

## **Christocentric or Trinitarian Doctrine of God?:**

### **Order of Discovery and Order of Presentation**

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None of us writes only on the subjects of his own choice, but it was perhaps with some foolishness that I agreed to speak on any topic that was suggested for me, and so it is with some trepidation that I approach the one that was suggested: Christocentric *or* Trinitarian doctrine of God? The question presents us with a choice, but our instinct for the Catholic *and* makes us want to ask if we really do have to choose between them. The subtitle moreover offers a Thomist solution to our dilemma: order of discovery and order of presentation, with the order of discovery allowing us to avail of a Christocentric doctrine of God, and the quite compatible order of presentation delivering a Trinitarian doctrine of God. However, in pursuing this possibility I want to show first that to some extent a solution already came ready-made with the introduction of the term “Christocentric” into theology. Secondly I want to point out some problems with the distinction between the orders of discovery and presentation, including William Hill’s characterisation of them as ways of religious and theological consciousness, the challenge to the distinction introduced by Karl Rahner’s theology of immanent and economic Trinity, and the fact that there would appear to be no explicit talk of an order of discovery in Aquinas’s teaching on the Trinity.

I am taking it that to speak of a theologian’s doctrine of God as Trinitarian is not simply to say that it teaches God to be a Trinity of persons in terms of content, but that the form of the doctrine is structured in a Trinitarian way. A glance at Aquinas’s doctrine of God in the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa theologiae* should be sufficient to persuade anyone that Aquinas’s doctrine is truly Trinitarian, but objections have been made against this claim. Karl Barth’s theology is often

taken as setting the bar today for whether or not a doctrine of God is to be counted Trinitarian, and he supposed that, without placing consideration of the divine persons first, the primacy of the doctrine of the Trinity, and thus the Trinitarian character of the doctrine of God, is somehow contradicted.<sup>1</sup> Here we meet the notion of the importance of one's *starting-point* in theology, and the perception that the choice of starting-point is crucial, at least from a rhetorical point of view, for the general direction a particular theology takes, and the sense of what is taught subsequently. Aquinas's *Summa* of course treats the single divine essence in advance of the distinction of persons, but since his pedagogical procedure can be honored with a compelling defence,<sup>2</sup> then we might conclude not only that Aquinas's doctrine of God is genuinely Trinitarian, but that the Barthian bar has been set artificially high.

So, having assured ourselves, however briefly, that Aquinas's doctrine of God counts as Trinitarian in structure, we can now investigate whether or not it need be threatened by the claim that the doctrine of God must be Christocentric. A claim about Christocentricity has been applied in more recent times to the whole of theology, though with the focus on the doctrines of creation and grace, and latterly on natural law;<sup>3</sup> I am concerned here, however, with the Christocentric threat to a Trinitarian doctrine of *God*. Before we ask what the orders of discovery and presentation can do to avert this threat, we should note how the possibility of this threat was already perceived *and discarded*, when the term Christocentric, and the claim about the doctrine of God that went with it, came into theology, almost certainly in the nineteenth century. The image suggests that an intellectual enterprise, a philosophy, a theology, or a doctrine of God, has a single, central point to which all else in it must be referred. Though the image suggests a *mid-point*, examination of how it is used in theology reveals that this mid-point is almost always

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. I/1: *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Edinburgh, T and T Clark, 1956), 300-03.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Gilles Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of St Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford and New York: OUP, 2007), 44-48.

<sup>3</sup> These debates have stemmed from the publication of Marie-Dominique Chenu, "Le plan de la Somme théologique de saint Thomas," *Revue Thomiste* 47 (1939), 93-107.

thought of in terms of a *starting-point*, and here we encounter again the importance of starting-points for the character of everything else that follows. Everything else is referred to what lies at the center, precisely because the center lies somehow at the beginning. So, while a Trinitarian doctrine of God would be *structured* by the doctrine of the Trinity, a *Christocentric* doctrine of God must somehow *begin* with the incarnate Christ. But if that were the case, and the incarnation does not simply come subsequent to the doctrine of God, as it does in Aquinas's *Summa*, one can see how a truly Trinitarian doctrine of God, where God is in no way constituted a Trinity by the incarnation, becomes open to the threat of modification. However, when we observe a variety of nineteenth-century theologies, which were seemingly among the first to accept the explicit Christocentric claim, we can see how they were nevertheless united in seeing things differently. Not only does the claim of Christocentrism *not* mean the denial of the doctrine of God's Trinitarian character, but this starting-point can even positively support (and may be the only way to guarantee) a Trinitarian doctrine of God.

The first appearance of the word "Christocentric" in English is perhaps found in the *Christian Dogmatics* published by the Reformed theologian, Jan Jacob van Oosterzee, in Utrecht in 1870, and translated from the Dutch into English in 1874.<sup>4</sup> Van Oosterzee declares that, from its very nature, *Christian Dogmatics as a whole* is "Christo-centric." Christ, he says, is Dogmatics' "principal subject-matter."<sup>5</sup> Does he then begin his Dogmatics with Christology in such a way that it then shapes the doctrine of God as the latter's starting-point? In fact he is clear that his claim does not make Christology the starting-point of dogmatics so as to displace the Trinitarian doctrine of God from primacy of place. He says:

The claim that Dogmatics shall be Christocentric does not therefore denote that Christology must be treated first of all; on the contrary, there are very weighty difficulties in that

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<sup>4</sup> The origin of the word and its implied claims warrant research I have been unable to undertake, particularly in the German language, in which the term *Christozentrisch* no doubt originated in connection with *anthropozentrisch*, a word already in use in the eighteenth century.

<sup>5</sup> Jan Jacob van Oosterzee, *Christian Dogmatics: A Text-Book for Academical Instruction and Private Study* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1874), 15.

method. Rather, this is the idea that everything dogmatics has to teach concerning God, man, the way of salvation etc, must be viewed by the light which streams forth from Christ as center.<sup>6</sup>

The reason that Christ is light for the dogmatician is that Christ is “the highest revelation of God.” Van Oosterzee was deliberately opposing Christocentrism to anthropocentrism, excluding contemporary anthropocentrism by adopting Christocentrism. He says: “The so-called Modern Theology is therefore already condemned in principle, since Christ has either no place or a very unimportant one in its system, which exhibits an anthro-centric character.”<sup>7</sup> Anthropocentrism, evidently, is a *bad thing*. In no way does the author oppose the revelatory light streaming from Christ as center against a starting-point within dogmatics in the doctrine of God, but it is precisely this revelation in Christ that makes this doctrine of God Trinitarian, and *only* this Christocentrism that *could* make *any* doctrine of God Trinitarian.<sup>8</sup>

We can see something comparable in terms of starting-points in a rather different nineteenth-century theology, one more consciously modern. “Christocentric” seems to have made its first appearance in Oxford theology, possibly the first time it was used by an English-speaking author, in the work of A. M. Fairbairn, a Scottish Congregationalist who studied in Berlin in the 1860s (where he may indeed have first encountered the word) and became the first principal of Mansfield College, a college for training Congregationalist ministers in Oxford. Fairbairn uses the term in his *The Place of Christ in Modern Theology*, published first in 1893, and there he notes that it was somewhat in vogue.<sup>9</sup> Now more so than van Oosterzee Fairbairn has an affinity for the categories of German Romanticism and idealism, and for the methods of nineteenth-century history. For Fairbairn, what most distinguished and determined *modern* theology with its

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 15, n. 3; amended translation.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> For his Trinitarian doctrine of God, see *ibid.*, 234-99.

<sup>9</sup> A. M. Fairbairn, *The Place of Christ in Modern Theology* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 4<sup>th</sup> edn., 1893), 301.

own special character was “a new feeling for Christ,” arising from the fact that “we know him better in history.”<sup>10</sup> He writes:

His historical reality and significance have broken upon us with something of the surprise of a new discovery, and He has, as it were, become to us a new and more actual Being. It is certainly not too much to say, He is to-day more studied and better known as He was and as He lived than at any period between now and the first age of the Church.<sup>11</sup>

For Fairbairn there are two fundamental sets of questions, exegetical questions concerning the Bible, answered by historical method, and constructive questions concerning a systematic theology, a term which in British fashion he prefers to dogmatics: systematic theology, for Fairbairn is a kind of “elaboration” of the interpretation of Scripture that has emerged from historical study. The first set of questions, the exegetical, give us the *source* of our doctrine or “conception” of God, as Fairbairn calls it. According to him, exegesis allows us to discover how *Christ* thought of God, and so offers the possibility to think ourselves *the same way about God as Christ did*, as Father. Christ’s consciousness of God is the “source and norm,” as he puts it, of our conception of God. However, once this conception of God has been derived by way of historical exegesis, it itself now becomes the “source and norm” of our systematic theology.<sup>12</sup> From this Fairbairn concludes: “This theology must then, to use a current term, be, as regards source, Christo-centric, but as regards object or matter, theo-centric; in other words, while Christ determines the conception, the conception determines the theology.”<sup>13</sup> Here we have two kinds of starting-point. Christocentrism says something about one’s starting-point, but not the starting-point *within* a systematic theology itself, but the starting-point from which one has come *to* the task of systematic theology. The systematic theologian starts out by receiving from the exegete the Christocentrism which arises from historical study of the Bible, together with the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 301.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

determinative element for theology to which it gives rise. In Fairbairn's case this means the paternity of God, with which the theologian can then begin the setting out of his systematic theology.<sup>14</sup>

Whatever the differences between van Oosterzee and Fairbairn, and whatever the shortcomings of their theologies and methods, they share this in common in their use of the term "Christocentric." Though they perceive that the term might be misused, neither uses it to remove the doctrine of God from its primacy of place in dogmatics as a whole or to restructure the doctrine of God by placing the incarnation at its head. As far as the principle of Christocentricity itself is concerned, it remains open that the doctrine of God be Trinitarian. Each treats the claim that the doctrine of God, or dogmatics in general, must be Christocentric, as a claim about revelation, the starting-point from which we *come to* the task of dogmatics, rather than what must be the starting-point that lies at the head of the dogmatics itself. But if this is the case for two such divergent theologies, then surely it might be the case for the disciple of St Thomas also. One possibility is that a Thomist distinction between the order of discovery and the order of presentation will allow us to distinguish these starting-points more clearly: there can legitimately be two kinds of starting-point because there are two different orders at work in the theological enterprise.

Interpreters of Aquinas speak of two orders or ways of knowledge, one by which a basic process of discovery takes place, moving from one thing already known towards something as yet unknown, and another in which this knowledge is suitably *reordered* for the purposes of educational presentation. For example, in his book *The Three-Personed God: The Trinity as a Mystery of Salvation*, Hill wrote: "Aquinas characterizes the methodology developed in his *Summa theologiae* as that of a *via doctrinae* in distinction from a *via inventionis*, a way of

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 426-48.

discovery.”<sup>15</sup> I take these terms, *via inventionis* and *via doctrinae*, to be equivalent to the order of discovery and order of presentation of the title of this paper. Way (*via*) and order seem to me to be effectively equivalent here, because we are concerned with the order found in movement along a particular pathway of knowledge, from starting-point to its end-point. Indeed the Gilbey *Summa* translates *via inventionis* into English as “order of discovery,”<sup>16</sup> and when treating “systematics” in his *Method in Theology* Bernard Lonergan likewise distinguished the “order of teaching or exposition” from the “order of discovery.”<sup>17</sup>

Hill sees the two ways (or orders) as distinguished by the exigencies of the knower and known.<sup>18</sup> The *via doctrinae* of the *Summa* treats things according to an order of intelligibility within *what is known*, moving on from what is most intelligible in itself and so can throw light on everything else that comes after. This explains why the *Summa* begins with the Trinity, despite the limitations of our knowledge of God, enabling all else to be then understood in the light of the Trinitarian doctrine of God. However, Hill points out that the three-personed God is only made known to us in the economy, following on the temporal missions of the Son and the Spirit. So what Aquinas has done, according to Hill, is to begin in some way by way of the *via inventionis* with these missions, seeking through them to reach towards the eternal processions, the doctrine of the eternal Trinity. He has then set himself to begin again, but with the eternal Trinity as his starting-point in the *via doctrinae*, seeking “an understanding, however faint” of the temporal missions and the economy in the light of the eternal processions.<sup>19</sup> And *within* Aquinas’s presentation of the doctrine of the Trinity too we find the same *via doctrinae*, as his treatment “brings to light an intelligible order represented by the tripartite move” from

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<sup>15</sup> William Hill, *The Three-Personed God: The Trinity as a Mystery of Salvation* (Washington DC: CUA, 1982), 82.

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 79, a. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 1973), pp. 345-46. See also his use of *ordo inventionis* and *ordo doctrinae* in “Theology and Understanding” in *Collection* (New York: Herder, 1967), 127-35.

<sup>18</sup> William Hill, *The Three-Personed God*, 68-69.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

processions to relations to persons. Aquinas's order of presentation is thus thoroughly Trinitarian, but we need to ask if his order of discovery is truly Christocentric, since Hill speaks of the starting-point of this order not as Christ, but as the *missions* of Son and Spirit.

Although Hill speaks consistently of *Aquinas* having *begun* with the two temporal missions, balancing Christ and the Spirit evenly, so to speak, in his own more general treatment of the order of discovery his own language is more definitely *Christocentric*. We can see this if we ask: While Hill takes the way of presentation to be exemplified in the *Summa*, where exactly does he locate the order of discovery? Hill places it where he places it for us all: in the psychology of religious experience. Just as Fairbairn in the late nineteenth-century saw the way towards the beginning of systematic theology as that of historical-critical exegesis, so Hill, no doubt influenced by Rahner's insistence that the Trinity must be an experienced mystery of salvation, saw the order of discovery as a religious way of faith-encounter. Speaking of the revelation of the Trinity in the encounter of faith, disclosed in the economy, Hill writes that "this order of knowing . . . is one indigenous to *religious* consciousness," as distinct from *theological* consciousness, which "alters this epistemic order somewhat."<sup>20</sup> While *theological* consciousness gives us the *ordo doctrinae* characteristic of the *Summa*, it cannot exist without *religious* consciousness, which moves first from "faith-encounter with God centered on Jesus of Nazareth"<sup>21</sup> – Christocentrism – to the doctrine of the Trinity. According to Hill, theological knowing then always retains this religious "order proper to faith in its origination" as the "norm of its own reflections".<sup>22</sup> But how do we get from Hill's Christocentric faith-experience, no doubt brought about by the mission of the Spirit, as the starting-point of the religious order of discovery, to the explicit focus on two temporal missions as *Aquinas's* starting-point for the order of discovery?

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

As Fairbairn was interested in exploring the psychology of Christ's consciousness, Hill has an interest in exploring *Aquinas's* religious consciousness and how it finally results in his theological consciousness, as expressed in the *Summa*. Of the latter Hill says, "His own thinking . . . arrives at this order only at the end of a far less simple process."<sup>23</sup> According to Hill, Aquinas accepts on faith that there are persons in the one God, and seeking to explain this distinction moves to the idea of relations, and from there returns to persons, now understood as subsisting subjects of relationary act, and from there moves to grasp such notional act as "processions" grounded in the essential acts of knowing and loving proper to the Pure Act of Being. However we assess Hill's analysis of Aquinas's mental moves, identifying such mental moves can give us a way of accounting for the different things Hill says about the starting-point of Aquinas's way of discovery: beginning with a Christocentric faith, Aquinas's reflection on the identity of Christ and on his acts, the fact that he is *sent* by the Father and also *sends* us the Spirit, could lead Aquinas to distinguishing the two missions, as a fresh, more reflective starting-point.

However, despite offering us a solution to one problem, there are other issues that Hill's psychological analysis raises. Clearly in Aquinas's psychological process, however it is reconstructed, there must have been genuine moments of intellectual discovery. However, such a process sounds too theological to fit Hill's characterisation of the *via inventionis* as religious rather than theological. Moreover, though this process may seem more theological, its order is *preliminary* to and quite different from what Hill identifies as the *theological* way of teaching found in the *Summa*. So this process fits neither Hill's religious order of discovery nor his theological order of teaching. It would seem that, without identifying where this process stands in relation to the two orders of religious discovery and theological presentation, and so articulating its role in the legitimate move from Christocentric to Trinitarian doctrine of God, the

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

two orders *on their own* must appear inadequate to clarify how the Christocentric claim does not undermine but rather supports the Trinitarian nature of the doctrine of God.

There is a hint that Hill sees Aquinas's psychological process as somehow a continuation of the way of discovery, but he is unclear. Perhaps he has here a third way, intermediary between the religious way of discovery and the theological way of presentation. It does, however, seem to fit what the Lonergan had called the "way of discovery" in his treatise on the Trinity. For Lonergan, the way of discovery fitted not so much in the domain of religion, as in that of dogmatics. Lonergan, however, did not use dogmatics and systematics interchangeably, but he saw dogmatic theology and systematic theology as responses to two distinct but interrelated objects. Basing himself on Aquinas's distinction between the objects of certitude and understanding,<sup>24</sup> attained by distinct acts, Lonergan saw dogmatic theology as aimed at certitude, while systematic theology, which is found in the *Summa*, aimed at understanding. While the order of teaching and learning suited the goal of understanding, according to Lonergan, the way of discovery – one though more dogmatic than religious - suited the goal of certitude. As with Hill, the psychological process of theological discovery must begin with something already in place, and while Hill characterises this as religious discovery, Lonergan characterised it as a prescientific *catechetical* knowledge.<sup>25</sup>

In general then Lonergan sees what he elsewhere calls the "way of theological discovery" (*via inventionis theologicae*) as beginning with the contents of Scripture and Tradition.<sup>26</sup> When considering the Trinitarian doctrine of God in particular, he sometimes speaks of discovery as beginning with the dogmatic affirmation of three consubstantial persons,<sup>27</sup> and at other times as

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. St Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, IV, q. 9, a. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, vol. 12: *The Triune God: Systematics* (Toronto etc.: University of Toronto, 2007), 58-67.

<sup>26</sup> He uses the term in Bernard Lonergan, *Collected Works*, vol. 7: *The Ontological and Psychological Constitution of Christ*, 86-87.

<sup>27</sup> Bernard Lonergan, "Theology and Understanding," 129-30.

beginning with the missions as found in the New Testament.<sup>28</sup> To some extent, I suppose, one begins the way of discovery wherever one happens to be. However, given that we begin from Scripture, the focus is first ideally on the missions, which Lonergan presumably finds the most prominent aspect of biblical Trinitarian belief, despite the fact that Scripture speaks *also* of the Word in the beginning as well as of the Word made flesh (Jn 1). Then, given certain historic questions raised about the content of biblical faith, there is a movement of discovery, where we move towards the consubstantiality of the persons, the identification of their personal properties, the idea that the latter are relative and then that the relations are relations of origin, and finally that the latter are better understood by the refinement of a psychological analogy. Once these discoveries are made, they are then reconceived in an inverse systematic order by the way of teaching, with the goal of imparting understanding to those being taught.<sup>29</sup> I suggest that the employment here of a strictly theological order of discovery allows us to see how a Christocentric starting-point in faith and revelation can be theologically refined in such a way that the missions become a more reflective starting-point for a process of theological discovery that properly issues in a Trinitarian doctrine of God.

However, having addressed one issue with the distinction *between* the two orders, we should note a further complication, introduced by Rahner. From Rahner's point of view, the distinction just needs to be overcome. In his book of 1967, *The Trinity*, Rahner effectively proposed that the order of discovery should *become* the systematic order of presentation, thereby replacing that of the *Summa* and the whole tradition leading to Lonergan. While the *Summa* had moved along a way from the immanent to the economic Trinity, Rahner recommended a starting-point in the economic Trinity for any treatise that aims at a systematic explanation of the doctrine of the Trinity. In doing this he took himself to have "established the methodically and practically

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<sup>28</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics*, 66-67.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-69.

correct starting point for a systematic doctrine of the Trinity.”<sup>30</sup> Rahner emphasises that our access to the doctrine of the Trinity comes in Jesus and the Spirit, as they are experienced by us in salvation history through faith. The doctrine of the divine missions is thus “from its very nature the starting point for the doctrine of the Trinity.”<sup>31</sup> Rahner thinks this is undeniable for any theology, because, as he continues, “it is a fact of salvation history that we know about the Trinity because the Father’s Word has entered our history and has given us his Spirit.” What concerns Rahner is to make what others would name the starting-point of the order of discovery *also* the starting-point for the way of presentation.

When Rahner first introduces for extended discussion the question of a methodological starting-point, he seems to accept that systematic treatises on the Trinity may continue to keep the Thomist order. What he says here is that, if it is true that we can only grasp the content of the doctrine of the Trinity through attention to the history of salvation and grace, then the section on the missions at the end of the treatise needs to be highlighted, even if it remains for educational reasons at the end of the treatise. The doctrine of the divine missions needs to be animating the treatise all the way through. In this case the treatise would be implicitly, though not explicitly, following “the same order as the history of the revelation of this mystery.”<sup>32</sup> But where Rahner is driving is for the explicit, and not merely implicit, adoption of this order of the history of revelation – Hill’s religious order of discovery – *as* the theological order of presentation that the treatise itself will make. Not long after he says of the divine missions: “But this starting point should not only be tacitly *presupposed*; the treatise should really start by positing it as such. Otherwise the meaning and the limits of all statements of this doctrine become unclear . . . .”<sup>33</sup> Merely presupposing the thesis, or leaving its treatment to biblical theology is not enough, but it requires a “systematic presentation” where the economic Trinity can lead us to the immanent

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<sup>30</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (London: Burns and Oates, 1970), 46. I have omitted consideration of the way in which Rahner’s axiom about the immanent and economic can itself be said to be a theological starting-point.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

Trinity. Rahner's fear is that, without what he elsewhere calls this "*really first* starting point,"<sup>34</sup> everything that is said about the Trinity will be almost inevitably misunderstood as a set of puzzling information about God that is irrelevant to our Christian experience. This is surely reminiscent of Barth's position that the starting-point within a dogmatics crucially shapes one's grasp of everything that is said subsequently, for good or ill. Rahner writes: "Salvation history, our experience of it, its biblical expression give us such a previous knowledge which remains forever the foundation and the inexhaustible, ever richer starting point, even after it has been systematized."<sup>35</sup> Not so different from what Hill would later say, except that for Rahner it should mean the end of any distinction between the order of discovery and the order of presentation, with the order of discovery becoming the order of presentation. There is to be only one order with only one starting-point: the economic Trinity, the principal mystery of salvation.

What reason can we have to accept Rahner's thesis? We may be unconvinced that everything said about the Trinity will inevitably be misunderstood if the economic Trinity is the starting-point of the order of discovery only and not also the starting-point of the order of presentation. Likewise we may be suspicious of Rahner's particular interpretation of the consequences of his axiom of the identity of economic and immanent Trinity, namely, that only the Son who is incarnate *can* be incarnate. Finding reasons to reject Rahner's charge that to allow that any divine person might become incarnate is an arbitrary hypothesis,<sup>36</sup> we might prefer that the *Summa's* order of doctrine allows us to see more clearly why it is so *fitting* for the Son to take flesh. However, the Thomist might easily find other reasons to incorporate Rahner's objection in some way. Partly, I think, Rahner's order has appealed to theologians, because it appeals to a contemporary state of uncertainty about whether it is true that Christ is truly God, whether the traditional categories for expressing dogmatic answers are of enduring value, and whether the ability to raise such questions is not itself the product of a historical conditioning that relativizes

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 63, n. 17.

the questions themselves. That a question of truth is at issue in our time should be something to appeal to a theological tradition that is concerned both with perennial truth and the particularity of our context. If Lonergan is correct that the way of discovery is aimed at certitude, then perhaps he is right that theology should be pursued in a way that is, in his sense, both dogmatic and systematic, that a Thomist's way of presentation itself should both retrace the order of discovery *and* expose the *Summa's* order of teaching, in a way that addresses both certitude *and* understanding. We can find some encouragement to do this more systematically ourselves from what Aquinas does more occasionally himself, how he punctuates his works with what Lonergan identifies as the *via inventionis*, say by arguing to the full divinity of Christ from the Scriptures.<sup>37</sup> He includes such points within the order of the book, as he lectures on John's Gospel,<sup>38</sup> which was of course written so that we might believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and within the order of teaching he employs in the *Summa contra Gentiles*.<sup>39</sup> It may be that a more thoroughgoing employment of this order of discovery as something genuinely theological is needed, if we are as theologians properly to face other contemporary questions, such as whether the economy does not reveal an eternal coming forth of the Son from the Spirit as well as an eternal coming forth of the Spirit from the Son.

However, I do want to acknowledge that Lonergan's account of the ways of discovery and learning is a synthesis from scattered remarks in Aquinas. When Aquinas speaks of the *via inventionis*, he normally contrasts this way of discovery not with any order of presentation, but with a *via resolutionis* or *via iudicii*, as he examines different ways in which we reason from one thing to another. For example, in the *Summa* he states: "Human reasoning according to the way of inquiry or discovery begins from certain truths quite simply understood, namely first principles, and then in the way of judgement by analysis returns to first principles, in the light of

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<sup>37</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *The Ontological and Psychological Constitution of Christ*, 86-87.

<sup>38</sup> For examples see Gilles Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of St Thomas Aquinas*, 10-14.

<sup>39</sup> St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, IV, 2-9, 15-18.

which it studies what has been discovered.”<sup>40</sup> In the way of discovery, our reasoning starts from what is already known and so moves to acquire new knowledge, but in the order of judgement we can refer something now known back to first principles. For Lonergan this is not yet a contrast between discovery and teaching appropriate to the distinction between dogmatics and systematics, and everything Aquinas has described here remains for Lonergan part of the wider dogmatic process he associates with discovery.<sup>41</sup>

Though I cannot find anywhere where Aquinas explicitly contrasts the order of discovery and the order of educational presentation, Aquinas does crucially distinguish discovery – *inventio* – from the process in which one learns from another who teaches. For Aquinas, teaching – *doctrina* – and learning – *disciplina* – unite the one who teaches and the one who learns in a single educational transaction. *Doctrina* means making another to know and *disciplina* means the reception of knowledge, where teacher and learner are united in this single movement.<sup>42</sup> As a consequence of this unity, the two terms, though not synonymous, can be used to some extent interchangeably, and the order that takes place in teaching is properly identified with the order that takes place in learning. Hence, while Aquinas says in the *Summa*’s prologue that he is setting out to write according to the *ordo disciplinae*, the order of learning, Hill is not wrong to observe that it is structured according to the order of teaching, as indeed Aquinas also employs *via doctrinae* in introducing his treatment of the Trinity of persons in God.<sup>43</sup> How though is this order of teaching and learning to be distinguished from the order of discovery? For Aquinas, discovery and teaching-learning are both ways of coming by or acquiring knowledge.<sup>44</sup> *Inventio* (discovery) is what it is for people to acquire knowledge for themselves, while in learning the

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<sup>40</sup> St Thomas Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 79, a. 8. Cf. St Thomas Aquinas, *In librum Boethii de Trinitate*, q. 6, a. 1, q. 3; *De malo*, q. 6.

<sup>41</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics*, 60-61.

<sup>42</sup> On Aquinas’s educational theory, see Wolfgang Schmidl, *Homo discens: Studien zur Pädagogischen Anthropologie bei Thomas von Aquin* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1987), 15-90; Vivian Boland, *St Thomas Aquinas* (Continuum Library of Educational Thought, vol. 1; London and New York: Continuum, 2007), 41-58.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. St Thomas Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 27, pr.

<sup>44</sup> St Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 11 (*De magistro*), a. 1.

acquisition takes place with the assistance of a teacher (who already possesses the knowledge in question) either live, so to speak, or through a medium such as a book. Aquinas denies that the one who acquires knowledge for himself through discovery is teaching himself, because he does not possess the knowledge to begin with, as a teacher does.<sup>45</sup> Rather the process of discovery is quite distinct from the process of teaching and learning.

What though of the order involved in each of these ways? As for the order involved in discovery, we have already noted that one moves from what is already better known towards the acquisition of new knowledge. Aquinas uses what Paul has to say in Rom. 1.20, of knowledge of the invisible things of God coming through what he has made, to show how in the order of discovery we move from knowledge of temporal things to knowledge of eternal things.<sup>46</sup> Could we by analogy apply the order of discovery to Trinitarian doctrine? From the created effects involved in the divine missions could we perhaps *discover* the eternal divine persons? Hill seems to have something like this in mind in the religious experience of faith.<sup>47</sup> However, as far as I am aware Aquinas never speaks of the *via inventionis* in connection with supernatural knowledge, and perhaps he would have difficulty in doing so, at least in respect of faith and revelation. This is because the Trinitarian character of God is not something we can come to know for ourselves; we cannot *discover* it for ourselves, even if we were to have knowledge of the humanity of Christ or witness the flames at Pentecost. The fact that we do not have an active capacity to know such things that are above our nature means that we cannot discover them for ourselves, that is, cannot “discover” them at all, in the strict sense of the term. The acquisition of this knowledge must rather be a case not of a *sacra inventio* but of a *sacra doctrina*, where one can learn that God is a Trinity only because God himself teaches us this.<sup>48</sup> For Aquinas, we can come

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., a. 2.

<sup>46</sup> St Thomas Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 79, a. 9.

<sup>47</sup> William Hill, *The Three-Personed God*, 68-69, 274; cf. Gilles Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of St Thomas Aquinas*, 9, 13.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. St Thomas Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 32, a. 1.

to know the eternal Trinity through the temporal missions only by way of an *ordo doctrinae*, never by discovery.

Hill is certainly right to hold that the *Summa* operates according to the order of teaching, but Aquinas seems to prefer to use *ordo doctrinae* in more than one way. He supposes that, like a medical doctor's art imitating the healing power of nature, teaching imitates discovery.<sup>49</sup> So, just as the way of discovery will move from what is better known to what is as yet unknown, so will the order of teaching. How the order of teaching works out in practice, however, will depend in part on who is being taught and what they already know. Aquinas accepts the principle that in teaching and learning, the order should be to begin with what is *easier* for the learner. At one point in the *Summa* he refers to "the order of teaching, which should proceed from what is easier to what is more difficult."<sup>50</sup> However, while he accepts this as a kind of default position, he thinks that it often needs to be trumped. As he writes in his commentary on Boethius' *De Trinitate*, "Sometimes in learning it is necessary to start, not with what is easier, but with that on which the knowledge of subsequent matters depends."<sup>51</sup> In this case he is concerned with the order in which one is taught different disciplines. Logic is certainly not the easiest of disciplines, but that is what one needs to start with, because one will need what it teaches for every other discipline, which one then learns *after* logic. So there appear to be different ways in which the order of teaching and learning can take place, each dependent in a different way on the particular needs of the learner: one order starts with what is easier, and another with just what needs to be known before something else can be properly known, however difficult that may be.

With regard to the doctrine of God, Aquinas envisages two different ways in which the order of teaching and learning can work.<sup>52</sup> In one we move from the Word made flesh to the Word in the beginning, and in the other we move from the Word in the beginning to the Word made flesh.

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<sup>49</sup> St Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 11 (*De magistro*), a. 1.

<sup>50</sup> St Thomas Aquinas, *ST II-II*, q. 189, a. 1 ad 4.

<sup>51</sup> St Thomas Aquinas, *In librum Boethii de Trinitate*, q. 6, a. 1, q. 2 ad 3. Cf. the *ordo addiscendi* in St Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia libri Ethicorum*, VI, lec. 7.

<sup>52</sup> St Thomas Aquinas, *Super Iohannem*, 1, lec. 1.

The first Aquinas finds in a Gloss which states, “We pass from our mother’s milk to the father’s table, that is, from the simple doctrine that teaches the Word made flesh to that of the Word that was in the beginning with God.”<sup>53</sup> Here we have an order of teaching with a definitely Christocentric starting-point: the Word made flesh. Aquinas justifies this order on the ground that it begins with what is *easier* for us, what can somehow enter into our sense and imagination rather than what surpasses all the senses. But in the *Summa* we see a quite different order of teaching, where the Word in the beginning with God is treated in the Prima Pars, and the Word made flesh in the Tertia Pars, but where light is thrown on the saving role of Christ’s humanity by the prior treatment of the Trinitarian doctrine of God. The adoption of a different order of teaching is to be explained by who is being taught: in the first case, the Gloss is concerned with what is easier for catechumens and neophytes receiving basic instruction, and the second with what is best for those babes who were ready for higher, theological studies, for advanced understanding, the students of Aquinas’s *Summa*.<sup>54</sup>

However, if we are to distinguish not a Christocentric religious order of discovery and a Trinitarian theological order of educational presentation, but *two* orders of educational presentation, the first Christocentric and catechetical and another more fully Trinitarian, at least two questions remain: what role is there for any order of discovery, and what is to be done about Rahner’s proposal, which now, *mutatis mutandis*, would be that Aquinas’s second order of teaching should be dropped, and the first be employed not only in catechesis but also in systematics? Though he may not speak explicitly of a theological way of discovery in the development of Trinitarian doctrine, there is no doubt that Aquinas participated crucially in this crucial movement as a master of theology. And if this way of discovery *does* provide a crucial link between a catechetical Christocentric order of doctrine of God and a systematic order of teaching a Trinitarian doctrine of God, then perhaps Rahner’s concern can be incorporated by a

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<sup>53</sup> St Thomas Aquinas, *ST* II-II, q. 189, a. 1, obj. 4 . . . ad 4. See also St Thomas Aquinas, *Contra retrahentes*, 7.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. St Thomas Aquinas, *ST* pr.

way of presentation that begins not exactly by recapitulating Aquinas's order of catechesis, but by somehow uniting the concerns of Lonergan's dogmatic and systematic theologies, as we trace our way from what is given to us in the divine missions all the way to the discovery of every aid which can then inform a properly Trinitarian doctrine of God, which can in turn illuminate for us the whole of sweep of Christian theology.