

***Bullitio* and the God beyond God: Meister Eckhart's Trinitarian Theology¹**

Part I: The inner life of God

P.L. Reynolds

Two of the most striking and memorable features of Meister Eckhart's treatment of the Trinity are these. First, in several passages in the Latin works he uses the metaphor of *bullitio*—literally 'boiling' or 'bubbling'—to explain the inner trinitarian life of the Deity; that is, to explain how and why there is procession within God. Secondly, in several passages in his German sermons he distinguishes between the personal, trinitarian God and a distinctionless, nameless ground or Godhead that transcends this. The latter distinction, apparently, is considered to exist within God: *prima facie*, at least, the distinction is not merely economic or between 'God within' and 'God without'. My intention in this study is to examine each of these aspects in turn, to suggest how they are related, and to consider what all this can tell us about the general character of Eckhart's trinitarianism.

Our task presents us with a problem which must always arise in the study of Eckhart: that of bringing together the Latin Eckhart with the German Eckhart and attempting to take a unified view, and this while conserving the peculiarities of each. *Bullitio* is a Latin word and, as far as I know, the notion is applied to the Trinity only in the Latin works. It may be noted, however, that there is a related family of German words such as *ûzbruch* and *ursprunc* which Eckhart uses to denote the idea of the supreme fountain-head or source, or the original outpouring, outspringing or outbreak of being.² One of the things I wish to suggest in this study is that the distinction between God as Trinity and as Godhead is not made in the Latin works. It is clear, at least, that it is not made in the *bullitio* passages.

No attempt will be made in this study to track down all of Eckhart's sources nor to discover how his views on the Trinity were conditioned by contemporary discussions and controversies. Something must be said, however, about earlier approaches and about a fundamental divergence in the Trinitarian theology of his predecessors.

The substantive contribution of Thomas Aquinas is twofold.³ First,

following Augustine, analogies for the Trinity are sought in the human mind. The generation of a mental *verbum* in the human intellect and the springing up of love in the will are considered as analogies by which the generation of the Son and the spiration of the Holy Spirit may be understood. Analogy here is more than mere metaphor. Secondly, following Aristotle, Thomas applies an analysis of relation. The being of a relation as such is said to be *ad aliquid* (from the Greek *pros ti*) rather than inherent in its subject. From this point of view the identification of the Persons with their relations comes into clearer focus. The Son is filiation and the Spirit is procession. The persons are 'subsisting relations'. In these respects Thomas is merely refining and clarifying accepted doctrines. Where he becomes more individual and characteristic, and where he breaks with much of tradition, is in his insistence on the *a posteriori* or retrospective nature of trinitarian theology.⁴ That God is three Persons is a datum of faith. Reasoning can only show *that* and to a small extent *how* this is possible. From this point of view the doctrine of the Trinity is a premise and not a conclusion. Here Thomas parts company from a noble tradition including Anselm of Bec, Alan of Lille, Richard of St Victor, Bonaventure and Matthew of Aquasparta. Such authors aim to derive the doctrine of the Trinity from first principles. There is a fundamental difference of approach here that is difficult to define. It is far from clear that Alan of Lille, for example, would have considered his proof of the doctrine to be a demonstration in the Thomistic or Aristotelian sense. And Bonaventure certainly maintained that the doctrine of the Trinity can only be attained through faith.⁵ It would be wrong, therefore, to summarise the divergence in this way: that according to one view the doctrine of the Trinity can only be known through faith, while according to the other view reason alone suffices. What is clear is that the *a priori* approach involves a certain blurring of just those boundaries between the provinces of faith and reason that Thomas sought to make definite. In Eckhart, notoriously, we find ourselves plunged back into the mentality of the 12th century, and a philosopher's principle (for example from Proclus) can be made to yield Christian doctrine.

The proofs of Alan (d. 1203) and Bonaventure (d. 1274) have a special relevance to Eckhart's theology of the Trinity. Alan's *Regulae de sacra theologia* is set out in a Euclidian manner. The truths of Christian doctrine are deduced from axioms, which Alan calls maxims and hebdomads. From the first and second rules, which pertain to the unity of God, Alan arrives at the third: 'Monad begets monad and turns back its own ardour upon itself'. In other words, according to Alan's explanation of this rule, the Father begets the Son and the Holy Spirit proceeds from them both as their love or bond.⁶ The dictum 'Monas gignit monadem et in se suum reflectit adorem' is the first rule of the pseudo-Hermetic *Book of the Twenty-Four Philosophers*, in fact a Latin

Christian work dating probably from the second half of the twelfth century.⁷ We may presume that Alan found the dictum in this work.

Eckhart himself cites this pseudo-Hermetic rule in a passage that will be discussed below. But we come nearer to the thought of Eckhart, perhaps surprisingly, when we consider Bonaventure's treatment. Bonaventure, like Thomas, maintains that the doctrine of the Trinity can only be known through faith. But in his case 'faith seeking understanding' takes the form of *a priori* demonstrations that there is a plurality of Persons in God, that their number must be finite, and finally that this number must be three. His proof that there is a plurality of persons bears the imprint certainly of the pseudo-Denys, and perhaps also of the *Liber de causis*. Plurality is deduced from God's supreme beatitude, perfection, simplicity and primacy or 'firstness' (*primitas*). At the core of his reasoning are two related principles: that the good is self-diffusive and that supreme primacy must be accompanied by supreme fecundity. Thus Bonaventure posits a fountain-like fulness (*fontalis plenitudo*) in God as the principle of the emanation of the Persons. This is in turn identified with unbegottenness (*innascibilitas*), which he considers to be a property of the Father.⁸

From an historical point of view we may interpret Bonaventure's theory as a transformation of the idea of a necessarily emanating first principle, as posited by the Neoplatonists and by Muslim philosophers such as Alfarabi and Avicenna. Since creation is considered by Christian authors to be gratuitous and not necessary, this eternal and necessary outflowing or self-diffusion is considered to exist within God.

We shall have occasion to refer to both these theories in due course. Let us now turn to Eckhart's treatment.

The Latin Corpus

'A remarkable passage from Eckhart's *Expositio libri Exodi* will lead us into the thick of our inquiry.⁹ Here we find both the notion of *bullitio* and the parallel but contrasted notion of *ebullitio* or 'boiling over': that is, God's outpouring, or more precisely the inception of his outpouring, outside himself and into creation. The passage consists of a detailed exegesis of the words '*ego sum qui sum*', by which God named himself to Moses (Exod. 3:14). In characteristic manner, Eckhart interprets each word in turn, explaining that 'I' indicates pure substance, without accident or quality, that 'who', being a non-finite term, indicates God's infinity and immensity, and that 'am', according to his curious theory of *secundum adiacens* predication, denotes pure being, where quidity and existence (*anitas*) are one and the same (nn. 14—15). Next he explains why the dictum contains the repetition 'am who am'. In this Eckhart finds three levels of meaning, of which the first two pertain to the unity

and being of God. The repetition indicates, first, purity of affirmation, the exclusion of all negation, and secondly the turning back or reflexion of being upon itself as it remains within itself. But it also indicates the begetting of another within God, and thus *bullitio* (n. 16). We must attempt here to translate the untranslatable. Eckhart states:

Furthermore [the repetition indicates] a certain boiling [*bullitio*] or giving birth of self: heating up in itself and liquefying and boiling in itself and into itself; a light that entirely penetrates its whole self, in light and into light, and which is in every respect entirely turned back and bent back upon its entire self. As a sage has said [in the *Book of the Twenty-Four Philosophers*]: the monad gives or gave birth to a monad and turned back into itself its love or ardour.

Eckhart equates the *bullitio* of the Deity with life. He adverts here to the principle that the soul is entire everywhere (*tota ubique*) in the body as its life-principle:¹⁰

Accordingly [he continues] it is said in John 1 that 'in him was life'. For 'life' denotes a certain thrusting out, by which a thing, swelling in itself, first pours itself forth in its whole self, each part of itself into each part, before it pours out and boils over [*ebulliat*] outside.

Reiner Schürmann points out in this regard that Plotinus punned on the similarity between *zao* and *zeo*, the verbs for 'to live' and 'to boil' or 'to seethe'. 'All things', wrote Plotinus, 'are full and boiling with life' (*Ennead* VI.7.12).¹¹

The *bullitio* in the Deity is the principle of the creative *ebullitio*, for God the Father—the *principium* of Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1—creates through the Word. Thus Eckhart continues:

Hence it is that the emanation of the Persons within the Deity is the principle [*ratio*] and precedent [*praeuia*] of creation. For as it is said in John 1: 'In the beginning was the word' and later 'All things were made through him'.

Bullitio is an emanation or a coming-forth. What is its source? We might suppose that *bullitio* describes the proceeding of the complexity of the Trinity from the silent stillness of the undifferentiated Deity. We might envisage the latter as still, clear water beneath a turbulent, boiling surface. But this is not what we find in the text. Eckhart is describing the generation of the Son from the Father—monad begetting monad, light from light, true God from true God—and the procession of the Holy Spirit from them both.

In attempting to grasp the nature of the processions Eckhart stretches language to its limit. In so doing he relies above all on metaphors: boiling, melting, turning and so on. This use of metaphor is quite different from Thomas's use of the analogy of the human mind. Although our concept of intellect is commensurate with created

intellects, it is not improper to attribute intellect to God, whereas it is improper to attribute boiling to God. God's intellect is unlike our intellect because it is infinite, but there can be no such thing as infinite boiling. Without entering into theories of analogy, we need to make a common-sense distinction here between analogies of this kind and metaphors. If by applying the *via negativa* we were to maintain that God is not intelligent, not wise, not good and so on, we ought still to recognize a radical distinction between such denials and the denial that God is seething or boiling or a lion. One feature of the kind of metaphors Eckhart uses here is that we are in no doubt that, on the literal level, they are *not* true. The language effaces itself, as it were, and the *via negativa* is implicit even though all the terms of the description are positive.

Eckhart's use of the first rule from the *Book of the Twenty-Four Philosophers* is significant. Vladimir Lossky suggests that Eckhart was influenced by Alan of Lille's commentary on this rule.¹² Be that as it may, Eckhart ascribes it simply to a sage (*sapiens*). Thomas Aquinas cites the same dictum in the *Summa theologiae*, and ascribes it to Hermes Trismegistus. This is in Thomas's discussion of the question whether the Trinity can be known through natural reason. It is here that Thomas distances himself from the tradition of *a priori* proofs of the Trinity. If Trismegistus knew of the Trinity, he argues, then it can be known through natural reason. Therefore the dictum must refer not to the Persons but to God's creation of the world through love. The philosophers only knew of certain attributes that are appropriated to the Persons; they did not know of the properties as such.¹³ Eckhart does not share Thomas's scruples.

'Bullitio' and Formal Emanation

In three passages *bullitio* is allied to the notion of formal emanation. It is written in The Book of Wisdom that 'when quiet silence contained all things, and the night was in the middle of her course, your almighty word sprang forth from heaven' (18:14–15). In his commentary on Wisdom Eckhart identifies this almighty word—*sermo* in the Latin text—with the Word (*Verbum*), the Son of God. Thus in his view the text refers to the springing forth of the Word in the Deity and to the coming of this Word into the soul, in inner contemplative silence.¹⁴ Both these advents, the eternal generation and the spiritual mission of the Son, are linked in Eckhart's mind by his notion of the birth of God in the soul. Only the Son of God *is* the image of God, for the human soul, according to Genesis 1:26, is made *to* the image (*ad imaginem Dei*). As God's image the Son is a purely formal emanation, and this emanation is *bullitio*. Insofar as the image of God is a 'certain formal production in the silence of the efficient and final cause' it is directed *ad extra*, into creation. This is the *ebullitio* (n. 283).

Eckhart's meaning in this passage, if I interpret him correctly, is

that the image of God in the soul—in other words, the soul insofar as it is God’s image—is not ‘outside’ God. It was a favourite idea of Bonaventure that God is the efficient, exemplar and final cause of creation, and he appropriated these three aspects of God’s causality to Father, Son and Holy Spirit respectively. In Eckhart, exemplar causality is collapsed into formal causality, and the relation between the latter and the Son is not merely one of appropriation. The Son *is* the formal cause. Hence both *bullitio* and *ebullitio* involve formal emanation, but while the former is purely formal the latter is accompanied by efficient and final causality. Once again, the metaphor of *bullitio* depicts the generation of the Son from the Father.

We find a similar explanation of how emanation *ad intra* differs from production *ad extra* in Eckhart’s commentary on St John’s Gospel. Efficient and final causality, he argues, are by nature extrinsic. Something is produced that is formally like but other than its principle. The emanation of the Persons in God, on the contrary, is purely formal. It results in something not only like but numerically the same as its principle:

The one [*unum*], however, principiates through itself and gives being [that is *esse*, as opposed to *fieri* or becoming] and is a principle within. And because of this it does not, properly, produce something like itself but something one and the same as itself.... Hence it is that emanation in the divine Persons is a certain boiling over [here Eckhart uses the word *ebullitio*], and because of this the three Persons are simply and absolutely one.¹⁵

Eckhart is not in this text emphasising unity at the expense of personal multiplicity, but is rather trying to account for orthodox doctrine. His remarks build upon Augustine’s conception of the Son as a perfect image; that is, an image in every respect like its principle.¹⁶

The third passage in which *bullitio* is allied to formal emanation is in a Latin sermon on the text ‘Whose is this image and inscription?’ (Matt. 22:20). Image as such, Eckhart explains, is a formal emanation conveying the entire essence of its principle. He describes this emanation in terms of life, of swelling up and of *bullitio*. There is emanation because of the principle that the good is self-diffusive. In itself the emanation of an image in God is entirely *ad intra*: this is the generation of the Son from the Father. The same emanation can also be identified with image as such, considered metaphysically and in abstraction from efficient and final causality. Insofar as these enter in, there are two further stages of emanation: *ebullitio* and creation.¹⁷ It is clear from this passage that for Eckhart *ebullitio* is not just analogous or parallel to *bullitio* but rather is rooted in it. *Ebullitio* is as it were the boundary between the generation of the Son and creative emanation. By considering image as such, which is common to both *bullitio* and

ebullitio, Eckhart aims to account for the orthodox doctrine that God the Father creates through God the Son.

'*Bullitio*' and Grace

The remaining text containing the notion of *bullitio* that we should consider comes from a Latin sermon on I Corinthians 15:1–10.¹⁸ This discussion is centred on grace, and Eckhart distinguishes between *gratia gratis data* and *gratia gratum faciens*. The former term has various senses in scholastic usage, but in general its meaning is this: that while *gratia gratum faciens* reforms and sanctifies the soul and makes it pleasing to God, *gratia gratis data* enables the soul to do something beyond its natural power but without sanctifying it. In Eckhart's usage the meaning of *gratia gratis data* is extended to cover all the effects of God in the natural order, and thus the distinction is virtually equivalent to that usually made between nature and grace. According to a long and interesting tradition going back through Bonaventure and Hugh of St Victor to Eriugena's interpretation of the pseudo-Dionysius, nature pertains to the creative emanation or *exitus* of things from God while grace pertains to the return or *reditus* of things to God.¹⁹ Hence Eckhart identifies or associates *gratia gratis data* with the *exitus* and *ebullitio*, and *gratia gratum faciens* with the *reditus* and *bullitio*. *Ebullitio* looks to God as being or as the good, and thus to his essential nature. *Bullitio* pertains to the personal, trinitarian aspect of God, and thus sanctifying grace can only be received by those creatures who are made in God's image: that is, by rational creatures.

Bonaventure is not an obvious source for Eckhart's ideas. But once again, just as the notion of *bullitio* invites comparison with Bonaventure's *plenitudo fontalis*, a comparison with Bonaventure's trinitarian theology is instructive here. In his commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* Bonaventure distinguishes three ways in which God is reflected in his creatures, namely shadow, vestige and image. The mind (*mens*) is in God's image because its three faculties (memory, intelligence and will) and their interrelations reflect the three Persons and their interrelations. All creatures reflect God in other, more distant ways because he is their cause. In this respect they reflect his essential unity rather than the Trinity. But here Bonaventure distinguishes between shadow and vestige. At the level of vestige, unlike shadow, there is a certain reflection of the Trinity, for God is a threefold cause. Since God is the efficient, exemplar and final cause of creatures, every creature is one, true and good. But vestige does not look to the properties as such but to appropriations: the three modes of God's causality and the three related divine attributes of power, wisdom and goodness are essential or common attributes of God which are merely appropriated to the Persons.²⁰ (For example, the Father and the Holy Spirit are no less wise than the Son.) The notion of shadow, as distinct from vestige, seems to

have been dropped in subsequent works, perhaps because Bonaventure sees the Trinity in everything. The point to note here is that vestige, as opposed to image, pertains to the essential unity of God and to his action *ad extra*.

Bonaventure is here systematizing ideas found in Augustine. He is equally Augustinian when he maintains that the mind is 'conformed immediately' to God, that no medium intervenes between the mind and God, and that the image of God exists in the soul above all insofar as the potencies of memory, intellect and will are turned towards God.²¹ Every creature reflects God distantly insofar as it is related to him as a vestige and as to its creative principle (*principium creativum*). The mind, being in God's image, is also related to God as his image and as to its motivating object (*objectum motivum*). That is, it has the capacity to grasp him by knowledge and love. When the mind is sanctified through grace it attains to the likeness of God and is related to him as to its indwelling gift (*donum inhabitativum*).²²

We should note one further development. In the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* Bonaventure posits a sixfold ladder by which the mind ascends into God (and *in Deum* does mean 'into God' and not merely 'to God'). The fifth stage consists in the 'contemplation of the divine unity through its primary name, which is Being'. The sixth consists in the 'contemplation of the blessed Trinity in its name, which is Good'.²³ Thus at the fifth stage the mind looks to God's essential unity and common attributes, while at the sixth it looks to God as Trinity. Explaining why the name of Good pertains to the Trinity, Bonaventure states that God is three because the good is self-diffusive.²⁴ This accords with his account of *plenitudo fontalis* in the commentary on the Lombard's *Sentences*. As God is understood at the fifth stage, he is the God of the philosophers, and also of the Old Testament: his name is 'I am who am'. The contemplation of God as Trinity pertains to the New Testament.²⁵ According to Bonaventure's assignment of mental faculties to the stages of the itinerary, the fifth stage is accomplished by understanding (*intelligentia*) and the sixth by the summit of the mind or spark of synderesis (*apex mentis seu synderesis scintilla*).²⁶

All this suggests that the rational soul, by virtue of its conformity to God and because it is made in God's image, has the capacity to attain, through grace, to a participation in the inner trinitarian life of the Deity. But if this was the direction of Bonaventure's thought, he did not complete the journey. He has, as far as I can see, no theory to account for such a participation. He does not explain the intimate connection between the two aspects of the image of God in the soul: that is, between the reflection of the Trinity by the interrelation of the three mental faculties and the orientation of the soul to God as its immediate object of knowledge and love. However, Eckhart, on the basis of similar, Augustinian ideas, does posit, I shall argue, a real participation of the

mind in the processions within God, and he has a theoretical framework to explain it. This involves the notions of formal emanation and the birth of the Son of God in the soul.

The Persons and the Essence

Bullitio depicts the emanation of the Son, and thence of the Holy Spirit, from the Father. No distinction is made in these texts between God as Trinity and as beyond Trinity. In a summary of Eckhart's teaching, Bernard McGinn argues that there are two patterns describing the *bullitio* in Eckhart, the first of which 'places the principle in the hidden Godhead itself', and the second of which 'concentrates on the Person of the Father.'²⁷ McGinn gives a number of examples of the latter pattern, which he says is more frequent. But what of the former? Here only one instance is cited, from the commentary on John's Gospel, where Eckhart states that the power of generating in the Deity belongs principally to the essence rather than to the relation of paternity (that is, to the Father). I can see no reason to find any reference to the hidden Godhead in this text. But what is Eckhart saying?

Eckhart states that the power of generating in the Deity belongs *in recto* and principally to the essence of God rather than to the relation of paternity: *Sic iterum potentia generandi in divinis in recto et principalius convenit essentiae quam relationi, quae est paternitas.*²⁸ As McGinn notes, this thesis is derived from an article in the *Summa theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas. The term *in recto* in Thomas's treatment is in contradistinction to *in obliquo*. Thomas concludes: *Et ideo potentia generandi significat in recto naturam divinam, sed in obliquo relationem.*²⁹ In other words, the nominative word *potentia* refers to the essence of God, while the genitive word *generandi* refers to a relation. Thomas argues that the power of generating, as opposed to the act itself, belongs to the common nature. The point is a technical one: that the power of generating, as opposed to the act, is not a relation, and everything in God is common except where a relation of opposition intervenes. Thomas argues from the analogy of human generation. An individual passes on not his own individual identity but his nature, for Socrates begets another man, not Socrates. This nature, according to Aquinas, is also the power by which (*a quo*) the agent generates. It is not entirely clear what Eckhart wishes to make of this in his commentary on John. The thesis is cited in a discussion of why it is better to say that the Son is in the Father than to say that he is from him. He argues that 'in' connotes final causality while 'from' connotes efficient causality, and that things depend in a prior and more noble way on their final than on their efficient causes. It is to exemplify this that Eckhart states that the power of generation belongs more to essence than to paternity. Perhaps he is suggesting that the common nature is in some sense like a final cause, insofar as the final cause of a thing is sometimes identified with its

form or essence or quidity.³⁰ What is clear at least is that Eckhart is not saying here that anything comes *from* the essence.

There is, I submit, no reason to suppose that when Eckhart refers to the essence of God in this text he is referring to the hidden Godhead. We should be wary of attributing to Eckhart the belief that there is some distance or distinction between the essence and the Persons, or of assuming that when Eckhart does distinguish between the Trinity and the hidden Godhead he is distinguishing between the Persons and the essence. The formula of one essence and three Persons was not arrived at by positing a quaternity and then identifying the three Persons with the essence. The point is that the three Persons are coessential, and the idea of their coessentiality precedes that of the essence both historically and theologically. Eckhart was not accused of denying the identity of Persons and essence in the Bull *In agro dominico*. Rather, he was accused, falsely, of denying all distinctions in God (articles 23–24), with the implication here that he denied the distinctness and thus the reality of the Persons. Thomas is only putting the orthodox doctrine in Aristotelian form when he maintains that while there are real distinctions between the persons, there is no real distinction, and only a distinction in reason, between each Person and the essence.³¹ It is not likely that Eckhart, who agreed so emphatically with Thomas that there is no real distinction among the attributes of God, and went so far as to suggest that the attributes are not even distinct in reason,³² would oppose Thomas by placing a distinction between the Persons and the essence.

There is at least one text, however, in which Eckhart does seem to distance the Persons from the essence. It is in regard to this text, from the commentary on Exodus, that Bernard McGinn argues that Eckhart's 'stress on the priority of the divine ground' explains why he 'cites without disapproval the suspect view of Gilbert of Poitiers that in God the relations that constitute the Trinity do not enter into the divine substance but remain "as if they were standing on the outside"'.³³ In a note on his translation of his text McGinn states that the formulation ascribed to Gilbert 'was rejected, at least in part, by Thomas Aquinas' in the *Summa theologiae* (I.28.2).³⁴ We must consider this text and its relation to Thomas's discussion in some detail.³⁵

Eckhart's discussion of relations in this text is adigression: the topic under consideration is whether the attributes of God are really distinct. Like Thomas, Eckhart agrees that they are not. Why, then, do the relations remain distinct? Eckhart's solution (nn. 64–65) is derived from Thomas's commentary on the *Sentences* and from the *Summa theologiae*. Attributes that in creatures would come under the eight non-relative categories of accident, he argues, become indistinct in God, while relations remain distinct because of their peculiar mode of existence. Accidents as such have an inherent mode of being (*inesse*), while the mode of being proper to relations as such is extraneous (*esse ad*
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aliquid). A relation has on the one hand being as an accident in a subject, but on the other hand 'according to its genus and insofar as it is a relation, does not posit anything at all in its subject, and does not bespeak any being [*esse*] or inherent being [*inesse*]' (n. 64). This leads Eckhart to the conclusion that relations do not 'pass into' (*transit*) the divine substance. Restating this argument, he argues that because of the inherent mode of being of an accident as such, an accident is in its subject and has one being with its subject. Its being (*esse*) is *inesse*. Since God's being is the same as his essence or substance it follows, according to Eckhart, that the non-relational categories of attribute 'pass into the substance'. Since relation as such has being *ad aliquid*, it does not pass into the substance but 'remains, as it were, standing outside'. 'Because of this', he concludes, 'theologians of earlier times [*antiqui*] used to say that the relations are accompaniments [*assistentes*] and stand outside' (n. 65). This is the opinion ascribed to Gilbert, but here gleaned from Thomas. Eckhart's reservation should be noted: he says that the *antiqui* used to say this, while affirming for himself that the relations stand as it were (*quasi*) outside.

Let us now consider Thomas's discussion in the *Summa theologiae*.³⁶ The article addresses the question of whether the relations are identical with the essence. Thomas concludes that they are. In his reply he notes that Gilbert is said to have erred by affirming that 'the relations in the Deity are accompaniments [*assistentes*] or attached externally'. The implication here is that according to Gilbert the relations are somehow external to the essence and thus not identical with it, but Thomas is careful not to make this explicit. In his reply he interprets Gilbert's opinion in a more favourable way.

Thomas's solution depends on the distinction between the *inesse* of accidents and the *esse ad aliquid* peculiar to relations. If I interpret him correctly he does not maintain that a relation might in principle have no *inesse*, for it has to exist in a subject. Thomas's argument appears to be as follows. In one way relations are accidents and have *inesse* in their subjects. In another way each genus of accident can be considered according to its peculiar character (*ratio propria*), and in this respect non-relational accidents have *inesse* while relations have *esse ad aliquid*. In this way they accompany their subjects, and are not intrinsic to them. Here Thomas himself uses Gilbert's terminology. He adds that Gilbert was considering relations only in this way; that is, as relations and not as accidents. I take it that Thomas is here saying that Gilbert is only partly right, but he could be understood as saying that Gilbert is wholly right if correctly interpreted. Thomas does not explicitly contradict Gilbert.

Thomas argues that it is precisely by virtue of their *esse ad aliquid* that the relations remain distinct from one another. His argument is of extreme difficulty and technicality, and cannot be presented here in full. Briefly, this is what he says. Whatever would have accidental being on

the level of creatures has substantial being when applied to God. Therefore insofar as a relation in created things has being in its subject, it has essential being in God, and is identical with the essence. But insofar as a relation in created things has being *ad aliquid*, this being has reference to an opposite term, and thus in God it has no bearing (*habitus*) on the essence. Therefore the relations in God remain distinct from each other, although they are identical with the essence.

Here we only need to consider what Eckhart made of the matter. He is rehearsing the arguments of Aquinas, especially as they appear in the article from the *Summa* just summarised. In this article Thomas argues that the relations are not other than the essence; let us assume that Eckhart agrees. Why, then, does he suggest, citing Gilbert of Poitiers, that the relations remain outside the essence?

It should be remembered that Eckhart only states that the relations stand as it were (*quasi*) outside. He does not commit himself to the opinion attributed to Gilbert, and in any case he is only following Thomas in citing it. Eckhart is led to suggest that the relations are as it were outside the essence because of his manner of formulating the problem. Where Thomas considers why the relations, while one with the essence, remain distinct from each other, Eckhart asks why they are not drawn into the unity of the essence. For the essence is one and they are one with it.

Certainly this is symptomatic of a fundamental difference in perspective. In Gilsonian terms, we might say that Eckhart's is a metaphysic of the One. However, it is probable that on this occasion Eckhart wishes to do no more than to affirm that the relations, unlike the attributes, remain multiple. Even here, then, as (I have argued) in all his Latin works, there are no good grounds for saying that Eckhart makes a distinction between God as Trinity and as Godhead. But before confronting the quite widely-held belief that Eckhart diminished the doctrine of the Trinity we must consider what he has to say on the Trinity in his German sermons, in Part II of this inquiry.

- 1 A shorter version of this paper was read at the Annual Conference of the Eckhart Society, Leeds, 2nd—4th Sept., 1988. The abbreviations *DW* and *LW* refer to the respective parts of Meister Eckhart, *Die deutschen und lateinischen Werke* (Stuttgart and Berlin, 1936—). *PL* = Migne, *Patrologia Latina*. *CCL* = *Corpus Christianorum: series latina* (Turnhout). All translations from Latin are my own.
- 2 See Reiner Schürmann, *Meister Eckhart: Mystic and Preacher* (Bloomington and London: Indiana Univ. Press, 1978), pp. 119—20. For instances of these words in Eckhart, see B. McGinn, *Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher* (New York, Mahwah, Toronto: Paulist Press, 1986), p. 403.
- 3 For a recent treatment see W. J. Hankey, *God in Himself: Aquinas' Doctrine of God as Expounded in the 'Summa Theologiae'* (Oxford: O. U. P., 1987). The appendices to vol. 6 of the Blackfriars edition of the *Summa* (1965) are also useful.
- 4 See Hankey, *ibid.*, pp. 132—34.
- 5 *I Sent.* 3.1.un.4, *Opera theologica selecta*, vol. 1 (Quaracchi, 1934), pp. 54—55.
- 6 *PL* 210:624C—625A.

- 7 Ed. Clemens Baeumker, 'Das pseudo-hermetische Buch der vierundzwanzig Meister', *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters* 25.1—2 (1927), p. 208. On the *Book* itself, see M.-Th. d'Alverny's article in P.O. Kristeller, ed., *Catalogus Translationum et Commentariorum* (Washington D.C.: Cath. Univ. Am. Press, 1960), pp. 151—54.
- 8 I *Sent.* 2.un.2, *Opera theologica selecta*, vol. 1 (Quaracchi, 1934), pp. 38—39.
- 9 *LW* II, pp. 20—22, nn. 14—16.
- 10 On the history of this idea, from Plotinus to Aquinas, see P.L. Reynolds, 'God, Cosmos and Microcosm', diss., Univ. of Toronto 1986, chs. 5 ff.
- 11 *Meister Eckhart* (1978), p. 247, n. 140.
- 12 *Théologie négative et connaissance de Dieu chez Maître Eckhart* (Paris: Vrin, 1960), p. 69, n. 109.
- 13 I.32.1, arg. 1 and ad 1^m, Ottawa edition, vol. 1 (1941), pp. 208a—b and 209a—b.
- 14 *LW* II, pp. 612—16, nn. 280-83.
- 15 *LW* III, p. 291, n. 342.
- 16 Cf. *De Trinitate* VI. 10 (11), *CCL* 50, p. 241; *De vera religione* 43(81), *CCL* 32, p. 241. See also John E. Sullivan, *The Image of God* (Dubuque, Iowa: Priory Press, 1963), pp. 11—22.
- 17 Sermon XLIX. 3, n. 511, *LW* IV, pp. 425—26.
- 18 Sermon XXV. 1, nn. 258—9, *LW* IV, pp. 235—26.
- 19 See: pp. 10—12 of I.P. Sheldon-Williams, 'Eriugena's Greek Sources', in *The Mind of Eriugena*, ed. by J.J. O'Meara and L. Bieler (Dublin: Irish Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 1—15; and p. 154 of the same author's 'Eriugena's interpretation of the ps.-Dionysius', in *Texte und Untersuchungen* 115 (1975), = *Studia Patristica* 12.1 (Berlin), pp. 151—54.
- 20 I *Sent.* 3.1.un.2, ad 4^m, *Opera theologica selecta*, vol. 1, (Quaracchi, 1934), pp. 51—52.
- 21 See *ibid.*; I *Sent.* 3.2.1.2, resp., pp. 61—62; and II *Sent.* 14.1.3.1, ad 4^m, vol. 4 (Quaracchi, 1938), p. 350.
- 22 *Breviloquium* 2.12, 1—3, *Opera theologica selecta*, vol. 5 (Quaracchi, 1964), pp. 55—56.
- 23 *Itin.* chs. 5—6, *ibid.*, vol. 5, pp. 203—11.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 6.2. pp. 208—09.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 5.2. p. 204.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 1.6, p. 184.
- 27 E. Colledge and B. McGinn, *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense* (New York, Ramsey, Toronto: Paulist Press, 1981), p.38.
- 28 *Expositio sancti Evangelii secundum Iohannem*, n. 43, *LW* III, p. 36.
- 29 I. 41.5, resp., Ottawa ed., vol. 1, p. 262a.
- 30 On quidity (*to ti esti*) as the final cause of generation, see Aristotle, *Physics* II.3, 198b1—5.
- 31 *Summa theol.* I.28.2, resp., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 188b: 'relatio realiter existens in Deo est idem essentiae secundum rem, et non differt nisi secundum intelligentiae rationem'.
- 32 See A.A. Maurer's introduction to Master Eckhart, *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, trans. A.A. Maurer (Toronto: P.I.M.S., 1974), pp. 13—14.
- 33 *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons*, p. 36.
- 34 B. McGinn, *Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher* (New York, Mahwah and Toronto: Paulist Press, 1986), pp. 135—36, n. 168.
- 35 *Expos. lib. Ex.*, nn. 64—65, *LW* II, pp. 68—71.
- 36 I.28.2, resp., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 188.

Part II ('Distinctionless Godhead and trinitarian God') will appear in the May issue.