Trinity, *regiratio* and mind: an exploration of the systematic-theological resources of Ruusbroec's regirative model.

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Abstract

This article discusses the original and highly dynamic doctrine of the Trinity of Jan van Ruusbroec (1293-1381) and explores its potential for systematic theology today. Ruusbroec's characterizes the Trinity as 'a flowing, ebbing sea' in which the divine processions are being reversed through a moment of *regiratio* or return. The theological-anthropological implications of this view (as well as Ruusbroec's affirmation of three faculties) are being examined. It is argued that Ruusbroec's central insight may have two distinct advantages. First, it may supplement some of Thomas Aquinas's views (who only recognizes two faculties, not three). Thomas's dyadic understanding of the human person makes it difficult, for instance, to do full justice to the intuitive aspects of the mind; as well as to beauty as a transcendental. Secondly, the notion of *regiratio* may also assist us in addressing the problem of 'trinitarian inversion' whereby the 'sequence' of the economic missions does not cohere well with that of the immanent processions.

Introduction

This paper explores the exciting systematic-theological potential of the so-called regirative model of trinitarian theology, inspired by the theology of the blessed Jan van Ruusbroec (1293-1381), a medieval mystical theologian whose profound and stimulating oeuvre remains largely understudied in systematic-theological terms.[1] In this model, the Son and the Holy Spirit return to their shared unity from which they re-emerge in a never-ending dynamic of ebbing and flowing. After a brief outline of Ruusbroec's doctrine of the Trinity, I hope to show that it contains the resources to address a number of problems that scholars of trinitarian theology have acknowledged but have left largely unresolved.

First, there is the issue of 'trinitarian inversion'. This problem, identified by Hans Urs von Balthasar, refers to the fact that there appears to be a tension between the immanent Trinity (where the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son) and the economy, where salvation effected by the Son presupposes the activity of the Holy Spirit, both historically (e.g., Annunciation) and in the acknowledgement of the saving meaning of Christ in the life of the believer. I will suggest that Ruusbroec's account of the Trinity does more justice to the trinitarian dynamics as revealed in the Scriptures and therefore better meets the requirement

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[1] For a brief but reliable outline of Ruusbroec's theology, see Bernard McGinn, *The Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism (1350-1550). The Presence of God. A History of Western Christian Mysticism. Vol. V* (NY: Herder & Herder, The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2012), p. 5-61. A more in-depth discussion can be found in Rik Van Nieuwenhove, *Jan van Ruusbroec. Mystical Theologian of the Trinity* (IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003). See also: John Arblaster and Rob Faesen (eds), *A Companion to John of Ruusbroec* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

of Rahner's famous axiom, namely, that our doctrine of the immanent Trinity must be informed by the revelation of the economic Trinity.

Secondly, one of the appealing features of Ruusbroec's thought is the intimate connection he establishes between trinitarian theology and a fully triadic account of the human person, i.e., a trinitarian anthropology in which the three faculties mirror the divine Persons. While this aspect it is not unique to Ruusbroec (for it can be found in the writings of Peter Lombard or St Bonaventure as well, for instance) a triadic account of the human person as image of God contains insights that may supplement key aspects of Thomist anthropology in which only intellect and will are considered proper faculties.[2] In raising this issue my aim is not to draw a contrast between Ruusbroec and Thomas Aquinas per se. The works of Ruusbroec, a mystical theologian writing in the vernacular, do not offer the theological comprehensiveness and depth of scholastic syntheses, such as Thomas's *Summae*. He does, however, develop a strikingly original insight (trinitarian *regiratio*) which deserves more consideration. It is the aim of the present contribution to begin to explore the potential of the notion of *regiratio* for trinitarian theology and anthropology today.[3]

I will proceed as follows. First, I will briefly revisit some key themes from Thomas's trinitarian theology and anthropology (section 1). This is a well-researched field and a short

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[2] *ST* I, q. 93, a. 7 ad 3, with an explicit repudiation of the interpretation by Peter Lombard.

[3] The only modern author who has developed ideas that are somewhat similar (but not identical) to the approach proposed here is Thomas Weinandy in his innovative book *The Father's Spirit of Sonship. Reconceiving the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995). Weinandy does not refer to Ruusbroec in this proposal for a new doctrine of the Trinity.

outline can therefore suffice.[4] I will then examine Ruusbroec's contribution (with specific attention to the concept of *regiratio*) (in section 2) and how it can supplement key aspects of Thomas's trinitarian vision (section 3). In the final part of this paper I will consider how the regirative model solves the issue of trinitarian inversion (section 4).

1. *A brief overview of Thomas's theology of the Trinity*

For heuristic reasons scholars usually identify two models of the Trinity in the Latin West: the psychological or intra-personal model, usually associated with Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, and the social or inter-personal model (inspired by Richard of saint Victor's *De Trinitate*). For two reasons I will in this contribution only deal with the psychological model and leave the social model out of consideration. First, Ruusbroec's model can be broadly characterized as an instance of the psychological model, albeit with important qualifications. Secondly, as I have argued elsewhere, the psychological model appears superior to the social one in several respects. The former, for instance, offers a better account of the personal names of 'Word' and 'Holy Spirit', as well as of the indwelling of the Word and the Holy Spirit in the soul (i.e., the invisible missions).[5]

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[4] The writings of Gilles Emery have rightly attained classic status in this field: *La Trinité Créatrice. Trinité et Création dans les Commentaires aux Sentences de Thomas d'Aquin et ses Précurseurs Albert le Grand et Bonaventure* (Paris: Librairie J. Vrin, 1995); *Trinity in Aquinas* (Ypsilanti, MI, Sapientia Press, 2003); and *The Trinitarian Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[5] See Rik Van Nieuwenhove, 'Trinitarian indwelling' in E. Howells and M.A. McIntosh, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Mystical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 387-403. I will not outline the arguments in detail here. Briefly: in the psychological model the second Person is generated through an intellectual procession and is therefore properly called 'Word'. In contrast, there is no *prima facie* connection between 'Love

Thomas's doctrine of the Trinity is usually considered to be 'psychological' or 'intra-personal' because it interprets the trinitarian dynamics (as witnessed in the Scriptures and the economy of salvation[6]) by drawing an analogy with the human soul. Thomas argues that the procession of the Word occurs by way of intellect whereas the procession of the Holy Spirit takes place by way of love. As he writes:

> The procession of the Word is by way of an intelligible operation. The operation of the will within ourselves involves another procession, that of love, whereby the object loved is in the lover; as by the conception of a word, the object spoken of or understood is in the intelligent agent. Hence, besides the procession of the Word in God, there exists in him another procession called the procession of love.[7]

On the strength of this account Thomas sees the creation and sanctification of the world in light of the generation of the Word and the procession of the Holy Spirit as Love or Gift,

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received and bestowed' (which is the way Richard establishes the personal identity of the Son) and the personal name of 'Word'. Also, in contrast to the interpersonal model, the 'psychological' one, by its very nature, coheres well with the affirmation of the indwelling of the Word and the Holy Spirit in intellect and will respectively, as exemplified in Thomas's rich theology of the indwelling of the Word and the Holy Spirit in the soul.

[6] For an eloquent defence of the psychological analogy and its Biblical provenance, see Matthew Levering, *Scripture and Metaphysics. Aquinas and the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), especially ch. 5, 'Scripture and the Psychological Analogy for the Trinity'.

[7] *ST* I, q. 27, a. 3. All translations from the *Summa Theologiae* are from *St Thomas Aquinas. Summa Theologica*, tr. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, Maryland, Christian Classics: 1981).

respectively.[8] Creation of the world is an extension, if you like, of the intellectual generation of the Word by the Father. Similarly, sanctification of the world should be seen in light of the personal Gift which is the Holy Spirit, freely bestowed by the Father and the Son. For our purposes, it is important to recognize that in the Thomist model the Holy Spirit, or Love, is understood in terms of an ecstatic procession by will. As Thomas writes: 'the name spirit (*spiritus*) in things corporeal seems to signify impulse and motion; for we call the breath and the wind by the terms spirit. Now it is the property of love to move and impel the will of the lover toward the object loved'.[9] Thomas's categorical rejection of *regiratio* (to be discussed later) will further confirm that he conceives of the Holy Spirit solely in 'outgoing' or ecstatic terms.

Thomas's understanding of the human person as image of God is deeply shaped by his trinitarian doctrine. Here, however, the mature Thomas departs from the mainstream medieval Augustinian tradition. Thomas repeatedly and explicitly critiques Peter Lombard's triadic account of the soul, stating that: 'it is clear that memory (*memoria*), intellect and will are not three faculties (*vires*), as stated in the *Sentences'*.[10] In *ST* I, q. 79, a. 7 obj. 1 the traditional medieval interpretation of Augustine is levelled against Thomas's innovation (with a reference to *De Trin.* X, 18, where Augustine appears to identify memory, intellect and will as the three powers that constitute our mind) but Thomas categorically objects to this reading (with an appeal to a quotation from *De Trin.* XIV itself): 'Although it is said [III *Sent*. d. 1]

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[8] *ST* I, q. 37. a. 2 ad 3. See also Emery, *Trinity in Aquinas*, pp. 152-53

[9] *ST* I, q. 36, a. 1. When, in an objection the view is aired that the Holy Spirit is a bond of love of Father and Son, Thomas is at pains to clarify, in accordance with his account of spirit as ecstatic, that the Holy Spirit is not a medium between Father and Son but proceeds from their mutual love (*ST* I, q. 37, a. 1, ad 3).

[10] *ST* I, q. 93, a. 7 ad 3

that memory, intellect and will are three powers, this is not in accordance with the meaning of Augustine…'[11] Whether or not Thomas's interpretation of Augustine is convincing does not matter for our purposes. The important point is that he does not accept a triadic account of the soul. One of the main reasons why Thomas rejected Peter Lombard's account of the soul in terms of a triad of *memoria*, intellect and will is that he was aware that the peripatetic tradition considered memory one of the 'internal senses' (as with Avicenna and Averroes) and a function of the sensible soul we share with other animals, unlike our rational faculties of intellect and will.[12]

Thomas's preference for a dyadic account of the human faculties[13] has important implications for his trinitarian anthropology: the soul actualizes its image character when it mirrors, not the three divine Persons, but by participating in the generation of the Word and the procession of the Holy Spirit as Love, that is: when we come to know and love God.[14]

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[11] *ST* I, q. 79, a. 7 ad 1

[12] For a detailed discussion of the fate of *memoria* in medieval thought, see the helpful contribution by Jörn Müller, 'Memory in Medieval Philosophy' in Dmitri Nikulin (ed.), *Memory. A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 92-124

[13] *ST* I, q. 79, a. 7: 'memory is not a distinct power from the intellect'.

[14] *ST* I, q. 38, a. 1: 'the rational creature does sometimes attain thereto; as when it is made partaker of the divine Word and of the Love proceeding, so as freely to know God truly and to love God rightly'. See also *ST* I, q. 93, a. 6 for Thomas's identification of our image character with the processions and D. Juvenal Merriell, 'Trinitarian Anthropology' in Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow, eds., *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), pp. 123-42 and Merriell's important study *To the Image of the Trinity. A Study in the Development of Aquinas's Teaching* (Toronto: PIMS, 1990). I will not discuss the relation between *mens* and *memoria* in the writings of the scholastics. For our purposes it suffices to say that Ruusbroec treats *memorie* (*memoria*) and

Thomas, again quoting Book XIV of Augustine's *De Trinitate*, claims to have found support for this reading of the soul as image of the Trinity in the writings of the bishop of Hippo who, he claims, 'places the image of the divine Trinity more in actual understanding and will, than in these as existing in the habitual retention of the memory'.[15] Thomas's understanding of the soul as image of the Trinity in terms of knowing and loving God, rather than in terms of mind, intellect, and will, is undoubtedly a highly dynamic one, with important implications for Christian spirituality. His choice to recognize only intellect and will as main faculties of the soul is, however, not without its drawbacks, even on his own terms, as we will see later (section 3).

2.   *Ruusbroec's regirative model of the Trinity*

Throughout his works Jan van Ruusbroec, although not an academic theologian, developed a spirituality which was deeply theologically informed. His trinitarian doctrine in particular must rank as one of the most dynamic ones in the Western tradition due to the central role he attributes to the notion of *regiratio*, i.e., the view that the generation of the Word and the procession of the Holy Spirit are being reversed. Scholastic theologians occasionally discussed the principle of *regiratio, reditus,* or *motus circularis* but they generally refused to apply it to the intra-trinitarian life itself.[16] Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas were happy enough to consider creation and sanctification in circular terms—from God to God—but they did not attribute it to the intra-trinitarian processions themselves. Albert for instance,

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ghedachten (*mens*) as synonymous. Once *mens/memoria* has been expelled from the triad of faculties, *memoria* becomes the mere power of recollection, as with Thomas.

[15] *ST* I, q. 93, a. 7, ad 3

[16] Emery, *La Trinité,* p. 88ff; see also Rik Van Nieuwenhove, 'Neoplatonism, *Regiratio*, and Trinitarian Theology: A Look at Ruusbroec', *Hermathena* 169 (2000), pp. 169-88.

expresses his concern that the notion of *regiratio* may appear to compromise the Son's *vis spiralis* (the power to spirate).[17] Thomas uses the term *regiratio* only once in a trinitarian context.[18] Following Albert, he declines to apply it to the intra-trinitarian life but associates it instead with the return of creatures to God. As the final goal of things mirrors their origin, the return to God occurs through the same divine realities from which they originated. Thomas therefore refuses to attribute a circular movement or return *(circulatio vel regiratio)* to the immanent Trinity but reserves the term instead for describing the *reditus* of created things to God. The dynamic of *exitus-reditus* refers to the trinitarian economy, not to the immanent processions within Trinity.[19]

Meister Eckhart, on the other hand, applies the notion of *reditus* to the immanent Trinity but, inspired by proposition 15 of *Liber de Causis*, associates it especially with the *reditio completa*, the complete return of the Word to the Father, in which the soul as image is said to participate.[20] For Eckhart the 'return' retained a deeply intellectual character. Ruusbroec, in contrast, associates the return or *regiratio*—which he translates literally and accurately in Middle-Dutch as *wederboeghen*—of the divine Persons especially with the Holy Spirit as the personal bond of love between Father and Son. To illustrate this, let us consider a passage from his first book *The Realm of Lovers*. Ruusbroec first describes 'the sublime nature of God' as follows:

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[17] Albert the Great, I *Sent*. d. 11, a. 1, ad 9. To adopt a postal analogy, it would be a case of 'Return to Sender.'

[18] I *Sent*. d. 14, q. 2, a. 2; see Emery, *La Trinité,* p. 393

[19] Emery, *La Trinité,* p. 402

[20] Van Nieuwenhove, 'Neoplatonism, *Regiratio* and Trinitarian Theology', pp. 173-75.

this noble nature, which is the principal cause of all creatures, is fruitful. Therefore it cannot rest in the unity of the Fatherhood, because of the stirring of fruitfulness; but it must without cease give birth to the eternal Wisdom, that is, the Son of the Father. (…) Neither out of the fruitful nature, that is, Fatherhood, nor out of the Father's giving birth to his Son does Love, that is, the Holy Spirit flow; but out of the fact that the Son was born a Person other than the Father, where the Father beholds him as born, and everything one with him as the life of everything, and the Son, in turn, beholds the Father giving birth and fruitful, and himself, and all things, in the Father – this is seeing and seeing-back in a fruitful nature – from this comes a Love, that is, the Holy Spirit, and it is a bond from the Father to the Son and from the Son to the Father.[21]

From Bonaventure Ruusbroec borrows the notions that the Father generates the Son out of the fruitfulness of his divine nature *(bonum diffusivum sui)* and that from the mutual contemplation of Father and Son the Holy Spirit proceeds as their bond of Love. This passage further suggests that creation can only be understood in light of the generation of the Word by the Father ('and everything one with him as the life of everything…'). This is standard medieval fare in the Bonaventurean, exemplarist tradition. However, Ruusbroec then makes an original move in the sentence immediately following this passage:

By this Love, the Persons are embraced and permeated and are made to flow back into that unity out of which the Father without cease is giving birth. Now, even though

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[21] All references (to the lines in the Middle Dutch text and the page numbers from the English translation) are from Guido de Baere and Thom Mertens (eds), *The Complete Ruusbroec,* 2 vols, Corpus Christianorum Scholars Version (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014). Here: *The Realm of Lovers,* 1597-1619; tr. 117

they are made to flow back into unity, there is no abiding, on account of nature's fruitfulness. This giving-birth and this flowing-back into unity is the work of the Trinity.[22]

Ruusbroec, therefore, sees the Holy Spirit as the principle of reflux (*wedervloeien*) or return (Latin: *regiratio*; Middle-Dutch: *wederboeghen*) of the divine Persons in their shared unity.[23]

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[22] *Realm of Lovers,* 1619-23; tr.117 (partly modified).

[23] In a number of publications, Lieve Uytenhove has denied that the Holy Spirit is the principle of *regiratio* in Ruusbroec's theology [*Embraced by the Father and the Son in the Unity of the Holy Spirit. A Study of the Trinity and the Mystical Life in the Works of Jan van Ruusbroec* (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), pp.109-114 and 'Ruusbroec as Theologian: the Holy Spirit' in John Arblaster and Rob Faesen (eds.) *A Companion to John of Ruusbroec* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp.179-203]. In the latter publication, for instance, she writes (p.185): 'the Holy Spirit regarded as a "Person" is not to be considered as a principle of *regiratio* (flowing back). *The love in which the Father and the Son are one in unity is, in truth, one and the same love, which comes into existence as the third Person* in the out-flowing from the Father and the Son. *For there is only one Holy Spirit or one divine love.* However, Ruusbroec is not saying that the Holy Spirit, as a "Person," is bringing about the flowing back (…)' [my italics]. She then attributes the cause of *regiratio* to the divine unity. Some brief comments: firstly, this reading clashes with the texts in which Ruusbroec explicitly affirms the role of the Holy Spirit as principle of return (e.g., *The Twelve Beguines*, 2b50, where he describes the reflux that occurs 'by means of the Holy Spirit' (*overmidst den heilighen gheest*); or the extract from *Realm of Lovers*, quoted in the main text above. Secondly, Uytenhove's view is based on the assumption that the Holy Spirit as 'bond (…) refers to the unity of God's nature' (p.184), which effectively confuses—or even identifies, as my quotation in italics from her article makes clear—the personal nature of love (=the Holy Spirit) with a substantialist understanding of love (=God as love). This is, however, a standard distinction in medieval theology from Augustine onwards. Finally, her interpretation makes Ruusbroec vulnerable to the charge of *quaternitas*, i.e., the notion that there is a fourth entity (divine unity) 'behind the Persons', which would be, in Uytenhove's interpretation, the cause of their return.

Through the Holy Spirit the divine Persons flow back into the paternal unity, where they 'enjoy' and 'rest' in 'the fathomless whirlpool of simplicity' of their perichoretic unity,[24] from which the generation of the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit recommences, due to the inner dynamism of self-sharing love. After all, it belongs to the nature of Love to return what it receives *(Minnen natuere es altoes gheven ende nemen)*, not because it feels indebted or desires to balance the books, but rather out of sheer gratuitousness, in order to enable the other to give once more, in a never-ending dynamic of giving and receiving love.[25] As I will suggest later in this paper, the whole economy of salvation and our response in grace can therefore be interpreted in light of this bestowal and return of the Holy Spirit as Love.

The passage quoted suggests that there are three moments in the life of the Trinity: there is an active, out-going moment (i.e., the generation of the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit); there is the moment of return (i.e., the reversal of the divine processions through the embrace of the Holy Spirit); and, finally, there is the moment of fruition in perichoretic unity. From here, given the fecundity of the paternal nature, the process starts all over again, in a never-ending, pulsating dynamic. Ruusbroec therefore describes the Trinity in highly dynamic terms, with the Son and the Holy Spirit *going out* from the Father, and then *flowing back* into the divine unity, where they *rest* in enjoyment. In a famous passage from *The Spiritual Espousals*, Ruusbroec writes:

> The flowing of God always demands a flowing-back, for God is a flowing, ebbing sea
> which flows without cease into all his beloved, according to each one's needs and

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[24] *The Spiritual Espousals*, c. 246-47, tr. 235

[25] *The Twelve Beguines* 2b 674, tr. 692; see Van Nieuwenhove, *Jan van Ruusbroec,* pp.136-8. Ruusbroec's analysis has also major potential for enriching contemporary discussions on the nature of gift.

dignity. And he is ebbing back in again, drawing all those whom he has endowed on heaven and earth, together with all that they have and can do'.[26]

As the last sentence of this quotation suggests, the Christian faithful are invited to share in this trinitarian dynamic, characterized by the three moments in the life of the Trinity, i.e., the outgoing moment, the reflux, and the moment of fruition. Our participation in this intra-divine dynamic constitutes what Ruusbroec calls the common life (*ghemeyne leven*), perhaps better translated as the universal or catholic life. Mirroring the threefold pattern of the Trinity, it involves a life of charitable activity and engagement with the *exterior* world; *interiority* and devotion; and contemplation or *resting* in God:

> God's Spirit breathes us out to love and perform virtuous works, and he draws us back into him to rest and enjoy: this is an eternal life, just like in our bodily life we breathe air in and out ... to *go in,* in idle enjoyment, and to *go out* with works, and *always remaining united* with God's Spirit: that is what I mean. (…) Thus we will *go out* into our ordinary life and *go in* with love and cleave to God, and always remain *united* with God in stillness.[27]

Ruusbroec's ideal of the common life echoes and radicalizes Gregory the Great's ideal of the *vita mixta* (the mixed life) in which charitable activity (exterior works), yearning for God (growing interiority) and contemplation (or fruition of God) are in perfect harmony. But how can we both enjoy God, and yet be active? Ruusbroec's language of 'enjoying God' or 'resting in God' (he treats the expressions as synonymous) recalls the Augustinian distinction between *frui* and *uti*.[28] Augustine's notion of fruition of God refers to a radical theocentric

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[26] *The Spiritual Espousals* b986ff; tr. 196-7

[27] *The Seven Rungs,* 1121–32 (my translation and italics).

[28] Augustine too had associated enjoyment and rest, as in *De Trin.* X.13.

focus we should adopt in all our dealings with the world. Only God should be our *ultimate* concern. Similarly, Ruusbroec explains the fruition of God by developing the notion of the single intention (*die eenvuldighe meyninghe*) or theocentric focus in everything we do.[29] As Ruusbroec puts it succinctly: 'therefore he has a common life, for contemplation and action come just as readily to him and he is perfect in both'.[30]

Thus far, I have outlined Ruusbroec's theology of the Trinity and how it shapes his ideal of the common life. I now want to examine in greater detail his trinitarian anthropology, which contains some interesting resources for supplementing the Thomist outline.

3. Trinitarian anthropology and regiratio

As mentioned earlier, Thomas, by rejecting a triadic account of the soul, construes its image-character, not in terms of three faculties but by referring to the operations of knowing and loving God, which constitute a participation in the generation of the Word and the procession of the Holy Spirit. Following Peter Lombard and Bonaventure, Ruusbroec, in contrast, still identifies three faculties in the soul: mind (*ghedachten* or *memorie)*, intellect, and will, which mirror Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Faithful to his regirative trinitarian model, Ruusbroec describes the operation of the soul in similar terms. Memory or mind (reflecting the role of the Father) as the ground of the soul can engage with the world through reason and will; it can, however, also repose idly when it turns away from the activity and multiplicity of the

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[29] *The Four Temptations,* 51-4

[30] *The Four Temptations,* 948–49.

external world in a more 'interior' state.[31] Again, our reason (mirroring the Word) is usually occupied with external things but it can also turn within and rest in non-activity. The will, finally, can pursue things in the world, or it can permeate the faculties and incline itself and the intellect towards their source, mirroring the role of the Holy Spirit as principle of the return of the divine Persons.[32] In this return the faculties come to rest in enjoyment. The analogy between soul and Trinity is clear: in both cases there is an out-going, in-going or regirative, and fruitive dimension.

It will have become clear that Ruusbroec's account allows us to do justice to the soul as image of the Trinity in a twofold way: first, our three faculties, namely mind, intellect and will reflect the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, respectively.[33] Secondly, the operations of intellect and will reflect the intra-trinitarian dynamic in its three aspects, namely, going-out, return, and rest. Ruusbroec's understanding of the soul as trinitarian image can therefore do justice to triunity as well as processions.

I will now briefly suggest how Ruusbroec's model can supplement Thomas's account in a number of ways. Throughout his writings Thomas correctly identifies intuitive and connatural aspects that ground our cognitive and volitional operations. It seems to me these may be better accounted for in a triadic model. A small number of scholars, sympathetic to Thomas's

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[31] For a more detailed discussion of this extract, see Rik Van Nieuwenhove, 'Ruusbroec's notion of the contemplative life and his understanding of the human person' in J. Arblaster and R. Faesen, eds., *Mystical Anthropology. Authors of the Low Countries* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 73-88.

[32] For this outline, see *The Realm of Lovers*, 272-99.

[33] This is an advantage over the Thomist version of the psychological model in which the soul reflects the processions only but not the three Persons.

thought, have flagged that in Thomas's psychology there does not appear to be a specific faculty which can do justice to important intuitive aspects that ground both our cognition and volition.[34] These aspects, therefore, have to go 'underground' so to speak, or be allocated to intellect or will.[35]

This applies at different levels. One of Thomas's key distinctions is the one between judgement by inclination or natural affinity and judgement by reason.[36] He refers to this throughout his works, such as when explaining how theological wisdom, acquired by the study of the data of revelation, differs from wisdom understood as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In *ST* I, q. 1, a. 6 ad 3, for instance, Thomas argues that the gift of wisdom allows us to judge 'by inclination' as when a virtuous person intuitively or instinctively knows what is right or wrong, without being able to offer reasoned arguments for it. On the other hand, we may be learned in moral sciences and be able to argue in a theoretical manner why something (e.g., adultery) is morally problematic without our having the proper virtue (e.g., chastity). In contrast to judgement by reason, this judgement by affinity or inclination is thus profoundly intuitive. One wonders, however, whether Thomas's overall intellectualist emphasis whereby our intellect comes to understanding through the generation of an inner word does full justice to connaturality. A triadic account of the soul might enrich the Thomist notion of connaturality.

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[34] For this, see Andrew Tallon, *Head and Heart. Affection, Cognition, Volition as Triune Consciousness* (NY: Fordham University Press, 1996).

[35] See Tallon, *Head and Heart,* chs 8-9.

[36] Tallon, *Head and Heart*, pp. 221-50

Similarly, Thomas rightly emphasizes that our discursive reasoning processes are grounded in a simple insight in, or understanding of, first principles, which we simply 'see' and cannot, or need not, argue for in a reasoned manner. His usual examples are the principle of non-contradiction or the notion that the whole is larger than any of its constituent parts. Thomas attributes this kind of immediate insight to *intellectus* because he does not have a distinct faculty that could 'cater' for the intuitive aspects that lie at the basis of our cognitive processes. Hence, he must argue that the faculty of human understanding has a twofold dimension: one intellective or intuitive (the insight into first principles) and another one rational-discursive.[37] The rational discursive process, however, also culminates in a moment of non-discursive insight, which Thomas calls *intuitus simplex*.[38] In short, rational-discursive cognition is framed, so to speak, by intellective, non-discursive insight as both its source and its culmination. In broad phenomenological terms this intuitive dimension is quite literally *fundamental* to our thinking, i.e., it is the ground of our cognitive processes. We can have a vague intuition, when confronted with a theoretical problem, that the solution might lie in a certain direction long before we can express it or even properly conceptualize it. Similarly, we 'test' the veracity of our intuitions by examining their coherence with views we already hold, and vice versa. The to-and-fro movement I am alluding to is, of course, known to Thomas and this is why he describes the cognitive process between *intellectus* and *ratio* in circular terms. Given his dyadic account of the soul, however, Thomas has to allocate both this intuitive dimension as well as the more discursive aspects of human rationality to the faculty of the intellect only. Here, Ruusbroec's account of the to-and-fro movement between

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[37] *De Veritate* [On Truth], q. 15, a. 1

[38] On this, see Rik Van Nieuwenhove, 'Contemplation, intellectus and simplex intuitus in Aquinas: Rediscovering a Neoplatonic Theme', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 91 (2017), pp. 199-225.

(the more intuitive) mind and (more explicitly veracious) intellect could be developed to enrich the Thomist account of human cognition.

The same applies to volition. Our acts of will are often the expression of a more intuitive inclination or fundamental orientation. Sometimes, of course, the movement goes the other way, for instance when we realize that we are wilfully pursuing a path that clashes with a more fundamental orientation, and we end up readjusting our explicit desires.[39] Indeed, Thomas draws a highly interesting parallel between the role of intellective insight into first principles and discursive reasoning, on the one hand, and will and free-will, on the other hand. The will provides us with the overall orientation toward the good; free-will expresses this by choosing, that is, it consists in desiring something for the sake of obtaining something else.[40] Again, Thomas has to 'locate' both the more general, intuitive dimension, as well as the more manifest expression of our voluntary acts, in the same faculty.

A similar argument can be made to account for 'attention'. Thomas knows perfectly well that our will is involved in deciding what the intellect pays attention to. (It is for this reason he can make allowances for the roles of will and charity in our essentially intellectual acts of

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[39] Such as occurs to the protagonist in A. Platonov's masterful story, incidentally—for my purposes—called 'The Return'. In the story Aleksey Ivanov, having boarded a train with the intention of leaving his wife and children, decides to return to them when he sees his daughter and son running near the train tracks, calling him back: 'Ivanov (…) felt a kind of heat in his chest, as if the heart imprisoned and pining within him had been beating long and in vain all his life and had only now beaten its way to freedom (…). He suddenly recognized everything he had ever known before, but much more precisely and more truthfully'. The story has been translated by Robert and Elizabeth Chandler in Andrey Platonov. *Soul and Other Stories* (London: Vintage Books, 2013), pp. 281-308.

[40] *ST* I, q. 83, a. 4

contemplation, such as argued in *ST* II-II, q. 180, a. 7 ad 1 when he discusses delight). It should be clear, however, that the will redirecting the intellect is, by Thomas's own logic, in effect a *return* of the will toward the intellect, perhaps somewhat in tension with the overall tenor of his intellectualism, in which the intellect first conceives of something which the will can then subsequently want or pursue.[41]

Also, and perhaps most importantly, I would like to add that the fact that he does not recognize mind as a distinct faculty is a contributing factor to Thomas's decision not to categorize beauty as a transcendental, in contrast to truth and goodness. Within the confines of this article I can only briefly sketch the problem. Jan Aertsen has convincingly argued that Thomas asserts that truth and goodness are transcendentals because they correspond to the faculties of intellect and will respectively.[42] When we conceive of something as 'good' we think of it as a suitable object of our desire. Something is 'true' when we conceive of it as in harmony with the cognitive powers of sense and intellect. Thomas defines 'beauty' in *ST* I-II, q. 27, a. 1 as 'that which pleases when apprehended'. The beautiful is the same as the good but whereas the good attracts us and calms our desire when possessed, the beautiful is that which stills desire by being seen or known. The beautiful can therefore be characterized (although Thomas does not quite put it in those terms) as a perichoresis of truth and goodness. Still, Thomas refuses to call beauty a transcendental, in marked contrast to truth and goodness. The reason is that, unlike truth and goodness, there is no corresponding faculty

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[41] We find instances of Thomas's intellectualism in *ST* I-II, q. 3, a. 4 and *ST* I, q. 82, a. 4. On the other hand, Thomas acknowledges that the will moves the intellect in terms of its intentionality toward the end in general, as it directs other powers to their suitable good. For the intellect this suitable good is truth.

[42] See Jan Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals. The Case of Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: Brill, 1996)

to which beauty could be appended to, so to speak. This may partly explain why Thomas has precious little to say about beauty throughout his writings. It is exactly the recognition of mind as a distinct faculty, however, that would fill this chiatus in Thomas's 'aesthetics'.[43] If the mind is the ground of the faculties of intellect and will, which express and manifest through our intellectual and volitive processes that which is in an incipient and intuitive manner present in the mind, and if art can be characterized as the embodiment and crystallization in sensuous form of truth and goodness, we can then begin to see how mind and art 'cohere' most intimately with one another. In the work of art we encounter 'truth' in a manner that is non-conceptual and 'intuitive'; and, similarly we relate to the 'goodness' inherent in the work of art by merely dwelling on it, without wanting to possess it. The mind, as the faculty that incipiently contains truth and goodness, is the one that is best attuned to intuitively enjoying art, in which we find an embodied instantiation of truth and goodness.

Finally, from a theological point of view the recognition of mind as a third faculty has the distinct advantage that each theological virtue has its own faculty to perfect (mind, intellect and will being perfected by hope, faith and charity, respectively). Ruusbroec merely hints at this approach,[44] which was later explicitly developed by John of the Cross. Thomas had associated both hope and love with the will, thus complicating the issue of how to distinguish between these two virtues. Indeed, Thomas veers toward describing hope as a mere

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[43] Although we should be careful not to attribute a modern notion of aesthetics to medieval authors, as Olivier Boulnois reminds us (in 'De l'Esthétique Médiévale, derechef, qu'elle n'existe pas' in Olivier Boulnois and Isabelle Moulin, eds., *Le Beau et la Beauté au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Vrin, 2019), p. 17-38) it is clear that other authors, such as Hugh of Saint Victor, Suger of Saint Denis, or Bonaventure were far more interested in the status of the beautiful than Thomas Aquinas.

[44] *Realm*, 575; *Espousals* b80.

'imperfect' version of love (for in charity we love God for his sake whereas in hope we intend to God for the sake of the good that is our salvation).[45]

In summary, the intuitive aspects that ground our cognitive and volitive operations, as well as the dynamic to-and-fro movement between intuition, on the one hand, and the operations of intellect and will, on the other, can be better accounted for if we acknowledge the existence of mind as a third faculty and recognize a *regiratio* of will and intellect back into mind. Again, attributing a transcendental status to beauty is only possible, on Thomas's own terms, if we acknowledge mind a faculty distinct from intellect and will. As a distinct faculty, mind is geared toward grasping the sensuous embodiment of beauty, which it itself a perichoresis of truth and goodness.[46]

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[45] cf. *ST* II-II, q. 17, a. 8: 'there is a perfect (*perfectus*) and an imperfect (*imperfectus*) love. Perfect love is that whereby we love others in themselves, as when we wish others some good for their own sake; thus we love our friends. Imperfect love is that whereby we love something, not for its own sake, but that we may obtain that good for ourselves; thus we love what we desire. The first love of God pertains to charity, which adheres to God for his own sake; while hope pertains to the second love, since those who hope, intend to obtain possession of something for themselves'.

[46] In his lucid book *About Beauty. A Thomistic Interpretation* Armand Maurer has suggested that a Thomistic aesthetics can be developed by focussing on Aquinas's notion of connaturality, which is non-discursive, intuitive, and experiential. This rich insight can be strengthened by recognizing a proper locus for connaturality in mind as a distinct faculty. The same approach is taken by Susanne Langer who describes the meaning (or import) we intuitively encounter in a work of art as follows: 'Art (…) gives form to something that is simply there, as the intuitive organizing function of sense gives form to objects and spaces, colour and sound. (…) To understand the 'idea' in a work of art is therefore more like *having a new experience* than like entertaining a new proposition (…).' *Philosophy in a New Key. A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite and Art* (MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 263. In *Feeling and Form* (NY: Scribner's Books, 1953), p.379, she explains: 'The import of

4. Trinitarian inversion, regiratio, and economy

Thus far, I have suggested that the notion of *regiratio* and the recognition of mind as a distinct faculty can enrich trinitarian theology and anthropology (including Thomas's). This proposal, however, will prove of little value unless it can be demonstrated that the regirative model is defensible in terms of revelation of trinitarian dynamics in the history of salvation. A sceptic might argue that the regirative model is simply another (?) instance of an extraneous Neoplatonic *exitus-reditus* scheme being crudely imposed upon a core Christian theological doctrine. In what follows I will argue that the regirative model can be supported by appealing to the economy as revealed in the Scriptural witness and that it may even solve one of the key problems classic models of the Trinity face, namely the issue of 'trinitarian inversion'.

It is a central assumption of traditional theology of the Trinity that the historical missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit reveal the eternal processions within the Godhead, or in more Rahnerian terms: the economic Trinity reveals the immanent Trinity. This raises the key question: Is there any evidence for *regiratio* in the economy?

At the peril of stating the obvious it should be clear that the Son returns to the Father (John 16:28) through his resurrection and ascension into heaven (Luke 24:51). In marked contrast to both the social and psychological models, the regirative model has the resources to account

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an art symbol cannot be built up like the meaning of a discourse, but must be seen *in toto* first; that is, the understanding of a work of art begins with an intuition of the whole presented feeling. Contemplation then gradually reveals the complexities of the piece, and of its import. In discourse, meaning is synthetically construed by a succession of intuitions; but in art the complex whole is seen or anticipated first'.

for this in immanent terms because it recognizes a 'return' of the Son to the Father within the Trinity, thus meeting the requirements of Rahner's axiom. This is a highly significant advantage.

It should be granted that we cannot refer to texts in the Scriptures that explicitly point to a return of the Holy Spirit. Nonetheless, just as there is no explicit doctrine of the Trinity in the New Testament but merely a trinitarian dynamic which the tradition has (correctly, in my view) interpreted through developing the Nicaean theology of the Trinity, so too there is a pneumatological dynamic of return present in the New Testament. Indeed, it is with the Holy Spirit that we are led back through Christ to the Father. This is the case both at personal-existential and broader economic levels.

I will first illustrate the more subjectivist-existential level, and again Thomas's theology will provide us with a useful point of departure. Consider the act of prayer in which, according to Rom. 8:26, the Holy Spirit comes to our aid, effectively assuming an interceding role on our behalf.[47] In Book Four of his first theological synthesis Thomas had asked whether we should pray to any of the trinitarian Persons, or rather to God as such.[48] He replies that while the entire Godhead is the source of our beatitude, there is nonetheless a trinitarian dynamic at work in our act of praying: 'a certain return (*reductio*) is made from the other Persons back to the Father (…). And this is the reason why Christ, referring us to the Father as to a principle not from a principle, taught us to direct our prayer to the Father through the Son'. Similarly, it

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[47] See Thomas's comments on Rom 8:23ff in his *Commentary on Romans*, Ch. 8, lect. 5, nos 692-4. The term Thomas uses is *postulare* (to intercede or ask).

[48] IV *Sent*. d. 15, q. 4, a. 5; I have benefitted from the translation by Beth Mortensen in *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Commentary on the Sentences, Book IV, Distinctions 14-25* (Wisconsin, Aquinas Institute, 2017), pp. 180-81

is through the Gift of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us, that we can address the Father through Christ. Therefore, so Thomas suggests, it is more appropriate *(magis competit)* to ask *for* the Holy Spirit than to ask something *from* the Holy Spirit. These remarks, no matter how brief, suggest that prayer can become a participation in the trinitarian dynamics. Our prayer reflects a kind of return *(reductio)*: in receiving the Holy Spirit we return with him through the Son to the Father, 'the principle not from a principle'. This *reductio* mirrors the operation of the Trinity in the history of salvation: the Holy Spirit, the one who is given to us in prayer, assists us in discerning the saving mystery of the Son who through the Incarnation brings us back in the Spirit to the Father. Here, however, we encounter a problem with the standard accounts.

The problem of trinitarian inversion[49] as it is called by Hans Urs von Balthasar refers to the fact that the Christological centre of the economy of salvation is framed 'by a pneumatology that precedes and succeeds it'. There is, in other words, a mismatch between the priority accorded to the Son over the Holy Spirit in the immanent processions (cf. *Filioque*) and the way the Holy Spirit precedes the Son in the economy.

As indicated, this problem arises at personal-existential (we come to recognize Christ in our lives through receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit) and at broader economic level. There is evidently a temporal priority of the Holy Spirit over the Son at the Annunciation. Similarly, at the baptism and the ministry of Christ the Holy Spirit precedes the Son. Moreover, in the process of discerning the mystery of salvation, there is a priority of the Holy Spirit over the

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[49] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic. Vol. III. The Spirit of Truth* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), p. 35 and *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory. Vol. III. Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press: 1992), p.183.

Word: the Scriptures testify that it is the Gift of the Holy Spirit who enables the community to recognize Christ as the Son of God through whom they come to the Father. Again, it is the Spirit of truth who witnesses to Christ (John 14:25; 15:26), and it is only when the apostles receive the Holy Spirit that they begin to discern the salvation that Christ effected as witnessed and prophesied by the Old Testament.

For von Balthasar this anomaly does not impact on his understanding of the immanent Trinity in which the generation of the Son precedes the procession of the Holy Spirit. In contrast, when critiquing the Latin tradition John Zizioulas has seized upon this issue to question the Latin notion of *Filioque*, observing that, 'if one looks at the Economy in order to arrive at *Theologia* [i.e., speculation about the immanent Trinity], one begins with the Holy Spirit, then passes through the Son, and finally reaches the Father'.[50] In summary, the historical missions of the Holy Spirit and the Son (the economic Trinity) appear at least in terms of temporal succession at variance with the way Latin theology has construed the sequence of processions within the immanent Trinity where the Son's generation 'precedes' that of the Holy Spirit. Both the traditional psychological and social models can adequately account for the Holy Spirit as the Gift in whom all gifts are bestowed. But they lack the theological resources to explain how our participation in the Holy Spirit can constitute a return to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. One of the attractive aspects of the regirative model is that it can do just that: it can explain that the Holy Spirit as Love is not simply love bestowed on us by the Father and the Son (the 'ecstatic' dimension that Thomas so beautifully captures) but also a Love that returns to the Father—a return in which we can share with the Holy Spirit. Ruusbroec's innovation of attributing a *reditus* to the immanent

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[50] John Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), p.188

Trinity coheres therefore much better with the witness of the economy in which the Holy Spirit both precedes and fulfils the mission of the Son.

Our entire response to the Gift of Holy Spirit in the Christian life through prayer, liturgical participation, theological activity, charitable activities… can be perceived as a genuine sharing in the return of the Holy Spirit, with the Son, to the Father. Through the Holy Spirit and the gift of the sacraments (especially baptism and Eucharist) we become incorporated into the Body of Christ, through which we return to the Father. The Eucharist becomes a supreme moment in which the missions of the Holy Spirit and the Son and their return intersect. This finds expression in the Eucharistic prayer in which the priest and the congregation honour God *(Per ipsum et cum ipso et in ipso est tibi Deo Patri omnipotenti in unitate Spiritus Sancti omnis honor et gloria per omnia saecula saeculorum.)* Through the Holy Spirit we can fathom the mystery of the Incarnate Word who himself is the way towards the Father (John 14:6). The entire history of salvation can thus be seen in light of the sending and 'return' of the Word and the Holy Spirit. Every action performed with charity in response to God's grace can now be interpreted as a participation in the returning movement of the Holy Spirit.

In short, the regirative model with its never-ending dynamic of divine going-out, flowing back in, and resting in enjoyment has significant and largely undiscovered potential for trinitarian theology in its own right, our understanding of the economy of salvation, trinitarian anthropology, the nature of mind and its relation to art, and spirituality. While each of these areas deserve a far more detailed discussion in light of the regirative model than I can presently provide, I hope that this brief outline will nonetheless have gone some way

toward lifting the veil on immensely rich and exciting theological vistas waiting to be explored.[51]