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Scholastic Reasons, Monastic Meditations and Victorine Conciliations: The Question of the Unity and Plurality of God in the Twelfth Century

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The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity

Edited by Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering

Print Publication Date: Oct 2011

Subject: Religion, Theology and Philosophy of Religion, Christianity

Online Publication Date: Jan 2012

DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199557813.003.0013

Abstract and Keywords

This article examines the thoughts of twelfth-century theologians in the West concerning the Trinity. It focuses on the works of Peter Abelard, Bernard of Clairvaux, Richard of St. Victor, and Peter Lombard. It explores the multiplication of models used to think about the Trinity. These include the triad power-wisdom-goodness, images in the human soul, traces in visible creation, and interpersonal love. It argues that despite the tensions at the beginning of the period, the efforts of the theologians led toward a richer doctrine, notably toward the theory of Trinitarian appropriations.

Keywords: Trinity, theologians, Peter Abelard, Bernard of Clairvaux, Richard of St. Victor, Peter Lombard, human soul, visible creation, interpersonal love, Trinitarian appropriations

□ In the twelfth century, notable reflections on the Trinitarian mystery led to a series of conflicts between the scholastic and monastic worlds. On the one side stood the masters, Abelard, Gilbert of Poitiers, and Peter Lombard, on the other, the monks, mostly Cistercians, William of Saint Thierry, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Joachim of Fiore. In the middle stood the canons regular Hugh, Achard, and Richard of Saint Victor, neither monks nor seculars, but religious and masters at the same time, who played the role of intermediary. Perhaps they are the reason that the conflicts of the century were less acute and more favourable to the masters, especially if they were bishops. After the condemnations of Abelard at Soissons (1121) and at Sens (1140/1) and the simple warning of Gilbert at Rheims (1148), Peter Lombard is solemnly acquitted at Lateran IV (1215) of Joachim's accusations.

What brought on this desire to better understand the Trinity? First, it is the fundamental and distinctive mystery of Christianity. In the twelfth century, expeditions to the Holy Land and the translations of Greek and Arab philosophical texts put thinkers of the Latin West in contact with other conceptions of the divine, which incited them to defend the truth of their faith. At the same time, a taste for dialectic was growing in the schools and cloisters. People sought the support of ‘necessary reasons’, independent of (p. 169) scriptural authority, to understand better Christian doctrine, including the major challenge for the human intellect which is the Trinity. Boethius’ *Theological Tractates* furnished the model of natural, universal, and necessary reason applied to the Christian mystery. He elaborated the notions of substance, person, essence, and relation in order to better understand God as one and triune. Nonetheless, the *aetas boetiana* is also the *aetas ovidiana*. In the cloisters and the courts, another taste, for the theme of love, sharpened the sense of the individual, his subjectivity, and his affectivity. It also stimulated interest in Cistercian and Victorine thinkers above all for the analysis of interpersonal sentiments and relationships. From these sources, Bernard and Richard drew new models for thinking about the Trinity.

Throughout the century, a question obsessed our authors: how to accord unity of substance and plurality of persons in God? How to avoid theological discourse separating into two treatises, one on God's unity, accessible to natural reason, the other on the triune God, supported by Revelation alone? Working on theological language, certain thinkers distinguished the names and formulated rules of predication (Abelard, Gilbert, and Peter Lombard). Others, insisting on divine transcendence, resisted the assaults of natural reason and revered the mystery (William and Bernard). Some found analogies in the human soul and creation (Hugh). Others proposed comparisons, that of a seal (Abelard), a kiss (Bernard), or interpersonal love (Richard). Still others meditated on plurality and its divine source (Achar). It is in this proliferation of reflection that appeared the doctrine of ‘Trinitarian appropriations’, a major twelfth-century contribution to Trinitarian theology (Hugh, Abelard, and Richard).

1. The Masters

Peter Abelard (d. 1142)

Peter Abelard composed three works on the Trinity, today distinguished as *Theologia ‘Summi Boni’*, *Theologia Christiana*, and *Theologia ‘Scholarium’*, in reality three versions of the same work. It was first entitled *De Trinitate*. He never ceased refining and

modifying its title, subject, purpose, layout, and tenor. Its central thesis is that 'Father', 'Son', and 'Holy Spirit' are the names by which Christ distinguished the 'perfection of the sovereign good', that is, God. Therefore, 'Father' names his power (*potentia*), 'Son' his wisdom (*sapientia*), and 'Holy Spirit' his goodness (*benignitas*). The triad 'power/wisdom/goodness' forms therefore a bridge between Christianity, Judaism, and philosophy, so that 'all human beings naturally have faith in the Trinity'. Objections against the unity of substance or the Trinity of persons are resolved by a careful analysis of notions: 'same', 'different', and 'person'. The processions from the Father and the Son are explained on the one hand by plausible arguments based on the relations that unite power, wisdom, and goodness (*Theologia 'Scholarium'*) and on the other hand by a controversial comparison (p. 170) with a seal. He distinguished the seal's matter (bronze) from its form (effigy of the sovereign); or, in a more precise way, (1) the bronze, (2) the 'apt to seal' (*sigillabile*), and (3) the 'sealing' (*sigillans*, once imprinted in the wax). Like the divine persons, these elements are at the same time identical by essence and diverse by their properties.

The Abelardian doctrine was condemned twice. At Soissons (1121), students of Anselm of Laon charged that he did violence to the Trinitarian mystery by employing an inappropriate dialectical method that separated the three persons or reduced them to names. At Sens (1140/1), the Cistercians William of Saint Thierry and Bernard of Clairvaux called into question fourteen theses, several being Trinitarian: the names 'Father', 'Son', and 'Holy Spirit' are improper; the three persons are of unequal power; the Holy Spirit is not of the same substance of the Father and the Son; the Holy Spirit is the soul of the world; and Christ is not a third person of the Trinity. Often caricatures, these theses do not reflect the real doctrine of Abelard, but rather manifest a real difficulty of his accusers in understanding it. As a matter of fact, this doctrine is as simple in its principal affirmation as it is complex in its demonstrations and corollaries.

At the centre is found the triad '*potentia—sapientia—benignitas*' and its identification with the three divine persons. The idea is not totally new. There are numerous precedents in the biblical, conciliar, and patristic tradition. Abelard's originality involves presenting this triad as a model that offers to natural reason a more universal terrain than Christian Revelation. In so doing, his purpose is threefold: polemical, apologetic, and theological-philosophical. He seeks: (1) to refute the theories of the 'pseudo-dialecticians', in particular his old master Roscelin; (2) to show that, in a certain measure, the Trinitarian mystery had been foretold or even acknowledged, outside of Christianity, by the prophets and philosophers: we find this preoccupation of universality in his *Dialogue of a Philosopher with a Jew and a Christian*; and (3) to offer to reason a terrain for research and discussion, a sort of philosophical theology, in which even the strictest logic is not offended by the affirmation of the mystery of the Trinity, as found in

the Scriptures, Councils, and Fathers. In his preface to the third *Theologia*, Abelard explains that he wrote his work because of the spontaneous request of students who

clamoured for human and philosophical reasons. They insistently sought things that we can comprehend rather than speak. They affirmed: that it is useless to pronounce words that do not result in comprehension; that one can believe nothing that is not first understood; and that it is ridiculous to preach to others that which neither oneself nor those whom one seeks to instruct is able to grasp intellectually, for the Lord himself disapproves of the blind leading the blind.

However, this model raises two questions that neither his opponents nor Abelard himself were able to address satisfactorily. What is the precise nature of the rapport between this model and the three divine persons? Even understood as a simple analogy, does it offer a teaching on the Trinity that is compatible with Christian tradition? At times, it seems that Abelard only sees the triad as an analogy. Thus, when he declares in the *Theologia 'Scholarium'* that wisdom is a certain power or faculty to discern and that goodness is in no way a power or wisdom, he quickly adds that nonetheless the three (p. 171) persons are equally powerful, wise and good. One can understand that these three faculties resemble above all the three persons by their relations of origin. Nonetheless, Abelard had declared in the preceding *Theologiae* that 'Father', 'Son', and 'Holy Spirit' are respectively the 'names' given by Christ to the divine power, wisdom, and goodness, and that the latter 'define' the three persons and are 'proper' to them. If someone opposes his position by quoting the Creed *Quicumque*, which affirms that the three persons are equally almighty, he responds that the same name can be either proper or common depending on the context. Therefore, there is no contradiction to say that power is proper to the Father and that the three persons are equally and fully powerful.

Is Abelard incoherent? Did he evolve with time, from a radical theory towards a more moderate one? Did his incomplete *Theologiae* juxtapose textual layers from different periods that he put off merging better until later? Did the nature of the relationship between the triad and the Trinity remain unspecified or only implicit? It is difficult to determine. Abelard's doctrine, even reduced to its central affirmation, does not reconcile easily with the anterior tradition that, prolonged by Hugh and Richard of Saint Victor, would give birth to the theory of 'Trinitarian appropriations'. Abelard, for his part, does not 'appropriate' (i.e. 'makes proper'), rather he 'communicates' (i.e. 'makes common'). He does not want to explain why some attributes, that the most rigorous theology considers to be substantial and 'common', are sometimes applied as 'proper' to a particular person, but why power, wisdom, and goodness, which he holds to be 'proper' attributes in themselves (*per se dicta*), can in certain contexts (*in contextu ... orationis*) become 'common' to the Three.

From common to proper or from proper to common, the difference seems slight, the essential being maintained: to demonstrate that God is indissolubly one and triune and that certain names can, according to the case, apply either to the substance or to the person. If we seek to reconcile 'authorities' as did Abelard, the result is the same. That is why he was sincerely persuaded that his doctrine did not fall into heresy in any way. If on the contrary we consider, as they did at Laon, Clairvaux, and Saint Victor, that these 'authorities' do not come raw to the theologian, but are transmitted to him through an exegetical tradition that already partially articulates, balances, and interprets them, whatever his dialectical virtuosity, Abelard's abnormal theory becomes impossible to accept. This principal cause of Abelard's *calamitates* in Trinitarian theology is only amplified by his provocative personality and by the difference in method.

Gilbert of Poitiers (d. 1154)

A Master in Paris and perhaps in Chartres, Gilbert of Poitiers addresses the Trinity in his commentaries on Boethius' *Opuscula sacra*. He took from the *Hebdomades* a metaphysical distinction between the 'that which is' (*quod est*) or 'subsistent' (*subsistens*: the existing thing in its concrete individuality) and the 'that by which it is' (*quo est*) or 'subsistence' (*subsistentia*: the formal principle that makes it be that which it is). Gilbert radicalizes this distinction and makes it the universal key to a new and coherent philosophical (p. 172) system. In theology, he also distinguishes a *quod est* ('God') and a *quo est* (his 'divinity'). Thus, one can say that each person is 'God', although their common divinity is unique. This distinction shocked two of his archdeacons and then William of Saint Thierry and Bernard of Clairvaux. At the Council of Reims in 1148, Gilbert defends his orthodoxy in front of Eugene III. Of four suspected theses, only the first is disapproved, even though it was not established that it faithfully expressed Gilbert's thought: 'The divine essence, substance and nature, that one calls "divinity", "goodness", "wisdom", "greatness of God", etc., is not God, but the form by which God exists'. Pope Eugene III required that no reason separate the nature from the person and that the divine essence be predicated of God in the nominative ('God is the divine essence') as well as in the ablative ('God is *through* the divine essence').

Peter Lombard (d. 1160)

Among the numerous twelfth-century doctrinal syntheses, Peter Lombard's *Sentences* were by far the most influential, because of their effort to harmonize the whole of the tradition around a moderate doctrine that was principally Augustinian. The first of the four books addresses God one and triune. It examines the processions of the Son then of

the Holy Spirit and the names employed in Trinitarian theology, arranged in six categories. In spite of its general moderation, two of its theses provoked debate.

In the lost *De unitate Trinitatis*, Joachim of Fiore reprimanded him for having written that 'neither has the Father engendered the divine substance, nor has the divine essence engendered the Son, neither has the divine essence engendered the divine essence', arguing that, if there existed in God a 'thing' (i.e. the 'substance') that is not affected by the relations of origin, this 'thing' is added to the three persons, thus introducing a quaternity. In reality, the Lombard rejected statements such as 'the Father engendered the divine essence', 'the divine essence engendered the Son', 'the essence engendered the essence', in order to avoid coming to the conclusion that the Father engendered himself. Indeed, Peter knew that Augustine affirmed that God the Father 'engendered that which he is himself'. But he interpreted it by saying that 'God the Father engendered from himself ... the Son, who is that which is the Father'. Against Joachim's charges, the fourth Lateran Council in 1215 proclaimed the orthodoxy of the Lombard. Another controversial point from the *Sentences* is their identifying charity and the Holy Spirit:

the Holy Spirit is the love of the Father and of the Son, by which they love each other mutually and love us. Moreover, the same Holy Spirit is the love or charity by which we love God and neighbour. When this charity is in us in such a manner that it makes us love God and neighbour, then one says that the Holy Spirit is sent or given to us; and the one who loves the love itself by which he loves his neighbour, in so doing he loves God, for love itself is God, that is, the Holy Spirit.

Certainly, charity, namely the Holy Spirit, is completely unalterable in itself, but it grows or diminishes in the heart of the person who receives it. It is therefore necessary to (p. 173) distinguish the presence of the Holy Spirit from its possession. Although being everywhere, it is neither possessed by everyone nor by irrational creatures. Against those who say that the charity of the Father and the Son is not the same charity by which men love God and neighbour, but is its source, Peter responds that charity can come from the Holy Spirit while being identical with it, since the Holy Spirit gives itself to men. Finally addressing the objections that affirm that charity is an affection, a movement, or a virtue of the intellect, he responds that charity is immutable, but that the mind is affected and moved by it as if it were a virtue. Never officially condemned, this thesis was nonetheless set aside by the thirteenth-century doctors, even if they limited its scope, as did Bonaventure.

2. The Monks

If the principal authors are Cistercians, the black monks also meditated upon the Trinity. In particular the Benedictine Rupert of Deutz (d. 1129) left an immense exegetical opus. His *De sancta Trinitate et operibus eius* is a commentary on the entirety of Scripture following a Trinitarian reading. The Trinity manifests itself throughout the history of salvation, in such a way that the works of the three divine persons correspond to three ages: creation (Father); from the fall of Adam to the Passion of Christ (Son); and from the resurrection of Christ to the end of time (Holy Spirit). This concern to reunite Trinitarian theology and salvation history reappears in the work of Joachim of Fiore.

William of Saint Thierry (d. 1148)

A former student of Anselm of Laon, Benedictine abbot, then Cistercian monk and friend of St Bernard, William of Saint Thierry fought the theories of Abelard, wrote an original synthesis on the Trinity, and meditated upon the assimilation of man to God one and triune. His *Disputatio adversus Petrum Abaelardum* refutes the identification of the three persons with the attributes 'power—wisdom—goodness'. In the name of divine 'pure simplicity', he affirms that for God to be powerful, to know and to will are the same thing. He also rebukes Abelard for only considering the Holy Spirit in its action *ad extra* with creatures. This oversight confuses the two processions of God: on the one hand, of nature, in God; and on the other, of grace, toward creation.

Building upon the Latin and Greek Fathers, the *Aenigma fidei* proposes a vigorous synthesis of faith in the Trinity, insisting that this part of the Christian doctrine is a mystery. William distinguishes (1) the essential names (*ad se*) affirming the indivisibility of the divine nature, (2) the essential and relative names referring to the relations between God and creation, and (3) the names that are proper to a person and yet relative (*ad aliquid*) in that each is related to the others (*ad invicem*). For the first ones, the simplicity of God is such that each divine attribute signifies the whole divine essence and can be (p. 174) indistinctly predicated of the substance or of each person. In the divine essence, there is thusly 'neither singularity nor diversity'. Concerning the second ones, they imply in God neither mutability nor separation of persons, but the three create, govern, etc. as a unique creator or governor. Regarding the third group, William redefines 'person' as 'that which is made known with certainty because of its form'. The persons are 'three proper and relative realities' (*propria relativa*); while being relative, they are nonetheless 'something *ad se*', without being three essences. The intra-Trinitarian life founds the history of salvation *ad extra*, 'from the Father'. In creation,

redemption, or prayer, the divine action is exercised 'from the Father', 'by the Son', and 'in the Holy Spirit', the link of charity uniting between them the three persons.

The *Epistola ad fratres de Monte-Dei* (*Letter to the Brothers of Mont-Dieu*) contains the elements of a 'Trinitarian mysticism'. In the ascension toward God, William distinguishes (1) pure faith, founded on authority alone; (2) 'science' or 'the reason of faith', which, under the control of faith, manifests that which it contains in seed; and (3) the 'sense of the divinity' or the 'taste of wisdom', communicated by the Holy Spirit, where the soul knows God no longer by reason, but by a loving experience that anticipates the beatific vision. From one state to another, man is progressively divinized and further united to the three persons, through his three faculties of memory, reason, and will. In the third state, the soul is united to the Holy Spirit who unites the Father and the Son in a mutual love and reciprocal knowledge, so that 'in an ineffable and unthinkable manner, man merits being of God, if not God' (*Dei, non Deus*) and 'that which God is by nature, man is by grace'. William thereby develops 'a theory of mystical experience that is *essentially* Trinitarian and an approach to the Trinity that is *essentially* mystical' (Brooke 1959: 120).

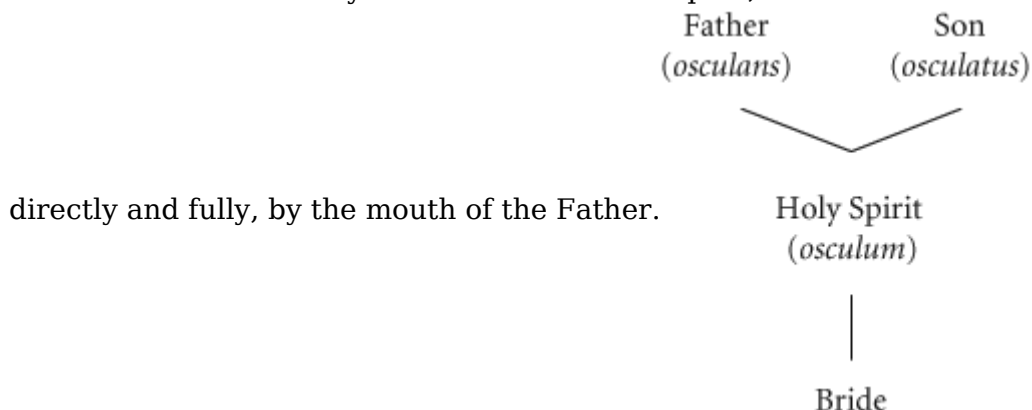
Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153)

A friend of William, Bernard has a doctrine that is similar but more affective. Like him, Bernard insists on the divine unity, which is indistinguishable for him from the charity that links the three persons.

Before the Council of Sens, Bernard sent intense correspondence to the Pope and the prelates to warn them about Abelard, whom he accuses of 'disembowelling the mysteries of God', of 'evacuating the merit of the faith', of being 'ready to render reasons for everything, even that which is above reason', and of daring 'to do it against reason and against faith'. His principal grievance is that Abelard 'sets up degrees and levels in the Trinity' with his defective model of the bronze seal or his use of the triad 'power/wisdom/goodness'. God is 'that concerning which one can think nothing greater'. And yet, it is greater to be supremely great in whole rather than in part. Each person is therefore the whole of that which is substance, the whole of that which are the two others. Therefore it is false to ascribe 'properly and specially' power to the Father, wisdom to the Son, and goodness to the Holy Spirit. It is not that Bernard critiques the link between the three attributes and the three persons: this link is found several times in his writings. But he rebukes Abelard's (p. 175) affirmation that the three attributes are 'properties' of the persons. The names of power, wisdom, and goodness, being names *ad se* (absolute such as 'divinity'), are substantial and common. On the contrary, names *ad alium* (relative such as 'engendered') are personal and singular. If power is ascribed 'properly' to the Father

because he alone exists by himself, the same reasoning demands that he be ascribed 'properly' wisdom and goodness as well. Bernard goes so far as to say that Abelard lacks logic—a paradoxical reproach of this 'new Aristotle'! The doctrine of Gilbert is moreover attacked in *Sermon 80* on the *Canticle of Canticles* and in *De consideratione* in the name of the supreme divine simplicity.

In his *Sermons on the Canticle of Canticles*, commenting on the first verse, Bernard delivers a lesson on the Trinity in which the literary beauty rivals its theological finesse. The Spouse of the Canticle says 'Oh that he would kiss me with a kiss of his mouth' (Cant. 1:1). This kiss is first identified with the union of the two natures in Christ. Next it signifies the person of the Holy Spirit, who is the kiss of the Father and the Son. Indeed, each kiss proceeds from the two persons who embrace, as the Holy Spirit itself proceeds from the first two divine persons. Moreover, uniting two mouths, it is a sign of charity, peace, and unity, even as the Holy Spirit is the love of the Father and the Son and as it spreads, according to St Paul, charity in our hearts. Finally, constituted of a breath, it recalls the very name of 'Spirit' and this breath that the resurrected Christ breathed on his disciples saying: 'Receive the Holy Spirit' (Jn 20:22). When therefore the Bride, addressing the Bridegroom, asks him: 'Oh that he would kiss me with a kiss of his mouth', she addresses Christ and asks that the Father give the Spirit, who is also revelation of the Father and of the Son. This kiss is received on two lips: one for understanding, the other for loving that which is revealed. The two are necessary in order to receive the knowledge of the divine mysteries. Thus, a biblical and poetic image of great density recapitulates how the three divine persons—the Father who kisses, the Son who is kissed, and the Holy Spirit who is the kiss—are distinguished and united in the unique movement of uncreated charity; and how the soul's created charity is united to God's uncreated charity, while being distinct from it: for if the soul participates in the flow of love of the Father and of the Son by the mediation of the Spirit, it is the Son alone who is kissed,



(p. 176) **Joachim of Fiore (d. 1202)**

A Benedictine monk, abbot, and reformer, then Cistercian and finally founder of the order of Fiore, Joachim produced a complex exegetical opus, rendered obscure by the presence of apocryphal writings. We have already mentioned that Joachim fought the Trinitarian doctrine of Peter Lombard, whom he reproached for positing the divinity as exterior to the Trinity. Moreover, he himself represented the Trinity in the form of the *Psalterium* of David, that is, as a trapezoid the shortest side of which is very narrow: the Father is the summit, the Son and the Spirit are the extremities of the base, and the common substance in the centre of the instrument is represented in the form of a circle corresponding to his table of harmony. The divinity is thus interior to the Trinity.

Joachim is also famous for his Trinitarian conception of history. Prolonging and modifying the typological method of scriptural explanation, he observes, between the personalities and the events of the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the time of the Church, certain proportional 'concordances' or analogies (often supported by calculations). For those who know how to read it, the Bible offers therefore keys for understanding the present and the future. The history of salvation is punctuated by three ages (*status*). The age of the Father, the period of nature and Mosaic law, corresponds to the Old Testament and the order of *coniugati* (laymen). The age of the Son, period of grace, corresponds to the New Testament and the order of clergy. After persecution by the Antichrist (that Joachim thought to be close) a third age will come, period 'of greater grace', peace, and freedom: it corresponds to the order of the spirituals, that is, of monks. Following this there will be the attack of Gog and Magog and finally the second coming of Christ to judge mankind. This Trinitarian conception of history wielded a deep influence on the Franciscan order, from Bonaventure to the Fraticelli.

3. Masters and Religious: The Victorines

Founded before 1113 by William of Champeaux, former teacher of Abelard, Saint Victor of Paris is an abbey of canons regular, at once clergy and contemplatives, whose encyclopaedic humanism is ordered toward a deeply Trinitarian Christian wisdom.

Hugh of Saint Victor (d. 1141)

Hugh's doctrine on the Trinity is principally expressed in the *De tribus diebus*, the *Sententiae de divinitate*, and the *De sacramentis* (I, 2–3). The first work proves the

existence of God, his unity, and his immutability and, finally, using a psychological analogy inspired by Augustine, the Trinity of persons. He attributes—probably before (p. 177) Abelard—power, wisdom and goodness to the three divine persons, but without insisting and as if in passing. The contemplation of the immensity, beauty, and utility of creatures awakens mankind to fear, truth, and charity and thus makes shine on us the day of the Father, that of the Son, and that of the Holy Spirit.

Later revisiting the issue, Hugh elaborates a doctrine of Trinitarian appropriations, mindful to differentiate his theology from the Abelardian theories. Among the ‘primordial causes’ that govern creation, the first is the divine will or goodness, accompanied by wisdom and power. Power, wisdom, and goodness: all divine attributes lead to these three, which encompass the whole divine substance. They form therefore a sort of trinity, being at once three and one, without being the divine persons, since they arise from the divine substance, equally shared by the three persons. Nonetheless, the ‘Catholic faith’, that is, the Christian tradition, ‘has assigned power to the Father, wisdom to the Son, and goodness to the Holy Spirit’, for two reasons. First, in order to correct the anthropomorphic conceptions that human language conveys: the names ‘Father’, ‘Son’, and ‘Holy Spirit’ can evoke the impotence of the aged, the immaturity of youth, and the ruthlessness of strictness. Applying the substantial attributes to the three persons combats the excesses of human language. The second reason is more positive. Between power, wisdom, and goodness, there exist the same relations of procession as between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In each triad, the first term does not depend on any other. The second term is engendered from the first. The third proceeds from those that precede it. Finally, while distinguishing each one from the other, the three terms do not converge any less to unity. There is thus a structural analogy between the triad ‘power—wisdom—goodness’ (1b) and the Trinity of persons (1a). Moreover, the three divine attributes (1b) are reflected in the created perfections of visible creatures (3: immensity, beauty, and utility), while the three divine persons (1a) have as an image the three faculties of the human soul (2: mind (*mens*), intellect, and will). God, mankind, and the visible universe are therefore structured in a triadic manner, following degrees for decreasing resemblance.

1a Divine persons	2 human soul	1b Divine substance	3 visible creatures
Father	mind (<i>mens</i>)	power	immensity
Son	intellect	wisdom	beauty
Holy Spirit	goodness/will	goodness	utility

Achard of Saint Victor (d. 1171)

A master, abbot of Saint Victor, then bishop of Avranches, Achard is the author of a *De Trinitate* or *De unitate et pluralitate creaturarum*. Fragmentary and discovered late, the text expresses powerful originality. Fascinated by the metaphysical question of the one (p. 178) and the many, he demonstrates by several arguments that in God a true plurality exists, from which comes every created plurality. (1) The unity and plurality of creatures implies that in God there exists a unity and a plurality adhering to this unity. (2) The imperfect resemblance of creatures to the Creator implies that beyond them a perfect resemblance of God exists, equal to God, therefore in God. (3) The beauty coming from the aggregate of several realities surpasses each of them separately. But such beauty is greater in spirits than in bodies and greater in the uncreated spirit than in created ones. It must therefore exist in God. (4) An analogous argument is sketched while replacing beauty by charity, which can only be found between several subjects; but 'we are unable to conceive of anything better or more delightful'. This plurality is constituted by persons, who are distinguished among themselves as being Unity, Equal, and Equality, fittingly called 'Father', 'Son', and 'Holy Spirit' (I, 19–36). We can see here, in embryo, one of Richard's arguments on the same subject. Nevertheless, Achard's enhances more audaciously the value of plurality. Far from being a mark of finitude or a degradation of the primordial unity, it has its origin in God, where it receives its perfection. Since God is alone true unity, he also is true plurality. Between God and creatures, the ontological gradation articulates itself, not by a progressive division of unity into plurality, but by a descent from God, truly one and plural, toward realities that are neither truly one nor truly plural.

Richard of Saint Victor (d. 1173)

A master, sub-prior, then prior of Saint Victor, Richard composed two famous works (known as *Beniamin minor* and *Beniamin maior*) on a type of contemplation that unites intelligence and affectivity. People spoke in his regard of a 'speculative mysticism'. In a certain way, his *De Trinitate* is an application and coronation of it. Here he teaches the contemplation of the principal mystery of the Christian faith using 'necessary reasons' in the tradition of St Anselm.

From unity to mutual love ('co-dilection')

In book III, Richard demonstrates that the one God is also three persons, by using three analogous arguments, founded on the notions of charity, beatitude, and glory. Their common mainspring is to apply to God a principle of maximal perfection. Since God is the

supreme good, it is always fitting to attribute the best to him. 'Nothing is better than charity, nothing is more perfect' (VI, 2). Since charity involves tending toward the other, there is in God a plurality of persons. Likewise, the exigency of maximal felicity or glory constrains us to admit the existence in God of an equal, to whom he communicates every good. Supreme majesty could not be limited by solitary greed. The same demand of maximal perfection implies the equality of persons and their perfect unity of substance. Richard shows that this plurality is, more precisely, a 'Trinity'. Indeed, these equal persons are at least three. For charity, felicity, and glory are greater when two who love each other associate unanimously a third to the plenitude of their love, felicity, and glory, without prejudice to the equality of persons. Love (*dilectio*) becomes the shared love of a (p. 179) third (*condilectio*), each person being in relation with the other two by a double and reciprocal affection.

The Existential of Richard

Another of Richard's novelties resides in his critique of the Boethian definition of person, which obscures the distinction between 'substance' (response to the question 'What?') and 'person' (response to the question 'Who?'). He resorts to the term *existentia*, which he gives a new meaning by analysing it thusly. '-sistentia' designates that which the thing is substantially. 'Ex-' specifies the relation of origin that defines this thing, that is to say, if it has being because of itself or from another source. The *existentia* varies therefore: by quality and origin for human beings, who have neither the same substance nor the same parents; by quality only for angels, who are all created directly by God; and finally by origin only for God, since the three divine persons are consubstantial but are different because of their relations of origin. The word '*existentia*' applies both to the divine substance (it is thereby common) and to the divine persons (it is thereby incommunicable). With this said, he replaces the Boethian definition of 'person' by a new one that can apply to God. The person is 'an incommunicable *existentia* of divine nature'.

Examining then the relations of origin, Richard affirms the need to posit a person who exists because of itself, in order to avoid an infinite regress. Such a person is unique; if not it would be a composition or a participation in another, prior reality. From this first person, existing because of itself, the others derive in a way that is (a) immediate, (b) mediate, or (c) immediate and mediate at once. The immediate procession necessarily precedes the other two. The immediate-mediate procession is required in order that there be *condilectio*. On the contrary, a purely mediated procession is excluded. It would introduce inequality. All the possible processions being thus exhausted, there is no place for a fourth person, since the divine persons are distinguished by their relations of origin alone. These persons are therefore three in number. The one exists because of itself. The second draws its existence from the first. The third draws it from the other two. These three persons are given the names of 'Father', 'Son', and 'Holy Spirit'.

The Trinitarian 'Appropriations'

In Trinitarian theology, Richard forges the concept of Trinitarian 'appropriations' (almost at the same time as the *Sententiae divinitatis*) and completes the theory already sketched by Hugh. The appropriation consists in taking a common term, therefore substantial, in order to apply it more particularly to one of the three divine persons, because of the fittingness or the greater affinity between this common notion and the person in question. It refers therefore literally to *appropriare* or to 'render proper', to move from the common to the proper. Since this word also seems influenced by its quasi-homonym *appropriare*, 'to become close', appropriation is also in some way an 'approximation'. As Richard explains in the *De tribus appropriatis personis in deitate* (a non-Richardian title), the appropriation of common terms, practised by the Scriptures and the Fathers, aims to give mankind a certain access to that which otherwise surpasses natural knowledge. The appropriated names neither explain nor dissipate the mystery, but rather give an inkling of the mystery in an indirect (p. 180) way, as in a mirror, while waiting for the beatific vision. Concerning the triad 'power—wisdom—goodness', Richard takes up a Hugonian and Abelardian explanation: the three divine perfections are united between themselves by relations of origin that are analogous to those of the three persons. There is therefore between the triad of attributes and the Trinity of persons not identification, but an analogy of structure and proportion.

In his doctrine of appropriation as in his notion of *existentia*, Richard searches to gather together these two poles of the Trinitarian mystery, namely the unity of substance and the plurality of persons, by distinguishing them, certainly, but also by articulating them and by drawing them together as much as possible. Thus, the doctrine of this speculative thinker, who is also a contemplative, is at the meeting point between the current of the masters and that of the Cistercians.

(Translated from the French by Craig Stephen Titus.)

Suggested Reading

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