, or as the historical, even as contingent, is necessary, the position most categorically defended in Hegel's last, unfinished *Lectures on the Proofs of the Existence of God*.¹⁶ As the liturgy has it, he "came down from the heaven he never left", held in the divine thought, of the Father, with whom he declared himself "one", eternally¹⁷. "He that has seen me has seen the Father" (this should be related to all Hegel says, of course corresponding to the "historical" or tensed mode of speech as such¹⁸, as to God's coming perfectly to himself in becoming sensible and/or touchable, actually the expression of eternal condescension, true home, necessarily, of history itself). That, and nothing less, is what is *revealed*, viz. everything, our sorrow "turned into" joy, in the Gospel phrase, and not merely replaced by it, this being the theme of the traditional "resurrection crucifix", of Christ who "reigned in triumph from the tree".

Hegel rejects all dualism. For him, there is only *one* order, that of reason, but of a reason which endeavours to make out the meaning, the intelligibility, the "necessity" of the total human experience, in particular of humanity's religious history. Hegel ... does not give preference to any religion at the outset. In his eyes none has the prerogative of proceeding from a special revelation of God; each, in its place and order translates the discovery that humanity makes, or which God makes in man, of what God is and what man is. ... It is necessary to describe, compare, class and judge the various positive religions, by showing how the "concept" of religion is realised and developed in them in a logical fashion. (Van Riet, *op. cit.*, p. 72)

This may be quite startling, in proportion, however, only to our grasp of Hegel's system as not, it may be, having as yet entirely "gone to the ground"¹⁹. God discovers himself in man; not, of course, that the Idea

¹⁶ Cf. our *Hegel on Thought and Incarnation*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2020, *passim*.

¹⁷ Jacques Maritain, in *On the Grace and Humanity of Jesus* (Herder & Herder, via, in translation, Burns & Oates, London, 1969) speaks, accordingly but not entirely satisfactorily, throughout this his virtually final essay, of (Christ in) "the heaven of his soul".

¹⁸ Compare the evangelical Prologue, for centuries in its entirety a part, viz. the concluding, o, the Latin or Roman Mass rite: "No man has seen God at any time: the only begotten Son, who dwells in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (*John* 1, 18).

¹⁹ I cite a tutor's remark to my first paper on Hegel in late 1967, which he, the late Joseph Kockelmans, nonetheless graded maximally. Here in 2020 I trust the

Absolute is in itself anything less than eternally perfect, that is to say infinite as being infinity itself, but that we who are discovering God are each ourselves yet one with him while “becoming”, in our imperfect or frankly *mis*-perception, what we are.

See what love the Father has granted us, that we should be called and in truth be the sons of God. ... and still it has not yet appeared what we shall be. Yet we know that when he shall have appeared we shall be like him, *because* we shall see him as he is.²⁰

This is the sense in which Hegel says that “spirit necessarily ... appears in time so long as it does not grasp its pure notion, i.e. *so long as it does not annul time*”²¹. “When this notion grasps itself, it supersedes its time character ... spirit’s destiny and necessity”. This means, has to mean, that our being in time is only appearance, as is time itself. “End is as such Realised End ... has been really secured” (*Enc.* 210-212 and *Zusatz*: “Within the range of the finite we can never see or experience that the End has been really secured”: cf. the *tetelestai* from the Cross as “last word”, indubitably present in Hegel’s mind here). Just so does *The Science of Logic* conclude with Spirit’s going forth, freely, “as Nature”, we having learned therein that Freedom and Necessity coincide, in God as we may say here, who “discovers himself in man”.²²

Hence Hegel is *bound* to show “how the ‘concept’ of religion is realised” in each of man’s religions, as far as he knows them at least, “in a *logical* fashion”, I stress. This “translation”, as Van Riet aptly calls it, instances the general aim of philosophy as such, according to Hegel, of rising from representation to concept and thence, *the* Concept, having set forth the grounds for this being there, as actual, to be found logically, again, or to be developed if not yet found. The System has “already” in fact established “the concept of religion”. This logical progression is found to end in

situation is the same. We remain beginners.

²⁰ *I John* 3, 1-2, stress added: I quote this as witness, simply, to the earliest Christian self-understanding rather than as in some way “authoritative”, which, however, anyhow simply means that later understanding, by the self-same community, endorses it. What else shall tell us what Christianity is, if we are to discuss it at all, as surely behoves us?

²¹ *Phenomenology of Mind* (Baillie), p. 800, stress added. The “so long as” is both a joke and a kind of temporal metaphor.

²² I refer here to the so-called Greater Logic of c. 1812, the final paragraph of which, preferably in the original, should be carefully studied as, indeed, a unitary whole as regards thought.

Christianity, according to De Lubac “not a religion but religion itself”²³, just as Hegel says it is “revelation itself”, consistent, and it is not an all that “finer” point, as we say, with as even entailing his denial of any religion’s being “a special revelation”. This is all an instance of his general view that behind history in its entirety, as behind natural phenomena as a whole, lies “logical progression” or “meaning”. How could it be otherwise? This is his unspoken Wittgensteinian question, in his case after having exhaustively shown this necessity, he claims. We need to be clear that he claims this before we ask if it can be so and not otherwise. His investigation discloses as established reality “*absolute, manifest religion*, where man is truly free, for God is revealed as He is, in his infinite phenomenality. This is the Christian religion.”²⁴

Revelation thus identified is set forth by Hegel as already a conceptual trinity, as three-in-one, of Trinity, Incarnation and Church, “now and forever” (Van Riet). We will concentrate on the first, Trinity as itself *pure thought* revealed in the “Kingdom of the Father” or first Trinitarian person, i.e. this, or he, is revelation’s “first form” (Hegel, in *LPR*), just conceptually, he means, as philosophy or pure thought reveals, reveals *itself*, namely, as Aristotle in his way had previously, but not quite firstly, if we recall, say, Anaxagoras’s words (“Mind has set all in order”), said, inasmuch as thought “thinks itself”, though further manifestation thereof lay then rather in the future.²⁵ Still, Aristotle thought, “a little of this” was “worth more than all the rest”, accordingly counselling a practice of death to all else, *athanatizein*, as John of the Cross, no mean philosopher in my view, will later confirm and further specify, Hegel concurring in this war on “the natural” as being “our affair”. “In order to come to that which you are not you must go through that which you are not” (John of the Cross), but you had better not be in too much of a hurry actively to try it, maybe. Count the cost, as the parable has it, though we are surely all bound to fail, in some sense at least, as in crucified God-forsakenness, not that one would lay flattering unction to one’s own or anyone’s “soul”. There are examples, though, besides this supreme exemplar, rather, of relative success.

The three kingdoms anyhow, Hegel insists, are, if more than just a figure borrowed from Kant, yet “not really separable nor even distinct” but “a single and self-same reality”. The Trinity then, thus indicated, God as “trine

²³ Cf. Henri de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheistic Humanism*.

²⁴ Van Riet, p. 78.

²⁵ St. Thomas refers to Plato and Aristotle as those who “sought in vain and with *angustia* for the true knowledge of God” (cited from my article, “The Resistance of Thomism to Analytical and Other Patronage”, *The Monist*, October 1997, Vol. 80, Number 4, pp. 611-617, final paragraph).

in his unity”, “is reconciliation in itself”. For “To know that God is three is to know that otherness is in God himself, and that it is overcome there” (Van Riet). Hegel, like Aquinas, is keen to play down any purely numerical aspect. *Numeri non ponuntur in divinis* (Aquinas). “It is useless to count” (Hegel).

This truth is the absolute truth in itself and for itself. It does not constitute a mystery, for “what is directed towards rationality is not a mystery for it; it is a mystery only for the senses and their way of looking at things”.²⁶

This is taken from the statement by Van Riet here from which we started our investigation. He summarises now the Hegelian message concerning the Trinity as follows:

The absolute truth, we have seen, is that God is Trinity, or again that the God-man died and rose again. To be acquainted with this truth is to conform it to oneself, to unite it to the self-consciousness is to perceive that “in this truth, the relation of man to this truth is also posited”.²⁷ In a word, it is to discover that not only God’s essence but also man’s essence is to be spirit, reconciliation of contraries. On one side man is nature, finiteness, mortality; on another he is a going beyond nature, an aspiring to infinity and to eternal life. He is a being divided, contradictory, who endlessly negates himself, who never is what he is; from this interior contradiction comes the sorrow and unhappiness of his conscience. In the “Kingdom of the Spirit” man finally understands that this contradiction is constitutive of his very being, and that it can be overcome (*aufgehoben*). He does not have to resign himself to it, as if it (contradiction) found its origin in an irreducible dualism (of being and nothingness, of good and evil). He does not have to wait for it to be lifted by an Other (as in Judaism) or in another life (as in the Platonic conception of heavenly beatitude). It *can be reconciled without being suppressed*, for it clings to the very essence of reality. True being is identity with oneself in difference, it is spirit. God himself includes finiteness, death, and surpasses them. Man is God’s image, God’s son, reconciliation. He knows that not only the history of Jesus, but also his own history, grasped in all the depth of their meaning, are the manifestation of the eternal history of the Trinitarian God.²⁸

²⁶ Van Riet, p. 81, citing *LPR* III, p. 17 (cf. *SW*, t. 16, p. 233).

²⁷ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, tr. J. Sibree, p. 324.

²⁸ Van Riet, p. 82. I add that in Christianity, as claiming to fulfil Judaism, the Other lifting the burden turns out to be simultaneously self as, this other, grace *perfecting* nature in the sense of making it become what it is, “I in them and they in me”.

CHAPTER ONE

AQUINAS'S ACCOUNT

I turn now to the classic theological account of the Trinity as presented by Thomas Aquinas and its points of comparison or contrast with the above. We have noted there being no question but that Hegel's Trinitarian philosophy had to be preceded by its teaching "in religion", as revealed "from above". That is, however, the *only* sense, and a valid one, in which it is "above" reason, i.e. above human reason, not above mind or spirit as such. In the same way, after all, if also differently, knowledge of the Absolute Idea is dependent upon the logical process, by way of dialectical analysis necessarily, as is also demonstrated, as much in *The Phenomenology of Mind* as in "the science of logic" and the treatises of that title themselves. Hence he declares that Trinitarianism, as against deism in particular, is the only reasonable account of God. Hegel

wanted to translate Christianity into terms of freedom. But did he succeed? Or, by translating it, did he betray it and thus favour atheism? If he is not atheist, is he Christian? Christianity being indisputably the religion of freedom, would Hegel have betrayed not only Christianity but also freedom along with it? In particular, by wanting to comprehend everything in a "system" which, in spite of its breadth, remains a "closed" system, did he sufficiently respect one of the essential dimensions not only of Christianity but of human freedom, that of openness to a future hope?²⁹

One thing is certain, philosophy, knowledge, however "absolute", takes its first rise in faith. Hence in children, without it having to be only they, Hegel *identifies* their faith, in their parents first of all but thereby in God supremely as including or requiring, rather, the latter, if they are well brought up, *as* reason, *as* instancing "the true reason-world". Nothing, in fact, speaks against this identity remaining, even in the mature Hegel himself. What else does it mean when he declares himself to be "a Lutheran" and hence Christian without qualification, unless as supplied from outside by those,

²⁹ P. 101. Van Riet appends as a footnote: "It is one of the questions raised by existentialism: it is often recalled in the work of P. Ricoeur".

rightly or wrongly, of a contrary view. Liberalism anyhow, declared a Pope of the time, with clear disapproval however, “overthrows the nature of an opinion”, of the “mine”, as Hegel would say. He “knows very well”, we noted, “that the notion of a Trinitarian God is born of the experience of Christianity” (*LPR* III, p. 99), i.e. as “the manifestation of Spirit in history.” It is no contradiction of this, therefore, that Trinitarian affirmation “stems directly from the philosophical order”, to which it thus belongs to show the truth of it. St. Thomas’s whole treatment of the Trinity shows him doing this, which argues for interpreting his affirmation of its being “above reason” as open to Hegel’s interpretation of this. “Each philosophy”, maintains the latter, “comes in its time”. Implied, however, is that for that time the moment reached by thought is its window on truth. Failure to appreciate this lies behind the Enlightenment’s or post-Enlightenment’s not well knowing how to treat the long period we call, as instancing this shyness, “medieval” merely. Hegel, of course, was himself not immune to this. How else explain his “seven-league boots” when running over that period in the history of philosophy?

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One should also look at the difference of ways, and the similarities, in which the Trinity is introduced in the two *Summae* or systems (insofar, which is doubtful, as either of these alternative denominations may be assimilable to the other). I propose, however, now to turn to the presentation in Aquinas, comparing with Hegel throughout.

We have previously studied about the unity of the divine essence; we now study about the trinity of persons in God. And since the divine persons are distinguished by their relations of origin, the order of our exposition is completely outlined; we shall have to consider: 1. The origin of procession; 2. The relations of origin; 3. The persons.³⁰

One notes that for the dogmatic theologian and teacher the agenda is pretty well laid down for him as it was not for Hegel, though he doubtless had in memory some of the catechetical procedures he would have been subjected to. Hegel, in fact, totally avoids the name “Trinity” throughout *The*

³⁰ Aquinas, *Summa theol.* I, q. 27, Prologue: *Consideratis autem his quae ad divinae essentiae pertinent, restat considerare de his quae pertinent ad trinitatem personarum in divinis. Et quia personae divinae secundum relationes originis distinguuntur, secundum ordinem doctrinae prius considerandum est de origine, sive de processione; - secundo de relationibus originis; - tertio de personis.*

Phenomenology of Mind in what has all the signs of having been a deliberate decision.³¹ At page 767 and following, though, it is clearly discussed, while its presence haunts much of the foregoing of that chapter. “There are thus three moments to be distinguished: Essential Being”, he says, the “thus” taking up the profound reflections of the previous paragraph introducing the topic; second, “explicit Self-existence, which is the express otherness of essential Being ... “. We will come back to these extremely compressed paragraphs, central to his account as they are. “The essential Being beholds only itself in its Self-existence, in its objective otherness”. Daringly, if deliberately, he next transfers the term *kenosis*, (self-)emptying, from its use in Scripture, i.e. by St. Paul or an associate, to denote the act of the Son in becoming incarnate, to mean the Father’s uttering of the Word, a self-emptying that is “merely within itself”, making thus of *kenosis* a general theme or characteristic of divinity, as surely, we then see, it must be if it is characteristic of the Son, as taught. All this “movement within expresses the absolute Being *qua* Spirit”, the *third* person grasped, necessarily, “as this process”. So these three moments are “notions in restless activity” as he further develops this.

This necessity, conceptual, of Trinitarian thought, is precisely what is not made explicit, very often at least, by the relevant communicators, either to themselves or those to whom they proclaim. We tend to find, in terms at least of expression, a kind of practical tritheism, which McTaggart seems to mistake for or insist on seeing as the actual Christian teaching, which he thus accuses Hegel of misrepresenting.

³¹ Cf. Baillie’s translation (1967), p. 767 f, or p. 772, where one finds the words “Quaternity” and “Quinity” but no mention of Trinity, the term. Nor does one find it elsewhere in this text where one might expect it, e.g. p. 253 or the note to page 555. Things are different, of course, in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, nor is he above mentioning it in *Enc. I* and *III* though in *I* he almost defiantly, one might think, speaks of God as “the absolute Person”, rather than, say, Absolute Personality (151, *Zus.*). But at 143, *Zus.*, his allegiance is explicit: “After all there is as good reason for taking everything to be impossible, as to be possible: for every content ... includes not only diverse but even opposite characteristics. Nothing is so impossible, for instance, as this, that I am: for ‘I’ is at the same time simple self-relation and, as undoubtedly, relation to something else. The same may be seen in every other fact in the natural or spiritual world. Matter, it may be said, is impossible: for it is the unity of attraction and repulsion. The same is true of life, law, freedom, and above all of God Himself, as the true, *i.e.* the triune God. – a notion of God, which the abstract ‘Enlightenment’ of Understanding ... rejected on the allegation that it was contradictory to thought.” So, “the true, *i.e.* the triune God”; “triune”, what could be clearer? In “The Philosophy of Mind (*Geist*)”, *Enc. III*, the treatment will be more systematic, as it is in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.

This, though, is simply false, while bordering on the merely populist (not surprising, given McTaggart's tendency to view Christianity as popular religion merely). I am hoping myself here to relate Hegel's utterances to those of Saint Thomas Aquinas, or even Augustine and the Church Fathers generally, who were anything but populist. In the thought of a later age, in my tentative opinion, say twenty centuries from now, Hegel may well come to be seen as one of them, with Boethius, Anselm, Hilary, Maximus and the rest, along indeed with Thomas Aquinas. Today we tend to end the list with St. Bernard, with the twelfth century.

So I will just mention that Trinity receives properly extended treatment in Hegel's "The Philosophy of Mind", i.e. in *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* III. The Trinity, it here appears, "is a "self-closed, circular process", while every page of Hegel's section VII C of the earlier *The Phenomenology of Mind* is concerned with it more or less directly.