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TOWARD CREATURELY VALUE: GOD'S INNER
PROGRESSIVE LIFE AND THE INTRINSIC
VALUE OF CREATURES IN
THOMAS AQUINAS

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Tyler Daniel Majors
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Tyler Daniel Majors

Read and Approved by:

Gregg R. Allison

Date _____

To Peregrine Lux Majors

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PREFACE

My intrigue for the works of Thomas Aquinas was first kindled in an undergraduate course on medieval philosophy. This fire was rekindled in a graduate course on the doctrine of God, as I patiently worked through portions of the *Summa Theologica*. Through these experiences as well as living a life close to the natural world, I have meditated often concerning the matters of this thesis. Yet, in this academic frame I have had the privilege of employing scholastics metaphysics for the purpose of living well within God's good world.

To my benefit, I had the exceptional privilege of obtaining a MDiv from SBTS, as well as this current degree. I am sincerely humbled to have had the fortunate opportunity to study under such excellent men and professors during my time as a student. In particular, I am indebted to Dr. Brian Austin for introducing me to Thomas in that medieval philosophy course, and to Dr. Tyler Wittman for further exposing and challenging me to read Thomas. I am grateful to Torey Teer and Dr. Gregg Allison for a steady flow of wisdom, insight, and editing throughout this writing journey.

As I began this ThM, I did not anticipate the weight of challenges that my family would take on in addition to my academic studies. Each person within my dear family has been a delightful encouragement to me in despairing moments, especially my wife Katie, whose covenant love is patient and content, and also my young children, whose cheerfulness is impenetrable.

Tyler Daniel Majors

Rutledge, Tennessee

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Human beings by nature desire to understand themselves and their world. Such a desire leads to a realization of our human plight and fickle existence. The angst of this realization provokes one to discern the essential value or the lack thereof of creatures, namely human beings. Though it seems a virtuous pursuit, yet without a divine solidifier of good and creaturely goodness,¹ what then is obtainable, if anything at all? The distinction to be made is whether human beings have value within themselves (i.e., intrinsic or inherent) or have no intrinsic value and confer their own value on the world and themselves. Simply stated, do creatures have intrinsic value, and if so, what is the basis for this value? Furthermore, how is it that creation out of nothing harmonizes with creaturely value.

Seeking an answer to the question requires an outward gaze, not an inward concentration. Assuming the createdness of the creature, the answer will scarcely lie within the subject. Rather, the createdness of the creature forces one to investigate the Creator, who bestows being on all things. When articulating creation out of nothing, John Webster states that it is the quest to recognize “all things with reference to God, the first topic being God’s immanent life.”² Thus, God, as the ultimate source of all creatures, is the first subject, and identifying the reality and goodness of creatures is the second subject. Yet, the endeavor proceeds, as Webster makes clear, from God’s immanent life,

¹ In this thesis I will use creaturely goodness, value of creatures, and creaturely value interchangeably unless noted otherwise.

² John Webster, *God without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology: Vol. 1, God and the Works of God* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2018), 99.

that is, God’s inner life in distinction from God’s economic life or God’s outer works. The inner life of the triune God is the source of all being and thus the primary focus when seeking to articulate creation out of nothing. Although, in this thesis, I am arguing for a particular end regarding creaturely goodness. The originator—who is the triune God—of all such creatures remains primary. Thus, “the repleteness of God’s life” and the necessary metaphysical relations will be focal. In turn, the culmination will consist of dogmatic considerations of God’s “turn toward that which is not God.”³

While the burden of this paper is primarily to paint a portrait of God’s blessed life flowing outward into the existence of creatures, the return journey of creatures to God is of demonstrable significance. The creature cannot be construed without a source, yet when considering God’s works, Thomas Aquinas argues that the creature speaks of “His wisdom” and “enables us to admire and reflect upon” it.⁴ Yet for Aquinas, the significance does not end here but terminates in error or truth about the nature of God. Thomas states that “errors about creatures sometimes lead one astray from the truth of faith, so far as the errors are inconsistent with true knowledge of God.”⁵ Thus, the primary subject regarding creaturely goodness and its origin remains the Creator himself, though with deference provided for the creature itself and its nature in relation to the Creator as its source and the determiner of its existence.

With the above groundwork in place, the argument is apropos. In this thesis, I will argue that creaturely goodness is grounded in God’s simple and free being as these perfections relate to God’s act of creation out of nothing.⁶ God’s simple and free being

³ John Webster, *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics II* (New York: T&T Clark, 2016), 198.

⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book Two: Creation*, trans. James F. Anderson, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), 30.

⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 32.

⁶ In this thesis, I will use *creatio ex nihilo* and creation of out nothing interchangeably unless noted otherwise.

sustains the reality of beings other than himself who were brought into existence from non-existence.

The outline for the present thesis is as follows. In chapter 2, I will forward this thesis by situating Thomas Aquinas's account of creation as the framework for the thesis. In doing so, I will demonstrate the mutually informing nature of Aquinas's account of creation as it relates to God's inner processive life. In chapter 3, I will transition to an articulation of God's inner processive life as the origin and end of all created life. In chapter 4, I will demonstrate that the procession of creatures from God rests and flows from God's inner processive life. I will do so by elucidating that God wills his own goodness as the end of all things and that all creatures from God participate in God. In conclusion, I will provide a summary of the chapters and thesis argumentation. The methodology of the thesis is historical and theological. The historical methodology rests on Thomas Aquinas's account of creation, God's being, perfections, and trinitarian relations, which are primarily derived from the *Summa Theologica*. The theological methodology derives from dogmatic reflection and deliberation of Aquinas's theological account and through the lenses of Aquinas's interpreters.⁷

Before approaching Thomas Aquinas, an orienting look at John Webster and creation out of nothing will act as a primer. While Webster discusses creation out of nothing, he speaks of modern theological tendencies of "misperceptions and misapplications" of the doctrine. For stimulating such tendencies, Webster chides both "proponents as well as despisers."⁸ Yet, what exactly are these misperceptions and misapplications? Webster plainly identifies one in particular as "the anxiety that the pure non-reciprocal gratuity of God's creation of all things out of nothing debases the creature,

⁷ In addition to the historical and theological methodology consideration, a biblical methodological section would further ground the concept of creaturely value, though a biblical and hermeneutical elucidation of the matter is beyond the parameters of the present thesis.

⁸ Webster, *God without Measure*, 1:100.

for a being so radically constituted by another as to be nothing apart from that other is a being evacuated of intrinsic worth.”⁹ The identification of this particular incongruence between creation out of nothing and the intrinsic worth of creatures can seem imperceptive at first and unrelated at least. Do these concepts of creation out of nothing and creaturely value have mutually informed data points, or ought they be relegated to distinct loci within the task of dogmatics? Disagreeing with the latter, Webster intimates the mutually informing nature of considering the Creator of creation such that the study of creation ought never be reduced to “teaching about created things, without adequate consideration of the creator and his work.”¹⁰ Creation necessitates creator as origin and source. Thus, the connective tissue between loci is thick. And for Webster, it seems that the emphasis on created things to the detriment of significance on the creator only begins to heighten the anxiety of debased creaturely worth.¹¹ Webster concedes that one can easily slip into proposing that *creatio ex nihilo* could easily devolve into creation as *nihil*. Yet, he suggests the negative assertion of *ex nihilo* stimulates a positive construal of God’s creation of being that is not God. Creatures “are not nothing, but participate in the good of being.”¹²

As seen above, the topic of creation out of nothing in recent scholarship among Reformed scholars have received fresh treatment and defense through a renewed interest in dogmatics. Within this renewed interest, some scholars have intimated the connection between God’s freedom and simplicity in regards to creation,¹³ while others have derived alternative models concerning this relationship.¹⁴ The alternative model is most pressing

⁹ Webster, *God without Measure*, 1:100.

¹⁰ Webster, *God without Measure*, 1:100.

¹¹ Aquinas seems to agree with this sentiment. Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* 32-34.

¹² Webster, *God Without Measure*, 1:106.

¹³ John Webster, *God Without Measure*, 1:99.

¹⁴ Oliver D Crisp, “A Parsimonious Model of Divine Simplicity,” *Modern Theology* 35, no. 3

in regards to divine simplicity, which some have recently qualified.¹⁵ Such issues are of indispensable importance, and the conclusions of which are inextricably connected with creation ex nihilo and creaturely value.

The inextricable nature of these doctrines converges, first, at God and his simple and free being, who creates beings other than himself out of nothing. The extricable nature may at first seem obtuse. Though cursorily stated, if God is not simple, then God's being has the same metaphysical nature as the creatures he has made. Second, if God is not free to create or not create, then God's act of creation is essentially necessary and not contingent on God's freedom.¹⁶ Lastly, creation out of nothing supplies the metaphysical prerequisite for creaturely value.¹⁷ The simple and free divine being creates from nothing beings who possess creaturely goodness. The connection between God and God's creation as intrinsically valuable within Aquinas's theological system is the topic to which I turn now.

(July 2019): 558-73.

¹⁵ Adam J. Johnson, *Atonement: A Guide for the Perplexed*, (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2015); Crisp, "A Parsimonious Model of Divine Simplicity."

¹⁶ Webster, *God without Measure*, 1:110.

¹⁷ Webster, *God without Measure*, 1:113.

CHAPTER 2

THOMAS AQUINAS ON CREATIO EX NIHILO AND THE INNER PROCESSIONAL LIFE OF GOD

I will in this chapter begin with an explication of Aquinas's assertion of creation out of nothing to provide the fundamental structure for the discussion of the doctrine's relation to creaturely value. Constructing the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas begins his discussion of creation in question 44, which follows directly after his discussion of the missions of the divine persons.¹ Aquinas begins by demonstrating the necessary relationship between the existence of all things outside of God to God himself and his agency. In article 1, Aquinas states, "It must be said that every being in any way existing is from God."² Such is the case due to the fact that "God is essentially the self-subsisting Being" and as such is simply one in his essence. "Therefore all beings apart from God are not their own being, but are beings by participation."³ Thus, all beings are bound to God in their essential existence since God himself is the only simple one whose being and existence are one.⁴

Aquinas continues on the procession of creatures from God by identifying that God himself is the universal cause of all material substance. Thus, for Aquinas, God is the origin of all primary matter whether it be of substantial or accidental form. Also,

¹ Later in the chapter there will be an analysis of the relation between the eternal relations *ad intra* and the divine missions *ad extra* to the divine act of creation.

² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae Prima Pars, 1-49*, ed. The Aquinas Institute, trans. Fr Laurence Shapcote OP (Lander, WY: Emmaus Academic, 2012), q. 44, art. 1 co. All quotes from the *Summa* will be derived from this edition unless otherwise noted.

³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 44, art 1, co.

⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 3, art 4.

when culminating question 44, Aquinas identifies God not only as the universal cause of all things but further as the final cause of all things. God in his creative agency does not act for or from need, such “does not belong to God.”⁵ In regards to all things that are not God, he is only agent and not patient. Thus, God “alone is the most perfectly liberal giver, because he does not act for his own profit, but only for his own goodness.”⁶ God then for the sake of his own goodness conducts agency toward all that is not himself. Thus, God, from whom all existence flows and is derived, is the final and universal cause of all creatures. These creatures then are created from God and have their ground of existence in God. Furthermore, for Aquinas, not only is God the origin of creatures and their existential ground but also the “divine goodness is the end of all things.”⁷

Now that I have considered question 44, a few summary deductions will benefit the analysis. First, it is clear that for Aquinas, God is the final ground of all being. Second, since God is the ground of all being, being and existence are simply one for God. Third, God is the final cause and ultimate end for all of God’s creatures since the divine goodness is the *telos* for all that is not God. With these deductions in place, the analysis will continue by discussing question 45 of the *Summa*.

After Aquinas details the procession of all creatures from God in question 44, he then picks up the doctrine of creation directly in question 45. Here, Aquinas articulates the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* in terms that necessarily connect the divine act of creation to creation from nothing. In rejection of any such supposition of pre-created substance or infinite regress from which all things were made, Aquinas concludes, “not-being is nothing.”⁸ The divine act of creation is not simply the bringing of certain things

⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 44, art. 4, ad. 1.

⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 44, art. 4, ad. 1.

⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 44, art. 4, co.

⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 45, art. 1, resp.

into existence but the creation of all such manner of existing things that are not God. Furthermore, Aquinas argues that the creation of whole substance is the greatest possible act of creative power, not simply the creation of substantial or accidental form. Thus, God is the creator of all existence in regards to the whole substance of material being.

In sum, Aquinas emphasizes two concepts in question 45 pertinent to the present thesis. First, the act of creation is solely the act of God, which is by necessity a creation from nothing. Second, Aquinas rejects the supposition of an infinite regress of unmade substance, further demonstrating the necessity of creation out of nothing concerning the divine act.

Divine Processions, Divine Missions, Divine Relations, and Exitus/Reditus in Aquinas

Having set the structure for Aquinas's doctrine of creation, I will now further explicate Aquinas's doctrine vis-à-vis recent Thomist scholars. The section in the *Summa* prior to Aquinas's treatment of creation is the question on divine missions, which inextricably connects to his handling of question 45. The organic connection between divine missions and the divine act of creation is precisely where Dominic Legge initiates his analysis of Aquinas. Legge even states that the truths of eternal processions and missions "stand at the center of Aquinas's account of the whole of theology."⁹ Thus, in reference to creation, the processions of creatures from God in the act of creation flow from God's eternal processions. The eternal processions *ad intra* are the "cause and *ratio* of every other procession that comes forth *from* God."¹⁰ Thus, the eternal processions within God provide the ultimate ground and source for all creative acts outside (*ad extra*) of God. Such a scheme colors all of Aquinas's theology into a trinitarian mode.

⁹ Dominic Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology of St Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 11.

¹⁰ Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology of St Thomas Aquinas*, 11, quoting from Thomas Aquinas's *Commentary on the Sentences*, I, *Sent.* pr.

Aquinas takes creation primarily, just as the diversity of persons flow from the unity of God, so too, the diversity of creatures flows from the divine processions.¹¹ As Gilles Emery succinctly argues, “one has to know about the procession of the divine persons in order fully to understand creation.”¹² Helpfully Emery offers counsel, namely that the path forward to God’s creative act and its intrinsic value begins at Aquinas’s concept of *exitus/reditus*. Here Aquinas builds his theology of the eternal processions as the ground for the *exitus* of all creatures from God and the *reditus* of all creatures back to God. The concept articulates the “circular motion by which goodness is diffused from God and returns to God.”¹³ Highlighting the result of this concept, Legge summarizes that the *exitus/reditus* model demonstrates how trinitarian processions “ground both creation and the Trinitarian dispensation of grace.”¹⁴

Taking the role of *exitus* first, Aquinas builds upon the schema, emphasizing the inner life of God. God’s immanent or inner life is the life of the eternal processions. These processions, as mentioned above, are the origin for all life flowing from God. The processions, in contrast to all that exists outside of God, are the dynamic reality of life within God’s very being.¹⁵ Thus, the whole of the processive action lies within the agent that is God.

Eternal Processions and Aquinas’s Speculative Trinitarian Grammar

To further elaborate on the role of *exitus* in Aquinas, it will necessary to offer a treatment of the eternal processions as he outlines them. The eternal processive action

¹¹ Gilles Emery and Francesca Aran Murphy, *The Trinitarian Theology of St Thomas Aquinas*, (Oxford ; UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), 343. See further, Gilles Emery, *La Trinité créatrice: Trinité et création dans les commentaires aux Sentences de Thomas d’Aquin et de ses précurseurs Albert le Grand et Bonaventure* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin 1995).

¹² Emery and Murphy, *The Trinitarian Theology of St Thomas Aquinas*, 344.

¹³ Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology of St Thomas Aquinas*, 12-13.

¹⁴ Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology of St Thomas Aquinas*, 13 (emphasis original).

¹⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 27, art. 1, co.

within God, for Aquinas, is detailed specifically in the nature of the trinitarian relations themselves. Aquinas, according to Tyler R. Wittman, offers a speculative grammar that enables and sustains a metaphysical framework that subsequently grounds the entirety of Aquinas's theological system.¹⁶ Aquinas arranges his speculative grammar around three metaphysical concepts: procession, relations of origin, and persons. These concepts explicate the one distinguishing mark of the divine persons, which for Aquinas are the relations of origin.¹⁷ The nature of an eternal procession is not causal as to promote the creatureliness of the Son or of the Holy Spirit. For the processions to be causal this would necessarily entail an action within God causing something outside of God. Though Aquinas reasons, "there must be an inward procession corresponding to the act remaining within the agent."¹⁸ As such, Aquinas comparatively suggests that this can be understood since an intelligible word proceeds from the speaker, yet the act remains within.¹⁹

After defining a divine procession as an act within God, Aquinas then names the first procession as generation.²⁰ The generative act within God is an intellectual act of understanding by which God speaks the word and the word is the Son. There is a distinction between God and the word as Aquinas makes clear, yet for God "the act of understanding and his existence are the same."²¹ Thus, God and the word are one and the same, since within the "divine existence are contained both the word intelligibly proceeding and the principle of the word, with whatever belongs to His perfection."²² So,

¹⁶ Tyler R. Wittman, *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 86.

¹⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 27, pr.

¹⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 27, art. 1, co.

¹⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 27, art. 1, co.

²⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 27, art. 2, co.

²¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 27, art. 2, co. See also I, q. 14, art. 4.

²² Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 27, art. 2, ad. 3.

Aquinas conceptualizes a distinction between God and his word according to the processive act, yet so too defines them as essentially the same according to the one divine being. Thus, Aquinas offers a conceptual distinction to further his trinitarian logic on the basis of his speculative metaphysical grammar.

Aquinas then moves from a consideration of the first processive act within God to then detail a second procession. Here Aquinas, reinforces the internal nature of the eternal processions, claiming, “we must observe that procession exists within God, only according to an action which does not tend to anything external, but remains in the agent itself.”²³ The internal and eternal action described by Aquinas is one of will. Utilizing his speculative trinitarian grammar, Aquinas adds to the intellectual procession within God, which concerns the word, and here details the procession of will, which he further defines as a procession of love. The eternal procession of love within God is an “operation of the will,” “whereby the object loved is in the lover.”²⁴ The act of will within God is precisely the procession of the Holy Spirit. Thus, Aquinas argues that there is a “distinction of order” between the two processions within God, first the procession of word, then the procession of love.²⁵ All such eternal and immanent activity of this sort take place within God. Though the descriptions provided by Aquinas offer speculative distinctions within God, he does not capitulate the unity of God, for he reminds the reader, “All that exists in God, is God.”²⁶ Thus, Aquinas utilizes a speculative trinitarian grammar to conceptually distinguish the persons of the trinity.

Aquinas then compares the processions within God to intellect in that the action of intellection remains within the person as they conduct the action. In reference to

²³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 27, art. 3, co.

²⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 27, art. 3, co.

²⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 27, art. 3, ad. 3.

²⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 27, art. 3, ad. 2.

God, the actions that remain within the agent are two: “the acts of intelligence and of will.”²⁷ The two acts mentioned correspond to the divine persons of the two processions within God. Aquinas names the divine persons according to their processive life: Word and Love. “God understands all things by one simple act; and by one act wills all things.”²⁸ The immanent act of God by which he knows himself and loves himself are the ways in which the processions are “denominated,” accordingly as God understands and loves His own “essence, truth and goodness.”²⁹ The single eternal act of God by which he understands himself is the procession or generation of the eternal Word, God the Son. Also, then the eternal act of God’s will is the “procession of love, by which the beloved is in the lover” where God understands himself through the eternal Word and, thus, loves himself through the Holy Spirit, “Love in person.”³⁰ The processive act of the Spirit for Aquinas is “the mutual love and nexus of the Father and the Son.”³¹

Divine Missions

Now that I have detailed Aquinas’s speculative grammar concerning God’s inner processive life, I will continue by documenting his conception of the divine missions. For Aquinas it is both the divine processions and the divine missions that account for the center of his theology. Dominic Legge helpfully articulates Aquinas’s paradigm, conveying that “the Son and the Holy Spirit *proceed* from one another in God, and are *sent* into the world.”³² Aquinas formulates the divine missions in question 43, expressing the reality of the divine missions in a twofold distinction. The first is the

²⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 27, art. 5, co.

²⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 27, art. 5, ad. 3.

²⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 27, art. 5, ad. 2.

³⁰ Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology of St Thomas Aquinas*, 15.

³¹ Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology of St Thomas Aquinas*, 15.

³² Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology of St Thomas Aquinas*, 11 (emphasis original).

“habitude of the one sent to the sender,” and the second relates “the one sent to the end whereto he is sent.”³³ Concerning the former, there is a “certain kind of procession of the one sent from the sender,” and as such “the mission of a divine person it is a fitting thing.”³⁴ Concerning the latter, Aquinas states that it is “a new way of existing in another.”³⁵

Some might suggest that this corroborates a change within God, though Legge notes that the divine mission within Aquinas’s paradigm neither makes God begin to be anywhere, nor cease to be anywhere that God was not already.³⁶ To precisely clarify between mission and procession, Aquinas notes that divine processions are eternal and refer to God’s immanent life, while divine missions are temporal in nature and constitute God’s economic life. Aquinas’s present distinction shows the changelessness within God and at the same time the change in respect to the creature.³⁷ Thus, the two indispensable elements concerning divine mission are the “person’s eternal procession” and the divine person’s relation to the creature, namely the created effect.³⁸

The former element of the divine mission has been considered above, though the second requires more treatment. Aquinas discusses the divine mission in relation to the eternal procession. The eternal/temporal distinction amply differentiates the two concepts, yet Aquinas moves further to state that the divine mission includes eternal procession and that there is an “addition of a temporal effect.”³⁹ So, it is the case that the divine person relates to his principle in an eternal way, yet this eternal relation has two

³³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 43, art. 1, co.

³⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 43, art. 1, co.

³⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 43, art. 1, co.

³⁶ Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology of St Thomas Aquinas*, 14.

³⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 43, art. 2.

³⁸ Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology of St Thomas Aquinas*, 15.

³⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 43, art. 3, ad. 3.

terms or ends. One end in the eternal and one end or terminus in the temporal. Thus, the eternal processions within God are related to the temporal missions outside of God in such a way that the processions are primary to and ground the temporal missions.⁴⁰

The temporal missions, then give rise to the created effect that resides in the creature and in no way within the Creator. There is change involved in relation to the temporal mission, though change only in the creature. Aquinas reasons, “The divine person may newly exist in anyone, or be possessed by anyone in time,” however, this “does not come from change in the divine person, but from change in the creature.”⁴¹ So for the divine person to be sent (mission) to the creature, the divine person then relates to the creature in a new mode or new relation.⁴² Such a concept from Aquinas is derived from question 13 and his treatment of mixed relations. The new mode or relation that exists between the divine person and the creature is new in the sense that “creatures are really related to God Himself; whereas in God there is no real relation to creatures, but a relation only in idea.”⁴³ Thus, the term relation is mixed in meaning when in reference from God to creatures, and from creatures to God. The former is real, though only real in the conceptual sense, while the latter is a real relation. For Aquinas this distinction allows the reality of a relation between God and the creature while maintaining the immutability within God’s essence. Having detailed Aquinas’s articulation of divine missions and mixed relations, I will now proceed by discussing his conception of relations within the inner life of God.

Divine Relations within God

To further explicate Aquinas’s theology of creation it is necessary to consider

⁴⁰ Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology of St Thomas Aquinas*, 17.

⁴¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 43, art. 3, ad. 2.

⁴² Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology of St Thomas Aquinas*, 18.

⁴³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 13, art. 7, co.

his treatment of the divine relations within the essence of God. As noted above, Aquinas's theology centers on God's eternal processions and temporal missions. Additionally, Aquinas adds to the conceptual frame of his theological metaphysics by elaborating on the relations within God's inner life. As such, these divine relations add another facet to his speculative grammar as it corresponds to the divine processions and missions.

In question 28 Aquinas details the nature of these divine relations. Aquinas seeks to establish the existence of a real relation within the essence of God, for he argues that without such a reality, Sabellianism is the conclusion.⁴⁴ Thus, for Aquinas the relations that exist within God are real, not merely "in our manner of understanding."⁴⁵ These relations, for Aquinas, establish the real distinction or denomination of each person within the trinity. The relations are the names of the persons. For the Father it is paternity and for the Son, filiation. Without these real relations, Aquinas argues, that God would simply not be Father or Son. Furthermore, these real relations are necessarily so, since they derive their conceptualization from the articulation of the divine processions. The divine processions and the real relations are in the "identity of the same nature," that is within the nature God.⁴⁶

Yet how is it that these real relations correspond to the divine essence? Aquinas succinctly argues that if anything is not the divine essence it is by necessity a creature. Though as he has argued, these relations are real relations within God and as such they truly belong to God. Since they belong to God properly then these relations exist in God and are identical with his essence, the relations differ however, in the mode of intelligibility. The difference is conceptual and aids the human intellect. Thus, he

⁴⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 28, art. 1, s.c.

⁴⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 28, art. 1, s.c.

⁴⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 28, art. 1, co.

concludes, “in God relation and essence do not differ from each other, but are one and the same.”⁴⁷

Since God’s internal relations are identical within the divine essence, how is it that God’s real relations correspond to the divine processions? As explained above there are, according to Aquinas, two and only two divine processions. These two divine processions give rise to two contrasting relations. The first is the “relation of the person proceeding from the principle.”⁴⁸ So the relation described here is the relation of the one who is proceeding. In terms of the procession of the word, which is generation, at the same time in terms of the relation it is filiation. Thus, in a similar manner the second relation corresponds to the “principle Himself.”⁴⁹ As such the second relation described refers to the Father, who is the principle or origin of the relation. The relation of the principle is paternity. In an analogous way the second procession, which is the procession of love, gives rise to the relation to the principle. The relation is the spiration, which refers to the procession of love, the Holy Spirit. Thus, the two divine processions give rise to the divine relations, which include, paternity, filiation, and spiration.⁵⁰ These processions and relations are the one and the same with the divine essence, yet they are distinguished in concept so that God’s unity and trinity are maintained.

The Unity of the Divine Essence

God’s trinity is fully displayed through the above discussion of Aquinas, though in his expression of the matter God’s unity can seem metaphysically disparate. Aquinas makes much of God’s inner life of pure act throughout his articulation of divine procession, missions, and relations. In doing so, Aquinas upholds God’s triune life in the

⁴⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 28, art. 2, co.

⁴⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 28, art. 4, co.

⁴⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 28, art. 4, co.

⁵⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 28, art. 4, co.

opposition to modalism, though how do these aspects of God's inner life coincide with God's unity? Aquinas begins his theology endeavor with such concerns in mind, dividing his theological arrangement into a threefold manner: the divine essence, the distinctions of the divine persons, and the procession of creatures from God.⁵¹

Such an arrangement demonstrates the interconnectedness of Aquinas's theology regarding these matters. The simple undivided essence of God informs the subsisting internal relations of procession, missions, relations, and personal distinction. And each of these theological formulations thus enlightens and grounds God's creative action of the world and its creatures. Adding a more recent metaphysical distinction, Gilles Emery utilizes the immanent/economic trinitarian distinction to further describe Aquinas's theological formulations. Such formulations characterize Aquinas's "neo-scholastic" conceptions of a "philosophical approach" and a "theological approach" to divine things.⁵² Such concepts for Aquinas render his speculative theological approach as an orderly account of the metaphysical notions at the foundation of the Christian faith.

So, for Aquinas God is one and God is triune. Aquinas formulates God as triune in his presentation of the divine processions, relations, missions, and personal distinctions. Each of these aspects are concerned under his theological approach. Yet, the philosophical approach brings the unity of God in focus. Aquinas articulates God's unity in relation to the triunity in terms of subsistence. For Aquinas, the subsistence of relation within the simple essence of God grounds the actuality of real relations within the triune life of God as well as promotes the unity of the divine essence. Aquinas expresses, "that in God essence is not really distinct from person; and yet that the persons are really distinguished from each other."⁵³ Thus, the term person signifies the subsisting relation

⁵¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 2, pr.

⁵² Emery and Murphy, *The Trinitarian Theology of St Thomas Aquinas*, 44.

⁵³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 39, art. 1, co.

within the divine essence.

Though is this a real distinction for Aquinas? Such a distinction is not a real difference for Aquinas, it is instead “only in our way of thinking.”⁵⁴ Thus, Aquinas institutes a speculative metaphysic to helpfully aid the understanding of God’s triune nature through his articulation of procession, missions, relations, and persons. And at the same time, he places all such metaphysical distinctions within the realm of the conceptual so as to sustain God’s perfect simplicity. In doing so, Aquinas maintains both God’s unity in the simple essence as well as the distinction of persons in the realm of subsistence.

Conclusion

I have in this chapter identified the foundational aspects of Aquinas’s doctrine of creation in questions 44 and 45. Also in this chapter, I detailed certain aspects of Aquinas’s speculative theology within his discussion of divine processions, missions, relations, and personal distinctions. For a rudimentary understanding of each of these concepts is necessary to apprehend a vision of Aquinas’s theology of creation. God is the source of creation and as such, a requisite knowledge of God is foundational to any further explication of the creaturely value of God’s creative act. Aquinas grounds his theology of creation on the fundamental principle of his *exitus/reditus* paradigm. God as the supreme good is diffused from God and returns to God in a circular motion. Such a paradigm “accounts for how the Trinitarian processions ground both creation and the *dispensation of sanctifying grace*.”⁵⁵ Furthermore, as Dominic Legge succinctly states, divine processions and divine missions “stand at the center of Aquinas’s account of the whole of theology.”⁵⁶ The processions and missions hold central value for Aquinas precisely because the very essence of God is bound up with the eternal processions.

⁵⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 39, art. 1, co.

⁵⁵ Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology of St Thomas Aquinas*, 13.

⁵⁶ Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology of St Thomas Aquinas*, 11.

God's inner life of eternal generation and eternal spiration is existence itself and is the fountain of all existence that is not God.

Demonstrating Aquinas's speculative grammar of God's inner life as the ground of God's outer works constitute the goal of this chapter. That is God's life of processions within are the fountain, the ground, the *ratio* (reason), for all of God's works *ad extra*. All such aspects are bound within Aquinas's *exitus/reditus* model. Thus, the trajectory of this present chapter has been to introduce the *exitus/reditus* paradigm to further demonstrate Aquinas's speculative theological grammar in the consideration of divine processions, divine mission, relations, personal distinctions, and God's simple unity. The analysis of Aquinas's speculative grammar benefits this thesis in that God's inner life is on display. For it is God's inner life that corresponds to and grounds God's outer works. Thus, it is essential to establish the nature of God's essence as he is in himself prior to analyzing God's work of creation. In short, all reality outside of God rests upon the divine processions within God. With this demonstration in place, I will proceed in the following chapter by examining Aquinas's perspective of the origin of creation and how God himself relates to his creation.

CHAPTER 3
GOD AS GOD IN REACTION TO THE PROCESSION
OF CREATURES

In the previous chapter I noted the source of all created things within the theology of Aquinas. The source of all created life is the inner processive life of God as it is detailed in and through Aquinas's speculative theological grammar. God's inner processive life is the source of all things that are not God. In this chapter I will give consideration to God in relation to himself as the creative agent. Such an endeavor will include a discussion of divine simplicity, God's freedom in creation, divine blessedness, a further explication of Aquinas's speculative grammar, and finally a consideration of divine self-correspondence. The concepts listed will further the thesis by helping to establish the metaphysical structure of Aquinas's conception of God and God's creative act.

**The God of the Creative Act: Aquinas on Divine
Existence and Essence**

To further analyze God as he is in himself and how it is that God relates to his creation, it will be necessary to ascertain the relationship of God's existence and essence. Aquinas begins his *Summa Theologica* in a threefold distinction with the first charter of inquiry being a philosophical theological approach to God. It is not the case that Aquinas merely suggests a metaphysical pontification of divine being, instead Aquinas seeks to apply metaphysical tools and philosophical rigor to the task of theology.⁵⁷ Within the first

⁵⁷ Gilles Emery and Francesca Aran Murphy, *The Trinitarian Theology of St Thomas Aquinas*, (Oxford; UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), 44.

movement of Aquinas's theological enterprise he desires to outline "whatever concerns the divine essence."⁵⁸ The two aspects that concern the essence of God that fundamentally pertain to God's relationship with his created world is divine existence and divine essence. Aquinas considers the latter in question 3 regarding the simplicity of God. Aquinas determines that there is no composition within God in relation to his divine essence. Succinctly stated, God is not distinct from his essence. God "is His very Godhead," and furthermore, "God is the same as His essence to nature."⁵⁹ Thus, for Aquinas God is simple, meaning that God is in no way composed of parts even to the extent that God is one with his essence.

Aquinas further demonstrates the simplicity of God in question 4 regarding divine existence. In philosophical fashion, Aquinas poses the objection that there is a conceptual distinction within God between the divine essence and existence. Yet, he renders the distinction null when he argues, "God is not only his own essence, as shown in the preceding article, but also His own existence."⁶⁰ Thus, God is simple in his being as his simplicity relates to the divine essence and existence.

Aquinas demonstrates God oneness with his essence and existence in several ways. First, God is in himself the first efficient cause. As such God has no causal relationship within himself or outside of himself, for either of these would imply a composition of some sort.⁶¹ Secondly, Aquinas argues that existence is the property that makes a thing actual. However, God is pure act within himself and thus has potential that may or may not become actual. The progression of potential to actuality solely resides in the creature not within the creator. Thirdly, Aquinas opines that what a thing has in

⁵⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae Prima Pars, 1-49*, ed. The Aquinas Institute, trans. Fr Laurence Shapcote OP (Lander, WY: Emmaus Academic, 2012), I. q. 3, art. 3, s.c.

⁵⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I. q. 3, art. 3.

⁶⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I. q. 3, art. 4, co.

⁶¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I. q. 3, art. 4, co.

distinction from what it is must necessarily participate in the thing which it has. If God were to merely participate in existence, then his existence would by definition be derivative from another. As such, Aquinas pronounces, “He will not therefore be the first being-which is absurd.”⁶² Thus, with these three arguments Aquinas clearly defines the essence of God inextricably with God’s existence. For God to be as God is, then God is and is no way composed, even a composition of essence and existence. For Aquinas, divine simplicity is foundational within his philosophical approach of the divine essence. Without which, God is not God as he is in himself.

Divine simplicity, as Aquinas articulates it in his *Summa Theologica*, provides the utter and resolute distinction between the creature and creator. Simply stated, each of Aquinas’s articles within question 3 successfully differentiate creature and creator. Yet, as James Dolezal contends, Aquinas’s greatest contribution to the doctrine of divine simplicity is in his articulation that only for God is essence and existence one and the same. Aquinas maintains that all other existent beings are at least composed of existence and essence.⁶³ Thus, God, and God alone, lacks composition whatsoever.

Divine Simplicity, Will, and the Challenge of Emanation

Supporting the doctrine of divine simplicity as Aquinas outlines it, can and does have detrimental effects on God’s relation to creation, asserts David Bradshaw.⁶⁴ Bradshaw summarizes Aquinas’s theology of creation and concludes that two of his assertions are incompatible. The claim of God’s absolute simplicity vis-à-vis pure act and the claim of God’s radical freedom with respect to creation are mutual exclusive, he

⁶² Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I. q. 3, art. 4, co.

⁶³ James E. Dolezal and Paul Helm, *God without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God’s Absoluteness* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 7.

⁶⁴ David Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007) See also R. T. Mullins, “Simply Impossible: A Case against Divine Simplicity,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 7, no. 2 (May 2013): 181-203.

suggests. As mutual exclusive, Bradshaw supposes the claims render Aquinas's theology of creation into some mode of emanation or necessary creation. An emanation theory of creation eliminates the free existence of creation resting on God's free choice. Yet, Bradshaw claims that if God's will and essence are simply one, then God's will to create cannot be otherwise since this would undermine divine simplicity.⁶⁵

Aquinas addresses these concerns in question 19 of the *Summa Theologica* in which he argues that God does indeed have a will, though as with all things within God, his will is identical with his essence.⁶⁶ Articulating the matter in such a way, Aquinas asserts the reality of God's will as well as upholding God's simplicity. Furthermore, Aquinas adds conceptually to the divine will stating that God wills not only himself but other beings as well. In the act of God willing other beings, he wills them as means to the end of willing his own divine goodness. Thus, God wills himself as the end of all beings that he wills to be. Aquinas reasons, "God wills things apart from Himself only for the sake of the end, which is His own goodness, it does not follow that anything else moves His will, except His goodness."⁶⁷ The distinction within Aquinas's reasoning is the crucial point of contention concerning nature of God's will with respect to creatures. Aquinas clarifies further when he intimates that God "wills something of absolute necessity: but this is not true of all that He wills."⁶⁸ The additional category of the divine will, according to Aquinas is God's will of supposition. Here Aquinas, seeks to make a distinction between between the absolute divine will, which is identical with the essence of God, and God's will of supposition, which is determined by God's freedom of will. In this respect, the latter is necessary only as it is willed by God in freedom. Thus, creatures

⁶⁵ Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 261.

⁶⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 19, art. 1, co.

⁶⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 19, art. 2, ad. 2.

⁶⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 19, art. 3, co.

are necessary only insofar as they are willed by God as a supposition.

Helpfully illustrating Aquinas's point Bernard-Thomas Blankenhorn addresses the issue of God's freedom and simplicity in terms of the self-diffusive good.⁶⁹ Blankenhorn seeks to draw upon the Neoplatonic influences for Aquinas concerning the good. Namely, that the good for Aquinas is a "natural dynamism toward action and self-communication."⁷⁰ Yet if the supreme good has an inherent disposition to communicate itself, how then does the self-diffusive good create of necessity? For finite good or being this is the case as there is a naturally flow into action *ad extra*. Though for an infinite, simple being there is no necessary *ad extra* reality. Blankenhorn deduces the self-diffusive good finding rest as it were in the communication of the divine essence in the eternal relations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For Blankenhorn then God's intrinsic communication of himself to himself "fulfills the requirements of the doctrine of the good."⁷¹ In terms of fulfillment the concept of divine beatitude or blessedness is apt as it demonstrates God's possession of all that God desires within his own essence.

To further explain how this conceptualization of the good coincides with God's simple will, Blankenhorn enlists a distinction of causes. The causes which are derived from Aquinas that Blankenhorn enlists are the efficient and final causes. Concerning the latter, Aquinas articulates a distinction of will; the necessary will and the will of supposition.⁷² The two aspects of the divine will construed by Aquinas correspond to Blankenhorn's expression of efficient and final causes. The final cause confers to the natural inclination of the self-diffusive good to "acquire and rest in the good."⁷³

⁶⁹ Bernhard-Thomas Blankenhorn, "The Good as Self-Diffusive in Thomas Aquinas," *Angelicum* 79, no. 4 (2002): 803–37; See also Etienne Gilson, *Thomism: The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2002).

⁷⁰ Blankenhorn, "The Good as Self-Diffusive in Thomas Aquinas," 805.

⁷¹ Blankenhorn, "The Good as Self-Diffusive in Thomas Aquinas," 819.

⁷² Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 19, art. 3, co.

⁷³ Blankenhorn, "The Good as Self-Diffusive in Thomas Aquinas," 823.

Blankenhorn demarcates characteristics of the two causes that helpfully contribute to God's freedom in creation as well as his simplicity in essence and will. Concerning the final cause Blankenhorn notes that God is in himself the final cause and precisely his own goodness. That is God communicates himself to himself. Furthermore, God wills himself, his own goodness, from himself, through himself, and to himself. Such a cause is fully and entirely intrinsic having no determination *ad extra* whatsoever. God achieves causality within himself though not in the sense that God gains anything. The final cause as such is necessary in that God as God is goodness itself, and as goodness itself, God is self-diffusive in that goodness to himself. The necessary communication of goodness within God is illuminated through the speculative grammar of the Aquinas's articulation of the inner life of God. The inner of life of God as triune offers a conceptual ground to further name the reality of God's simplicity in harmony with his will. God as simple must be one with his will and highlighting God's necessary willing of himself as goodness to himself maintains the metaphysically congruity of God's simplicity and will. All that God wills by necessity is himself. In this necessary act of willing God is blessed since he possesses all that he so desires. Any such willing "beyond himself is gratuitous."⁷⁴

The gratuitous nature of the God's freedom is in the fact that God chose to create. In the choice to create, God willingly chooses to will his own goodness to himself through an efficient cause. Blankenhorn's distinction of causes present within this conception seeks uphold both God's simple life apart from creation as well as God's radical freedom to create. The efficient cause promotes the existence of other beings in goodness and through this cause God wills himself to himself. In this act, God in no way compounds his will since God only wills himself by necessity. Thus, God is simple in essence and so too in his divine will. God's will *is* that God wills his own goodness to himself as the final cause. Yet, in this very willing of his own goodness God freely

⁷⁴ Blankenhorn, "The Good as Self-Diffusive in Thomas Aquinas," 827.

chooses to will an efficient cause to the end of *his* final cause, which is his own goodness. Thus, Blankenhorn concludes, “the reason that God creates is for the sake of his goodness.”⁷⁵ Though stated with clarity, the epistemic tension found in this conception simply leaves no room for a relaxed answer. However, the conception does allow for intellectual space for the tension to reside within. Blankenhorn supposes a resolve via *quoad nos*, in which the human intellect can rest in a distinction of the mind that is a logical or conceptual distinction.⁷⁶ Yet, all the while maintaining the utter simplicity of God in his essence and will.

As Blankenhorn supposes a distinction *quoad nos*, Tyler Wittman intimates that Aquinas’s use of a speculative grammar provides resources for Aquinas to uphold God’s simplicity and freedom in creation.⁷⁷ Such resources find use for Aquinas in the abstraction of the thing signified from the mode of signifying, according to Wittman. The former is the *res* which is the thing itself and the latter, the *modus*, is the linguistic signification of the thing itself. For Wittman, Aquinas’s successful abstraction of terms allows divine simplicity to remain a negative, apophatic proposition. Wittman reasons that if the doctrine of simplicity does not remain apophatic then misunderstandings of the divine will and God’s relation to creation are inevitable. Aquinas’s construal of divine simplicity, Wittman argues, is and remains a negative doctrine whereas the divine will is a positive construction. Thus, God’s will can be articulated in positive terms according to necessary and free conceptions though the divine will is conditioned by simplicity’s negation. Wittman maintains that allowing simplicity to remain negative and granting the positive nature of the divine will creates intellectual space within the human mode of understanding. The human mode of understanding within Aquinas’s construction is at all

⁷⁵ Blankenhorn, "The Good as Self-Diffusive in Thomas Aquinas," 832.

⁷⁶ Blankenhorn, "The Good as Self-Diffusive in Thomas Aquinas," 832.

⁷⁷ Wittman, *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*, 83.

times analogical.⁷⁸ Thus, epistemic clarity is supplemented by Aquinas's speculative grammar, even so the human intellect must be conditioned by humility. So, an analogical knowledge of God's will as both necessary and free is possible in keeping with Aquinas's grammar of *res* and *modus* as well as with the human mode of understanding. With such parameters in place there is good reason to affirm God's simplicity and absolute freedom in the creative act. Wittman concludes that creation on this basis is for Aquinas only hypothetically necessary. Since God is fullness of life and possesses all blessedness, he gains nothing from creation. Thus, creation is gratuity, pure and simple, and as such God wills his goodness to himself while freely choosing to create goodness to that end.⁷⁹ Now with Blankenhorn and Wittman's defenses of Aquinas's articulation of divine simplicity and will in place, I will conclude this subsection with a return to David Bradshaw's analysis of Aquinas's view.

In Bradshaw's critique of simplicity and divine freedom, Aquinas's distinction of necessary will and the will of supposition begins to cut through Bradshaw's gordian knot. For Aquinas, that God is simple and absolutely free in his act of creation are not mutually exclusive. Rather, Aquinas argues that God is free to will creatures as to his own infinite goodness for it "befits the divine goodness that other things should be partakers therein."⁸⁰ Thus, for God to will his goodness is absolutely necessary, yet is fitting and volitional that God wills creatures to that end. Another slice at Bradshaw's knot is that God can exist apart the existence of creatures, and as such it is not possible that creatures are part and parcel of God's absolute will. Rather, they are contingent to God's absolute will, and the contingency arises on account of the potential creature not God who is pure act. Matthew Levering helpfully summarizes, "the necessary and free

⁷⁸ Wittman, *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*, 86-87.

⁷⁹ Wittman, *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*, 90.

⁸⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 19, art. 2, co.

modes of God's one will can be distinguished but not separated, because God's free creative will is his one eternal will (pure act)."⁸¹ If there were a real distinction then God would no longer be simple, as his simple will would become a composition. Furthermore, Levering reasons that as God wills himself necessarily, he also in the very same act of willing, freely wills creatures as a contingent mode of being. At this, Levering acquiesces that no more can nor should be said "due to the limits of our analogous knowledge."⁸² Thus, Levering in line with Aquinas, seeks to uphold God's simplicity as well God's freedom in creation through an apophatic and analogous reading, rather than, as Bradshaw pursues to assert the incompatibility of the two claims. The limits seem not with God but with our mode of reasoning for without divine simplicity, at least for Aquinas, God could not create in the manner *ex nihilo*.⁸³

Divine Blessedness and Creation Out of Nothing

Having considered simplicity and God's freedom in relation to God's act of creation, I will now reflect on God's beatitude or blessedness as it relates to God's act of creation. Divine beatitude or blessedness is conceptually the pinnacle for divine aseity and as such it is the apex in the discussion of the divine being. For Aquinas this can be demonstrated as he ends his treatment of the divine unity with divine beatitude. In doing so he forwards an insightful concept prior to articulating the trinitarian nature of God in questions 27-43. Aquinas defines beatitude as the "perfect good of an intellectual nature."⁸⁴ Clarifyingly, Tyler Wittman articulates the concept of blessedness as consisting

⁸¹ Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Creation: Cosmos, Creatures, and the Wise and Good Creator* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 104. See also Harm Goris, Herwi Rikhof, and Henk J. M. Schoot, *Divine Transcendence and Immanence in the Work of Thomas Aquinas* (Leuven BE; Peeters, 2009) especially chapters 1-2.

⁸² Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Creation*, 104.

⁸³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 45, art. 5, co.

⁸⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 26, art. 1, co.

in “God’s possession of himself as supreme good and the ultimate end,” also that God possesses blessedness and as such God in no way seeks it but has it.⁸⁵

In such a concept of beatitude there is the display of divine simplicity and aseity from the perspective of rest or satisfaction. God is the supreme good and he is so devoid of parts. Thus, God is goodness and in terms of beatitude God possesses perfectly the good that he is and desires. The emphasis of the intellectual nature, as Aquinas portrays, demonstrates further his speculative theological grammar in use. Aquinas employs the speculative grammar as a way analogy to describe the inner life of God. Within this inner life of God, there is intellect pure and unaided that is “capable of knowing that it has a sufficiency of the good which it possesses.”⁸⁶ God not only is good, but in speculative terms, God is good, desires the good, and perfectly possesses the good. As such, God is at rest that is God is beatitude and blessedness itself.

The concept as described helps to illuminate the previous discussion of God’s simple will as it relates to creation. In terms of beatitude, God is fully at rest within his simple essence of pure act. There is no thing exterior to God of which there is any real or possible addition of happiness, beatitude, or blessedness. God is simple in terms of his essence, goodness, and will. God does indeed create in freedom according to Aquinas’s elucidation, and it is precisely divine blessedness which irrefutably demonstrates such freedom. As Aquinas’s speculative grammar illuminates the inner trinitarian life of God in and through the processions, as well in the goodness of the divine essence willing himself as final end, so too the grammar of blessedness grounds the inner divine life in rest and satisfaction. Aquinas solicits the reader that it is precisely this God of inner rest and satisfaction that freely chooses to create.

⁸⁵ Tyler Wittman, “The Logic of Divine Blessedness and the Salvific Teleology of Christ The Logic of Divine Blessedness,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 18, no. 2 (2016): 135.

⁸⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 26, art. 1, co.

Aquinas probes into the essence of God by way of a speculative grammar, which is always mediated by his understanding of analogical language concerning God. In this analogical mode Aquinas details the intellectual nature of blessedness within God. In this mode, Aquinas seeks to establish that God knows himself and possesses himself. Concerning the former, God has a comprehensive knowledge of himself which then results and encompasses knowledge as possession. Thus, for Aquinas, knowledge entails a metaphysical possession.⁸⁷ Tyler Wittman helpfully clarifies this aspect of knowing in terms of comprehension. That is God has eternal self-knowledge of himself and thus God comprehends himself. The nature of this comprehensive is such that God is unlike human beings even when they know God. For humans only know God in part or as they participate in the eternal self-knowledge of God. By way of contrast, God knows himself exhaustively with no remainder since God's knowledge, as it is conditioned by simplicity, is one with God essence. There is thus no transitivity nor discursiveness within God for God is pure act.⁸⁸ Upon this affirmation of divine simplicity and eternal self-knowledge, Aquinas seeks to deduce subtleties utilizing analogy and speculative terms to aid the human mode of understanding as the human mind desires to know God truly. Thus, Aquinas helpfully guides into awe of the *res* by way of precise deductions through the *modus* to bring human understanding into the knowledge of God. So, God is blessed, and as blessed, God is blessedness itself. Divine blessedness according to Aquinas supposes that God possesses himself through his own internal act of intellect. Thus, God as the supreme good is intellectually satisfied with the good that he is. And so, as God wills his own goodness as the final end, God truly possesses the good that he wills and is utterly satisfied within himself and is at rest. On the basis of divine blessedness, God could in no way seek something so as to be gained from without his being. There is

⁸⁷ Wittman, "The Logic of Divine Blessedness," 136.

⁸⁸ Wittman, "The Logic of Divine Blessedness," 136-37.

nothing to be gained for God *ad extra*, thus creation in its totality is gratuitous. Within Aquinas's theological endeavor and in keeping with his speculative grammar, creation could be nothing other than gratuitous, a product of God's eternal, self-possessing fecundity.

The nature of the present chapter thus far has been to establish Aquinas's conception of God as God relates to himself in seclusion from his creation and creative act. In doing so, I have emphasized the speculative grammar utilized by Aquinas as well as its value in fashioning a conceptual framework to further the human mode of understanding into the nature of God. Within this emphasis, I first noted the nature of divine simplicity as proposed by Aquinas. After simplicity, I offered a discussion of the divine will as it relates to divine simplicity, as well as some responses to contemporary challenges to Aquinas's metaphysical conceptions of will and simplicity. Concluding the section, I proposed the nature of divine blessedness as the pinnacle display of God's aseity. Aquinas ends his discussion of the divine unity with question 26 on blessedness and it aptly sustains the notion of God in relation to God.

Aquinas's Speculative Grammar and Divine Self-Correspondence

Having considered the God of the creative act through Aquinas's speculative grammar and subsequent blessedness, I will now explore the concept of divine self-correspondence as a means of transitioning from the processions of the inner triune life to the processions of creatures from God. For Aquinas, the eternal processions within God and the processions of creatures from God are inextricably connected, stating that the former is *ratio* or reason for the latter.⁸⁹ Thus, to probe a detailed understanding of creation as God's gratuitous act, at least according to Aquinas, one must do so in a

⁸⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences, Book IV, 14-25*, trans. by Beth Mortensen (Lander, WY; Emmaus Academic, 2017) d.14, q. 2, a. 2.

trinitarian mode. As Gilles Emery notes, Aquinas “has bound ‘theology’ and ‘economy’ tightly together at every step.”⁹⁰ For Emery, theology in this context is referring to Aquinas’s notion of the immanent trinity or ontological trinity, that is God as God in relation to himself. Within this tightly bound structure, Aquinas has developed a correspondence in the relation of the immanent trinity and the economic trinity. For Aquinas, this precise correspondence is the connection between God and all things that are not God. But not God as indistinct, rather God as distinctly triune. Specifically, Tyler Wittman argues “only where creation is understood as trinitarian act is God’s self-correspondence secured.”⁹¹ It is for Wittman that the procession of creatures *ad extra* corresponds to the processions of persons *ad intra*. As such it is this God who is most blessed within, yet freely chooses to create without. To clarify, there is one, triune God that creates all things from nothing and the triune God who is life within himself. For Aquinas, there can be no absolute distinction between immanent and economic trinity, nor can there be absolutely no distinction.⁹² God is *sui generis* and as such God is God in relation to himself, yet it is this God who in freedom creates from a place of blessedness and rest.⁹³

The nature of the correspondence between God as God and God as creator must be “tightly bound” so that some two-god theory does not arise. Emphasizing the correspondence of God’s inward essence and God’s outward act of creation makes for a fitting resolve to maintain the reality of God’s inner life apart from creation and God’s free work of creative power. Tyler Wittman supposes that since “God’s essence is his

⁹⁰ Emery and Murphy, *The Trinitarian Theology of St Thomas Aquinas*, 338.

⁹¹ Wittman, *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*, 92.

⁹² For a thoughtful discussion of the immanent/economic Trinity see Fred R. Sanders, *The Triune God*, *New Studies in Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 37-68.

⁹³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 3, art. 5, co.

being, then as an effect bears a resemblance to its principle in essence.”⁹⁴ The resemblance of God’s creative act and God’s essence begins to disclose the connective tissues within Aquinas that will help to ground the value of creatures *ad extra*. According to Wittman, Aquinas elaborates the resemblance or correspondence in two ways, first by accenting the order of the divine persons within the divine essence and second, by employing a psychological model for the trinity to further describe the trinitarian nature of creation.

The creative act of God is at once a singular act of the one triune God and also appropriated to certain divine persons. If the divine processions are the *ratio* for the procession of creatures, then each divine person is active in creation. Within the essence of God, the divine persons relate in an order of subsistence that corresponds to Aquinas’s detailing of processions, persons, and relations as noted in chapter two. The unique order of subsistence within God provides the trinitarian rationale for the act of creation in conferring being *ad extra*.⁹⁵ Focusing upon this order of subsistence, Aquinas clearly states that creation is an indivisible work of the triune God.⁹⁶ Yet, elaborating upon this point Aquinas probes in speculative grammatical fashion as he employs a psychological model for God’s creative act. Aquinas’s psychological model likens God to an artist who has a word in his intellect and love in his will toward an exterior object. In such a model, the Father creates the exterior object through his eternal generated word, the Son, and through his eternally breathed spirit, the Holy Spirit.⁹⁷ Concluding his discussion of the model, Aquinas states, “in this way the processions of the persons are the reason for the production of creatures.” Commenting on this passage, Tyler Wittman argues that

⁹⁴ Wittman, *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*, 92.

⁹⁵ Wittman, *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*, 93.

⁹⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 46, art. 6, s.c.

⁹⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 46, art. 6, co.

Aquinas operates with a “tempered form of reasoning” as he desires to offer simply an analogy for the trinitarian life and creative action.⁹⁸ The analogy of word and love offer the grammatical weight to the inner trinitarian life as Aquinas elaborates on God’s act of creating. Though “tempered,” Aquinas’s model “affords insight into God’s self-correspondence in the creative act by providing a model for how the procession of creatures from God corresponds to a procession within God.”⁹⁹ As noted earlier, Aquinas defends the correspondence between the God’s inner processional life and the processions of creatures from God. Yet, it is in this psychological model that Aquinas proposes how it is the eternal processions are the reason for the procession of creatures.

On this point, Tyler Wittman offers two concepts that describe in what way the inner and outer procession correspond, both of which are pertinent to this thesis. The first concerns the self-correspondence of God’s inner life and creative act in and through the generation of God the Son. The Son in Aquinas’s model is conceived as the word, who is the Father’s likeness. As the Son proceeds from the Father in likeness, so too “creatures proceed from God with a certain likeness to him.”¹⁰⁰ Aquinas’s model allows a process of analogical naming concerning God’s inner life that aids human understanding of God and his creative act. God’s eternal word encapsulates a full expression of God as the Son is the ultimate fruition of God’s self-knowledge. Such a model leads Wittman to express that the procession of the word in God is the “archetype for the procession of creatures from God.”¹⁰¹ The archetypal nature of the word is found in the reception of being for all creatures which then represents a likeness to the Son’s “eternal reception of the divine

⁹⁸ Wittman, *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*, 94.

⁹⁹ Wittman, *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*, 94.

¹⁰⁰ Wittman, *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*, 95.

¹⁰¹ Wittman, *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*, 95.

essence from the Father.”¹⁰² Aquinas denies a univocity of reception in this respect concerning creature and the Son. In denying univocity he promotes a resemblance in that the Son is the first born of creatures. The resemblance demonstrates that as the Son is the archetype of generation, the generation or procession of creatures from God is the ectypal correlative. Not only is the word an archetypal representation of the procession of creatures, the procession of the word is a perfect representation of the Father. The perfect representation of the word to the Father is the ground or reason the likeness of creatures to their origin, God. Wittman notes that such a representation is “the exemplary reason and pattern of that in which God speaks creatures into existence and therein grants them a participation in his own likeness.”¹⁰³ As the Father eternally generates the word in his own likeness, so God creates on this foundation of God’s eternal word in himself. Thus, the correspondence of God’s inner life of the generative-word and God’s creative activity is displayed.

Wittman’s second concept that details the correspondence of God’s inner life and outer work of creation is spiration. The above sketch of God’s eternal generation of the word corresponds to Aquinas’s concept of the artisan as a creator of the idea within the mind, which highlights God’s creative procession of creatures through the eternal procession of the Son. The second iteration involves not the mental conceptualization of the idea, but as Wittman articulates it the “inclination of the will toward the object” conceived.¹⁰⁴ God knows himself through the eternally generated word and God loves himself through the eternally spirated love, the Holy Spirit. Thus, for Aquinas the terms word and love are in a sense shorthand for God’s inner life of procession. The procession

¹⁰² Wittman, *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*, 95.

¹⁰³ Wittman, *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*, 96.

¹⁰⁴ Wittman, *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*, 96.

of the Son is “by way of intellect” and the procession of the Spirit is “by way of will.”¹⁰⁵ Keeping with Aquinas’s artisan analogy, the crafter does not only conceive of the idea of the object but he then inclines his will to create and sustain that object. In this sense God knows himself in the eternally generated word and sets his will of love on himself and the psychological model “discloses rationality in the distinction of processions” within God.¹⁰⁶ For in this model the object understood remains within the mind and the object loved remains within the will of the lover. The reality that God possesses himself in infinite self-knowledge and rests himself in infinite self-love is the reality from which God’s creative freedom flows. In reference to God’s inner life Wittman astutely reasons, “The Son is like the fruit of God’s self-knowledge, and so the Spirit is like the fruit of God’s love for what he knows in his self-knowledge, which is a dynamic movement of God toward himself.”¹⁰⁷ God knows himself and loves himself and in so doing, God freely chooses to create. Aquinas concludes that God’s relation to creation is “implied both in the Word and in the proceeding Love” though in an ancillary way.¹⁰⁸ Such an ancillary implication demonstrates the divine self-correspondence of God’s inner life of word and love as to the “principle of understanding and loving all creatures.”¹⁰⁹ As such, the infinite knowing of God’s-self through the word and the infinite loving of God’s-self through love within God’s being, corresponds to the knowing and loving toward all created being. Thus, God knows and loves all of his creatures in and through himself.

Conclusion

In this chapter I sought to discuss God as God relates to himself and thus

¹⁰⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 37, art. 1, co.

¹⁰⁶ Wittman, *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*, 97.

¹⁰⁷ Wittman, *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*, 97.

¹⁰⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 37, art. 2, ad. 3.

¹⁰⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 37, art. 2, ad. 3.

further establish a foundation for an examination of God's relation to creation. I did so first by demonstrating the centrality of Aquinas's philosophical thought concerning divine simplicity, which was validated primarily by stating that God's existence is his essence. Thus, God is beautifully simply and the divine will is conditioned by such a simplicity. Though recent debates have interrogated divine simplicity and freedom, Aquinas's speculative grammar supports consistency within God's simplicity and his absolute freedom to create *ad extra*. God's absolute freedom in creation was bolstered by a discussion of divine blessedness that demonstrates God's aseity in full. Finally, in the chapter I noted the astute significance for the role of divine self-correspondence. Aquinas's model of procession of persons *ad intra* is the *ratio* for the procession of creatures *ad extra*. The connective explanations of this *ratio* are found in Aquinas's model of divine self-correspondence. The emphasis following this chapter will consist of the procession of creatures *ad extra*, to this I now turn.

CHAPTER 4

THE PROCESSION OF CREATURES FROM GOD: TOWARD CREATURELY VALUE

The procession of creatures *ad extra* necessarily flows from God's life *ad intra*. The burden of the present and final chapter is to elaborate Aquinas's model of the procession of creatures from God and then move toward a mode of creaturely value. In doing so, I will first provide a description of divine self-correspondence as it relates to the procession of creatures from God. Second, I will exhibit the structure of creaturely value as it relates to God's inner life and the creature's participation in the divine life.

Divine Self-Correspondence and the Procession of Creatures from God

As noted in the previous chapter, Aquinas portrays God as having perfect blessedness life within himself and that God created all things in absolute freedom. In contemporary parlance the present distinction is between the immanent and economic life of God. Aquinas employs "procession" as an apt word for both the inner life of God and the life that God creates. Thus, for Aquinas, procession is differentiated metaphysically as within God's life and as the life of creatures that flows from God. The economic and immanent trinity are, for Aquinas, tightly bound at every point according to Giles Emery.¹¹⁰

The precise nature of the relation between immanent and economic is promoted by Aquinas's application of a speculative grammar. The speculative grammar

¹¹⁰ Gilles Emery and Francesca Aran Murphy, *The Trinitarian Theology of St Thomas Aquinas*, (Oxford; UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), 40-44.

detailed in God's inner life is the basis for divine-self correspondence. In other words, the speculative grammar allows for further contemplation regarding God's inner trinitarian life as it pertains to the creative act and the result of the created act, creatures. As such, the inner life of God is appropriated with the procession of life from God. For Aquinas, it is clear that God is the absolute blessed one and requires nothing from without to reconcile any needs. Thus, God is free in his creative act from which all being flows from being itself. The structure of this creative act is found in Aquinas's speculative supposition of word and love. The inner processional life of word and love, as Tyler Wittman reasons, provides the "ultimate confirmation of God's freedom and self-correspondence" for it is here the trinity is revealed.¹¹¹ Continuing his commentary on Aquinas, Wittman provides conceptual aid by comparing the immanent and economic life of God. Wittman reasons, "Without the processions of the Son and Spirit, the procession of creatures corresponds to no procession in God."¹¹² The nature of such a correspondence as articulated by Wittman is the connective tissue as it were between God's inner life of blessedness and God's generous created reality.

The reality of divine self-correspondence originating in Aquinas and expounded upon in Wittman is the fundamental principle for creaturely value. Simply stated, the life within God is inextricably connected to the life outside of God. The inextricable nature of the economic and immanent trinity is clearly seen in Aquinas's own work, as noted above. Though the precise component in this chapter to highlight is the connectedness between the inner processions *within* God and the procession *from* God. The connectedness is precisely the divine self-correspondence as derived from Wittman's work. Correspondence in this sense means that God is God, economic and immanent. The distinction is attendant to the epistemic ability of the knower through

¹¹¹ Wittman, *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*, 110.

¹¹² Wittman, *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*, 111.

Aquinas's elaboration of analogical language which is received from God. Thus, the distinction is speculative in the fullest sense for God is not some kind of God inwardly and some other God outwardly. Such a supposition would dissolve the theological enterprise through and through. Yet, within the demonstration and subtle usage of speculative metaphysics in Aquinas, there is wholeness to the knowledge of God that weds immanent and economic. Thus, there is one God, simple and absolutely free, and this God is the creator. Speculative metaphysics provides language for the distinction of immanent and economic as well the correspondence of God's inner life and outer work. As such, the divine self-correspondence grounds and secures creaturely value.

God Knows and Loves All Things in Himself

The first element of divine self-correspondence that grounds and secures the value of creatures is Aquinas's notion the God knows all things in himself. Such a notion is consequent to divine blessedness, for according to Aquinas, God perfectly knows himself to be the perfect good, which he possesses in his own being. In the terms of blessedness, God perfectly possess the good, which is himself. Thus, in Aquinas's conception, God's outward creative act corresponds to God's inward reality of blessedness. Divine blessedness within God grounds created reality outside of God.

Aquinas's speculative grammar provides a linguistic reality so that thoughtful categories can be derived. On the basis of this speculative grammar and theological/philosophical categories, I will move toward a structure of creaturely value. God is life and has life in himself. Therefore, God has no need of anything. God is generative and fecund in and of his own being. God's generative nature eternally generates the divine son. In Aquinas's parlance, the Father generates the Word.¹¹³ The procession of the word is the movement of the divine intellect. The divine intellect knows

¹¹³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae Prima Pars, 1-49*, ed. The Aquinas Institute, trans. Fr Laurence Shapcote OP (Lander, WY: Emmaus Academic, 2012), I, q. 34, art. 1, co.

the word prior to its sounding and thus the word is conceived and generated within the one intellect.¹¹⁴ Aquinas likens this aspect of his speculative inquiry of God to an artist who has the representation of the art within the mind. Within this analogy the Word is the full expression of the Father. Aquinas argues that “it follows that the Son alone is properly called Word in God.”¹¹⁵ The Son, the one who proceeds eternally from the Father, is given the proper name of Word within Aquinas’s speculative grammar. Gilles Emery helpfully distinguishes the two aspects or meanings in which the Son operates for Aquinas. The two aspects function around the themes of action and disclosure. Emery suggests that the Word reveals “a content” of the Father but also the Word reveals a “dynamism of action,” which corresponds to the creative act.¹¹⁶ The former corresponds to the Son’s full expression of the Father as the Word and the latter refers to the act of the Father creating all things through the Son, the Word.

These two aspects derived from Aquinas demonstrate the linguistic structure of his speculative metaphysic for the inner trinitarian life. The life of God analogized through the terms of Son and Word offer epistemic space to conceive of the Father’s knowledge of all things through God’s self-knowledge in and through the Word. It is here that Aquinas moves from the inner life of God in terms of the procession of Word to the implication of the Word’s relation to creatures. Thus, for Aquinas it the intellectual conception within the triune life that is the procession of the Son, the Word. Such a conception moves the blessed and simple life of God toward that which is not God. The procession of the Son as humanity through divine revelation is able to ascertain is not a procession disconnected to life without. The inner processive life of the triune God is blessed, simple, fecund and so the inner processive life of God correspondence fittingly

¹¹⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 34, art. 1, co.

¹¹⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 34, art. 2, co.

¹¹⁶ Emery and Murphy, *The Trinitarian Theology of St Thomas Aquinas*, 195.

to the procession of all things that are not God. Such a substantiation does not dissolve the beautiful freedom of God in the choice to create all things of nothing. It is precisely within Aquinas's speculative grammar and metaphysical structure that *creatio ex nihilo*, divine simplicity, divine freedom, eternal processions, and the procession of creatures from God have coherence as each of them are ascertained through analogical language. Furthermore, the coherence of each of these philosophical and theological loci generates the ontological aptitude for creaturely value. Aquinas reasons, "Word implies relation to creatures."¹¹⁷ Lucidly, Aquinas here conjoins the reality of the eternal procession of the Son to the reality of creatures. Yet what resides within this implication?

The implicit nature that Aquinas appeals to is derivative of God's knowledge.¹¹⁸ God is blessed within himself and thus God possesses himself in an intellectual manner. Yet here, the intellectual possession is connected to the knowledge of all things that are not God. "For God by knowing himself, knows every creature," expounds Aquinas.¹¹⁹ Such a connection not only derives from God's knowledge but also from divine simplicity. The intricacy of divine freedom and divine simplicity for Aquinas muses around the reality of analogical language as well as the distinction of the *res* and *modus significata*, as noted above. At this juncture, Aquinas's explication of divine simplicity demonstrates an inseparable connection between the act of the eternal procession of the Son and the procession of creatures from God. God is pure act, simple, and it is by one simple act that God "understands himself and all things."¹²⁰ The divine Son, the Word, is not only the cognitive location for creatures but he is also the active origin of all things. The Word is cognitively expressive and ontological operative in the

¹¹⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 34, art. 3, co.

¹¹⁸ Emery and Murphy, *The Trinitarian Theology of St Thomas Aquinas*, 195.

¹¹⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 34, art. 3, co.

¹²⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 34, art. 3, co.

reality of creatures. The Father eternally expresses himself within himself and to himself. This very expression of divine self-giving and self-receiving is the ontological ground for ontology without God. It is the divine self-correspondence of God's inner life and outer work found within Aquinas's speculative grammar that demonstrates the structure of being that grounds creaturely reality and thus, creaturely value.

Gilles Emery furthers Aquinas's implication of the Son's operative function as Emery emphasizes divine aseity in terms of divine knowledge. Emery advocates for the aseity of divine knowledge when he reasons, "God does not just know himself; the way he knows means he knows all things; he knows all creatures and thus everything that happens, right down to its singularity."¹²¹ Further Emery contends that such divine knowledge is not received from the creature. Rather, the fact that God knows all things through himself, the Son, denotes that God's knowledge is the cause of all of things. The knowledge of all things that are not God are known through the divine self-possession of the Father and the Son within the processive life. As the cause of all things, the Son who proceeds eternally from the Father generates all being and life *ad extra*.

Now that I have considered the correspondence between God's knowledge of all things in himself and the value of creatures. I will now turn to the second element of divine self-correspondence that grounds and secures creaturely value, which is that God not only knows all things within himself, but God also loves all things within himself. The first element of creaturely value as signified above correlates to the procession of Son from the Father. The second correlates to the procession of Spirit from Father and the Son. For Aquinas, the two processions within the life of God are referred to as the Word and Love. Via Aquinas's speculative grammar, the former is a procession of intellect through which God knows himself and all things. The latter is a procession of will through which God loves himself and loves all things. The act of will similarly to the act

¹²¹ Emery and Murphy, *The Trinitarian Theology of St Thomas Aquinas*, 195.

of intellect remains within the one acting. Aquinas maintains that when love is set on an object, “a certain impression results.”¹²² Such an impression remains within the lover in the sense that the impression is the affective reality of that love. Aquinas concludes concerning this impression residing within, “the thing loved is in the lover.”¹²³ Thus, God in himself loves himself and loves all things. Aquinas makes a distinction between an essential understanding of the term love and a notional meaning. The former refers to the proper name of the person, the Holy Spirit, “the love proceeding”, and the latter governs the phrase “the spiration of the love proceeding.”¹²⁴ Such a distinction for Aquinas acts to preserve the unity of the divine essence so as not to mingle the essence of God with his creatures. Yet, on the other hand, Aquinas further grounds to reality of creatures on the life of God *ad intra*.

Aquinas addresses the relation of creaturely value and trinitarian processions further in question 38. In question 38 he considers the Holy Spirit in terms of the mutual love of Father and Son as well as the Holy Spirit as the origin of all gifts to creatures. As with the term love in question 37 Aquinas seeks to employ a speculative grammar with the term gift as it applies to God the Holy Spirit. Here, Aquinas in one term, gift, seeks to demonstrate the fittingness of the Holy Spirit to be gift and giver. Firstly, Aquinas insinuates that the Holy Spirit possessing the name gift ‘imports an aptitude for being given.’¹²⁵ The Holy Spirit possesses this aptitude for being given eternally, but the act of giving only happens in time. Gilles Emery identifies this distinction as “Gift (*donum*) and as given (*datum*).”¹²⁶ Such a distinction helpfully guides the process of the present thesis

¹²² Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 37, art. 1, co.

¹²³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 37, art. 1, co.

¹²⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 37, art. 1, co.

¹²⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 38, art. 1, co.

¹²⁶ Emery and Murphy, *The Trinitarian Theology of St Thomas Aquinas*, 251.

as it correlates the inner processive life of God the Holy Spirit with the giving of life and being to all creatures. God's knowledge (Word/Son) and God's will (Love/Gift/Holy Spirit) for God's own supreme goodness is the "foundation of every gift God gives to the creature."¹²⁷ In this inner processive life of God there is a full description of God's inner fecundity that exists within himself and has no necessary relation to creation. On this matter, Aquinas's argues that a knowledge of the divine persons and their relations is necessary to have an accurate view of creation. Otherwise, creation can and will be viewed as necessary and the reason for creation would ultimately be something other than God's own goodness.¹²⁸

Aquinas outlines here the weight of his speculative grammar as it corresponds to God's creative work, for without it there is little protection from pantheism/panentheism as well as voluntarism. That is Aquinas's speculative grammar utilized for the articulation of the trinity and the trinity in relation to creation offers the metaphysical categories to thoughtfully distinguish God's life *ad intra* from his work *ad extra*. Not only does Aquinas's protect from pantheism/panentheism and voluntarism as well as positively afford the metaphysical space to articulate God's life and God's work of creation, but also as I have argued in this section that God's inner life of procession generates the goodness and value of all that is not God. For God knows and loves all things that are not God in himself. The love generated for his creatures in the creative act, *ex nihilo*, corresponds to God's inner life of procession. The procession of all things that are not God find their reason, purpose, origin in the eternal processions of God's own life. It is precisely the correspondence of eternal procession *ad intra* and the creative procession *ad extra* that generates the creaturely value intrinsic to all creatures. For in God's fecund act of creation there is an inextricable bond created among the triune life

¹²⁷ Wittman, *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*, 97.

¹²⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 32, art. 1, ad. 3.

and the life of creatures. Thus, Aquinas summarizes appropriately that a knowledge of the divine persons and their eternal relations is necessary to possess “the right idea of creation.”¹²⁹

Creation: Participation in God

Now that I have considered the relationship of God’s triune life *ad intra* and God’s creative act *ad extra* as the ground and origin of creaturely value and goodness in the previous section, I will now turn in the concluding section to the structure of creaturely value as it relates to the creature’s participation the divine being. Aquinas, in question 44, states that “all beings apart from God are not their own being, but are beings by participation.”¹³⁰ Aquinas’s principle of participation is the guiding center for the structure of creaturely value in the final section of the present thesis. Aquinas articulates God as the one who possesses being most perfectly and thus God is the most perfect being, perfectly possessing himself in beatitude. God then, for Aquinas, is the “greatest in being and greatest in truth.”¹³¹ Tyler Wittman’s commenting on Aquinas’s vision of being states, “The first and most primordial act of anything is its act of being, its existence.”¹³² As noted in chapter three, God is his own being and existence. Such terms are analogically used when speaking of God, though in essence God is beautifully simple, pure act. Since God is pure act, the simplicity of being and existence, then God is the “only possible cause of all things that participate in being.”¹³³ Thus, God is pure act, being and existence itself, and as such God is the origin and ground of all being that is not God.

¹²⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 32, art. 1, ad. 3.

¹³⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 44, art. 1, co.

¹³¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 44, art. 1, co.

¹³² Wittman, *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*, 46.

¹³³ Wittman, *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Bart*, 47.

God is simple, and so God's existence and essence are utterly one, dissimilar to God's creatures. How is it then that God's utter oneness in being provides the ground and structure for the intrinsic value of creatures? Rudi te Velde, in his monograph on Aquinas's use of metaphysical participation, argues that Aquinas offers a supplement to Boethius's consideration of the goodness of creatures. Velde establishes Boethius's notion as derivative of the Neoplatonist conception of participation. Thus, God is good and all God's creatures are created with some similitude, and as such all creatures can be considered good. For Boethius, Velde argues, the goodness of creatures is founded upon the participated origin in the Divine Good.¹³⁴ Yet, such a conception leaves the creature with no essential goodness of its own, but only a derivative goodness. Such a dilemma Aquinas seeks to remedy by establishing the reality of the creature as "essentially and intrinsically good as well as good by participation."¹³⁵

On the first account Aquinas, pursues a distinction between intrinsic goodness and extrinsic goodness where the latter is predicated on external relation alone. The extrinsic sense of goodness, which is derivative of God's goodness is aptly affirmed by Boethius and Aquinas. Aquinas seeks to supplement the matter with the conception of the intrinsic goodness of the creature. Velde argues that Aquinas presents this supplement through an Aristotelian understanding of *communicatio boni* via efficient causality. Such that, the communication of the good effects the good in the thing caused. In Aquinas's model God in the act of the creation communicates his goodness to the creature. The result of the communication is not merely an extrinsic result in the sense of being flowing from God to the creature, but a communication that effects a creature that is intrinsically good within itself.¹³⁶ The creatures are good in themselves, yet it is a goodness that is a

¹³⁴ Rudi A. Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden NL; Brill) 1995, 22.

¹³⁵ Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, 23.

¹³⁶ Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, 23-24.

similitude of the supreme goodness, God himself.

Bernard-Thomas Blankenhorn agrees, when he approaches the matter of intrinsic goodness of creatures from the conception of God as the self-diffusive good. Blankenhorn in his article argues that in Aquinas's formation all creatures possess goodness though it is an "imperfect goodness."¹³⁷ Velde describes the goodness as a similitude or a goodness of likeness and Blankenhorn as imperfect. With both terms, there is a display of Aquinas's insistence that the creature is good intrinsically. Velde concludes, "things are good, formally in virtue of an immanent form given to them as a likeness of the highest good, and furthermore in virtue of the first goodness as the exemplary and effective principle of all created goodness."¹³⁸ Simply stated, God as the supreme good chooses to create freely from God's own fecund beatitude, and in doing so, God creates good creatures and only good creatures, creatures whose goodness is their own.

Having considered Aquinas's supplement to Boethius's notion of the creature's goodness, I will now continue the discussion of creaturely value as it relates to "essential goodness" and the participation in the good. Essential goodness in a strict sense is a non-starter for Aquinas. Yet, he petitions that even though the goodness of the creature must be derivative of the divine goodness, there is a mode of essential goodness which is distinct from the "essence of a thing."¹³⁹ Velde seeks to particularize Aquinas's mode of essential goodness in a threefold structure. Velde's threefold structure of essential goodness will further arrange the structure of creaturely value for the conclusion of this thesis.

Firstly, Velde notes that for Aquinas goodness in the creature is changeable.

¹³⁷ Blankenhorn, "The Good as Self-Diffusive in Thomas Aquinas.," 820.

¹³⁸ Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, 26.

¹³⁹ Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, 27.

The creature can become more or less good and as such is in direct contrast to God, who is goodness itself and becomes nothing since God is perfect. Thus, the creature is good by participating in the divine goodness, though the creature is good by degree not kind.

Secondly, Velde shows that Aquinas supplements Boethius's conception of creaturely goodness by advocating for a substantial goodness. Substantial goodness differs from the first in that the goodness is not accidental, rather it is fundamental to the creature insofar as it exists. As God grants creatures to participate in his being, they too as a result have a being of their though not entirely of their own. The creature is derivative since in Aquinas's parlance the very procession of all creatures depends on the eternal processions of God's *a se* life. Though creatureliness as a derivation in no way dissolves the value of the creature. Thus, Aquinas reasons, "But only good can be a cause; because nothing can be a cause except inasmuch as it is a being, and every being, as such, is good."¹⁴⁰ For God his being and essence are one, but this is not so for creatures. For the creature, its essence and being differ.¹⁴¹ Thus, creatures receive their being from God and as such are substantially good. Creatures have being, therefore they are good and the creature has value.

The present line of reasoning moves into the substance of Velde's third mode of Aquinas's structure of creaturely goodness. Aquinas details the creature as being good by participation in the divine being. Such a participation is conditioned by the end to which the creature is ordered. The end of all things is God's own goodness, as the previous section demonstrated. Thus, in God's freedom God creates all things and orders them to that which God himself is ordered, God's goodness. So, all things that are not God are ordered by God towards himself. In this ordering, the creature participates in the good and as such the creature is good in this way. Summarizing Aquinas's supplement to

¹⁴⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 48, art. 1, co.

¹⁴¹ Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, 29.

Boethius, Velde maintains both that a creature has being and goodness as derived from God who is pure being, as well as an intrinsic goodness, which is in the likeness of God's supreme goodness.¹⁴²

Conclusion

In this chapter I sought to elaborate Aquinas's model of the procession of creatures from God and also move toward a structure of creaturely value. Concerning the former, I demonstrated that God immanent corresponds to God economic. Further I maintained that this divine self-correspondence both grounds and secures creaturely value. The God who is free and simple in himself is the God who offers being to all that is not God. God's offering of being is articulated by Aquinas as the procession of creatures. And the procession of creatures fittingly corresponds to the eternal processions within God's fecund and blessed life.

Concerning the latter, I demonstrated the structure of creaturely value through Aquinas's notion of God knowing and loving all things in himself. God knows all things through the divine word, the Son. The knowledge of all things implies a relation to the creature, where God knows himself and in so doing God knows all things, since divine knowledge is casual. God also loves all things in himself through God the Holy Spirit, who is Love and Gift. In God's act of loving himself God loves all things since for Aquinas the thing loved remains in the lover by way of an impression. So, God both knows and loves all things in himself. As such, God's creatures are bound to God's inner processive life which secures and grounds the value of creatures.

Lastly, in this chapter I demonstrated that since all creatures participate in God, all creatures have intrinsic value. I argued that Aquinas establishes a threefold structure of creaturely goodness through the creature's participation in God's being. Since the

¹⁴² Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, 34.

creature participates in this way, the creature maintains a substantial goodness of its own, a goodness which is simultaneously derivative of God's supreme goodness.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I sought to explicate the basis for creaturely value in God's simple and free being as derived from the work of Thomas Aquinas. In chapter 1, I proposed the work of John Webster as a helpful primer in regards to a systematic discussion of creation. Webster focuses the nature of the study of creation solidly on God that is his being and freedom of action. Such emphases can tend to lead the theologian to move from creation that is from nothing, to creation that is nothing. Thus, obfuscating the intrinsic value of God's creatures. In contrast to such an obfuscation, I sought to establish the inextricably nature of creation's value to God's inner relations, simplicity, and freedom. These concepts within the inner life of God are not deposed from the value of creatures, rather this God who is dynamic life grounds creaturely value. In the chapters 2 through 4 I sought to retrieve such a connection in the work of Thomas Aquinas to further ground creaturely value.

In chapter 2, I provided central notions regarding Aquinas's articulation of God's creative act *ex nihilo*. It is *creatio ex nihilo* that provides the foundation for creatures themselves as well as their value. God is the final cause of all things; thus, creatures are the result of God's free creative act. So it is that all creatures and all things move within Aquinas's model of *exitus/reditus*. God is source and goal of himself, as well as all that is not God. As such creatures are both *ex nihilo* and good. Therefore, in this thesis I have argued that in Aquinas creaturely goodness and value fundamentally rest on God's simple, free, blessed, and fecund inner life. And it is precisely this God who's inner processive life corresponds to all life that is not God in that God creates all

things from nothing. God's inner life and self-correspondence provide the metaphysical space for creatures who possess being and goodness in themselves through participation in the divine life itself. Consequently, for Aquinas God in his own triune goodness, creates good creatures from nothing, God then orders them to his own goodness and therefore the creature *is* good.

In chapter 3, I explicated the inner life of God as it relates to creation. Primarily, I contended that Aquinas employs a speculative grammar to further a metaphysical and linguistic understanding of God's freedom and simplicity. God's freedom of will to create corresponds to and is not abrogated by God's simplicity of essence. Such a God is that which creates from an inner life of blessedness and fecundity, thus leaving no epistemic space for some such necessary creation, pantheism, as well as voluntarism. Since for Aquinas, God is free not to create yet, it is fitting that such a God of dynamic life *ad intra* would create *ad extra*.

In chapter 4, I first pursued Aquinas's model of the procession of creatures from God, and then I move toward a structure of creaturely value. The movement towards creaturely value was on two accounts. I relied on Aquinas's notion of divine self-correspondence as the basis for the procession from God. Because of divine self-correspondence, the procession of creatures from God corresponds to the eternal processions within God. Thus, the creature's procession rests on God's inner fecund life of eternal generation and eternal spiration. Eternal generation for Aquinas amounts to God's knowledge of all things within himself through the Son. Aquinas details eternal spiration as God's loving of all things in himself through the Spirit. In these terms, Aquinas's use of a speculative grammar provides the linguistic and metaphysical structure to articulate such matters and further ground creaturely value.

Secondly in the chapter, I considered Aquinas on the creature's participation in God who is the supreme good. For God, existence and essence are one. In contrast, all creatures have a distinction of essence and existence. Thus, all creatures derive their

existence from God and in this act, God effects creatures that are good in themselves. I identified Aquinas's threefold structure of creaturely goodness. First, creatures participate in the good and are good, though this goodness is imperfect and changeable, whereas God's goodness is perfect. Second, Aquinas argues for a substantial goodness of the creature, that is fundamental to the creature insofar as it exists. Third, I show that Aquinas advocates for participated goodness in that all creatures are ordered to God, the supreme good. Since creatures are ordered to the good, they are good as God has ordered them.

From beginning to end, the heart of this thesis has been to wed dogmatic and speculative theology to the existential terrain of creaturely life. The dogmatic and existential often, and perhaps always, seem opposed. The former ostensibly aloof and abstract, the latter introspective and earthy. Yet, theology, as described by John Webster, is theological only when it is pursued in reference to God. Thus, I hope that I have offered a small though substantive thesis to further such a theological task as it pertains to speculative/metaphysical theology and creaturely life. The alleged gulf between these enterprises offers prospects for further research to increasingly relate scholastic dogmatics to creaturely life in the modern world. If we are God's creatures, we need God to know that we are creatures. Furthermore, we must know God to know ourselves. Thus, I would suggest that there is much room to consider the relationship of these interwoven epistemologies in concert with the early church fathers, other medieval theologians, and perhaps most appealingly, some protestant scholastics, such as the freshly translated Petrus van Mastricht. Any such endeavors of research will be of benefit to academics and the church catholic.

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ABSTRACT

TOWARD CREATURELY VALUE: GOD'S INNER PROCESSIONIVE LIFE AND THE INTRINSIC VALUE OF CREATURES IN THOMAS AQUINAS

Tyler Daniel Majors, ThM
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022
Gregg R. Allison

The intrinsic value of creatures is defensible on many accounts, though more rarely from a speculative, metaphysical, and theological perspective. In this thesis, I seek to establish and elaborate the connection between creaturely value and scholastic theology through the work of Thomas Aquinas. In chapter 1, I explicate the thesis and the methodology and build a case that Aquinas's speculative, metaphysical, and theological clarification provide the substructure for creaturely value. In chapter 2, I argue that Aquinas's vision of creation and inner trinitarian relations are mutual informing. In chapter 3, I explicate the *ad intra* processions of the Trinity as the origin and end of all created life. In chapter 4, I elucidate the relation between the processions of the Trinity *ad intra* and the procession of creatures *ad extra*. In chapter 5, I summarize my thesis and offer points of contact for future research. As such, according to Aquinas, the value of all creatures has a direct correlate in the eternal processions of the Trinity.

VITA

Tyler Daniel Majors

EDUCATION

BA, Carson Newman University, 2014

MDiv, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019

ORGANIZATIONS

Society of Biblical Literature

PROFESIONAL/MINISTERIAL

Farm Minister at Renovatus Recovery Community, 2019-Current

Ministry Candidate at Lakeway Presbyterian Church (PCA)