

ADOPTIVE SONSHIP: OUR UNION WITH THE DIVINE PERSONS

FRANÇOIS BOURASSA, S.J.

L'Immaculée-Conception, Montréal, Canada

ONE of the central efforts of Catholic theology has always been “to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth” (Eph. 3:18) of the mystery whereby we are made participants of divine life and admitted into the society of the Father and His Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit. To this effort of understanding Pope Pius XII has given new impetus and has restated its fundamental norms.¹ These norms are two: first, this union of grace never destroys the radical distinction between Creator and creature;² second, and by consequence, every exercise of divine efficient causality is common to the three Persons.³ These two principles are, as we shall see, two aspects of the same truth, the former translating it into terms of personal being, the latter into terms of action.

The second norm has by its very statement prompted a certain line of investigation. For it seems to imply that from the exercise of another causality than efficient there might arise a direct union with the Persons themselves, such as is realized in the Incarnation. To this investigation many theologians—Scheeben, Waffelaert, de Rénnon, Mersch, and others—have already turned their attention. The well-known developments of Fr. de la Taille on this divine formal causality, or created actuation by the Uncreated Act, have furnished theology with a metaphysical schema with which to work out further explana-

¹ Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis* (AAS, XXXV [1943], 231): “We are well aware that many a veil shrouds this profound truth of our union with the divine Redeemer and in particular of the Holy Spirit’s dwelling within our souls and impedes our power to understand and explain it. This mystery is enveloped in a darkness, rising out of the mental limitations of those who seek to grasp it. But We know, too, that well-directed and earnest study of this doctrine and the clash of diverse opinions and their discussion, provided love of truth and due submission to the Church be the arbiter, will open rich and bright vistas, whose light will help to progress in kindred sacred sciences. Hence We do not censure those who in various ways and with diverse reasonings strain every effort to understand and clarify the mystery of this our marvelous union with Christ” (America Press translation, pp. 34–35).

² *Loc. cit.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 234 (America Press translation, pp. 36–37).

tions. Thus Fr. Malachi J. Donnelly, S.J.,⁴ and Fr. P. de Letter, S.J.,⁵ have been among the latest to elaborate the thesis: if efficient causality is common to the three Persons, yet formal causality may be distinct and proper, as all admit in the Incarnation.

There remain, of course, many difficulties, whose origin is the very richness of the mystery. For the latter, though in itself one, has had to find its human expression in a wide range of concepts in Scripture, Christian tradition, and scientific theology. It is the task of the mind, when trying to adjust itself to the transcendent reality, to remain aware of the limitations of its own concepts, always correcting and completing them one by another, so as to grasp the fullness of the reality which no single human word can express.

Our present concern is to study, under the guidance of St. Thomas, one of the points involved in the larger question of the union of grace, namely, the titles of the Christian soul consequent upon divine adoption, primarily that of son of God, and the correlative titles and relationships of God towards His adoptive sons.

A brief review of two important opinions on the matter will enable us to put clearly the questions we wish to raise. According to Fr. de Régnon, S.J., we become through divine adoption brothers of Christ, that is, brothers of the Son and of the Son alone; we become adoptive sons of God, that is, of God the Father; and it is only by an abuse contrary to Christian tradition that one could call the just man a son of the Holy Spirit or a son of the Trinity.⁶

Similarly, Fr. Paul Galtier, S.J., claims that, although our adoption is the common work of the three Persons, the Father is nevertheless the only one whom Christ could invite us to call by the name of father. To us as well as to Christ, the Father can be really and exclusively father only by reason of His eternal and necessary paternity. Therefore, He alone is to be blessed by this title, and alone to be invoked as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and our father.⁷

⁴ Malachi J. Donnelly, S.J., "The Inhabitation of the Holy Spirit: A Solution according to de la Taille," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES*, VIII (1947), 445-70.

⁵ P. de Letter, S.J., "Sanctifying Grace and Our Union with the Holy Trinity," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES*, XIII (March, 1952), 33-58.

⁶ Th. de Régnon, S.J., *Etudes de théologie positive sur la Sainte Trinité*, IV (Paris: Retaux, 1898), 536; cf. pp. 535, 537, 552.

⁷ Paul Galtier, S.J., *L'Habitation en nous des trois Personnes* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1928), pp. 128-29, "... quoique notre adoption divine soit leur oeuvre commune, bien que tous

To the objections raised by A. Verrielle,⁸ Fr. Galtier gives answers based on texts of Scripture and the liturgy. In the *Pater noster*, he says, the Father is the only one to be invoked under that name. Thus, though it may be theologically true that the Son and the Holy Spirit may likewise be called our father, yet this cannot be deduced from the manner in which Christ here teaches us to pray. Again, when Christ promises His disciples that He will pray the Father to send them the Paraclete, He speaks of His Father alone. The same limitation is observable in the following texts: "Your Father knows that you need all these things" (Matt. 6:33); "You therefore are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48); "The Father Himself loves you" (John 16:27). Finally, when in the prayer, *Te igitur*, of the canon of the Mass the Church invokes by name the Father, she does not wish thereby to designate also the Son whose sacrifice she is then presenting to the Father.⁹ In brief: "Being Himself the Son of Him whom He has revealed to us as the Father, the Word whose brothers we have become by adoption cannot under this precise aspect be also called our adoptive father."¹⁰ While admitting, therefore, that it is theologically correct to call the three Persons our father and ourselves in turn sons of the Trinity, Fr. Galtier yet insists that such texts imply a richer notion of divine adoption which reaches to the distinction of Persons. And in this he modifies the doctrine of Fr. de Régnon.

soient animés à notre égard d'une bienveillance également paternelle, qu'ils nous rendent tous participants de leur commune nature et nous admettent d'un même élan à la possession de leurs biens, il [le Père] est le seul cependant que le Christ nous ait invités et ait pu inviter à appeler du nom de Père. . . . Pour nous aussi, il n'est réellement et exclusivement 'le Père' qu'à raison de son éternelle et nécessaire paternité. 'Mon père et votre père,' nous dit son Fils, 'le vôtre, parce que le mien.' . . . Aussi, et puisqu'il a plu au premier né du Père éternel de se donner des frères réels, est-ce son Père uniquement que, dans le sanctuaire de leurs âmes, ils ont le droit de bénir et d'invoquer comme le Père de N.-S. J.-C. et le leur."

⁸ A. Verrielle, "La théorie trinitaire des Pères grecs, et le livre du P. Galtier," *Revue apologétique*, XLVIII (1929), 540-53; cf. p. 549.

⁹ Paul Galtier, S.J., "La Sainte Trinité en elle-même et en nous," *Revue apologétique*, XLIX (1929), 141-54; cf. p. 149.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 150: "Fils lui-même de celui qu'il nous a révélé comme 'le Père,' le Verbe, dont notre adoption nous rend les frères, ne saurait, de ce chef, être appelé aussi notre père adoptif."

We are now in a position to raise two questions for our discussion:
 (1) How is it possible to say that the just man is a son of the Trinity?
 (2) Are the correlative titles of the Christian soul and of the Persons predicated by "propriety" or by appropriation?

SON OF THE TRINITY

Fortunately for us St. Thomas has explicitly treated this question. He constantly affirms in his solution that not only the operation which effects the adoption, but also the consequent relation of fatherhood are common to the three Persons. The whole Trinity therefore is our father by adoption. So much is this principle a fundamental of St. Thomas' teaching, that in his reasoning he assumes as admitted that the whole Trinity is our Father, and concludes therefrom that the operation of adoption belongs to the whole Trinity.

Apart from passing declarations,¹¹ this doctrine is clearly expounded in the questions on the Incarnation. St. Thomas asks whether Christ as man may be called son of the Holy Spirit or of the Trinity. His solution states this distinction between Christ's filiation and ours, that Christ is the Son of the Father alone, while the just are sons of the whole Trinity or of the Holy Spirit.¹² This solution is based upon the principle that filiation and paternity are essentially relations consequent upon generation. But there is this difference between Christ and us, that He is natural Son by generation from the Father alone, while we are adoptive sons by a generation or communication of the divine nature, not from the Father alone but from the three Persons. Christ therefore is Son of the Father alone, but we are sons of the Trinity.

St. Thomas cites the opinion of those who deny that Christ can be called son of the Trinity or of the Holy Spirit, not because such a title is simply false, but because it is unsuitably given. Some who held this opinion were willing to grant that by reason of habitual grace (by which the whole Trinity dwelt in His soul) Christ could, even as man, be called the son of God, but not of the Trinity; for He is not by this

¹¹ Cf. *In III Sent.*, d. 4, q. 1, a. 2, qtl. 2; d. 10, q. 2, a. 1, sol. 2, ad 2m; d. 10, q. 2, a. 2, sol. 1, resp.; d. 10, q. 2, a. 2, qtl. 3, sed contra 2; *Sum. theol.*, III, q. 3, a. 5, ad 2m; q. 23, a. 2; q. 32, a. 3, ad 2m.

¹² *In III Sent.*, d. 4, q. 1, a. 2, sol. 1.

grace referred to the relations which distinguish the Persons of the Trinity; by reason of the grace of union, however, Christ can only be called the Son of His natural Father.¹³ St. Thomas himself refuses to admit that Christ may in any sense be called a son of the Holy Spirit or of the Trinity, not only because such titles are unsuitable, but also because, according to the teaching of St. Augustine, they are simply false and impossible. Nevertheless he explicitly admits and retains the principle adduced in the rejected opinion, namely, that "by grace we are called sons of the Trinity, without reference to the relations by which the Trinity is distinguished."¹⁴

To the objection that the brothers of Christ and those in the state of grace are sons of the Trinity, and that therefore Christ must likewise be called son of the Trinity, inasmuch as He is the Son of the same Father as we and has the same grace, St. Thomas, while constantly conceding that we are sons of the Trinity, denies the univocity of the paternities and filiations involved in the comparison. Christ is, indeed, in His human nature the first-born of many brothers; nonetheless He is only analogously a Son of God with other men, for He is God's natural Son due to the hypostatic union, while other men are adoptive sons through the assimilation to God which grace brings. Therefore it is not entirely the same Father who is the term of reference in each case.¹⁵ The grace of union makes Christ the natural Son of God; habitual grace gives Him no title of sonship, even natural.¹⁶

In the *Summa*, St. Thomas holds the same doctrine, and for the same reason, namely, that the type of filiation depends on the perfection of the likeness communicated in generation. If there is perfect likeness, there will be perfect filiation; if imperfect likeness, imperfect filiation. Christ is Son of God according to a perfect filiation—by reason not of creation or justification, but solely of the generation whereby He is Son of the Father. He must not, therefore, be said to be in any sense a son of the Holy Spirit or even of the whole Trinity.¹⁷ This solution implies, of course, opposition between being "son by grace" and being "Son of the Father alone."

Further objection is raised that, as the souls of other saints are

¹³ *Ibid.*, "Concedunt etiam."

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, sol. 2, ad 1m.

¹⁷ *Sum. theol.*, III, q. 32, a. 3, resp.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, "Similiter etiam quod."

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, ad 2m.

formed by the Holy Spirit, so the body of Christ was formed by Him. These saints, however, by reason of this formation, are said to be sons of the whole Trinity and consequently of the Holy Spirit. St. Thomas grants all of this, but refuses to conclude to a similar filiation on the part of Christ, for he denies the parity and univocity of our filiation and His.¹⁸ Our sonship is only an imperfect one, consequent upon the imperfect likeness communicated by grace and caused by the whole Trinity. Christ's sonship, however, is perfect, so that He can in no sense be called son of the Holy Spirit or of the Trinity. The Son's nature is one with the Father's; the creature is only an imperfect image of the Creator.¹⁹

From the principle used in these solutions ("the type of filiation depends on the perfection of the likeness communicated in generation"), it is already clear that, for our purposes, no distinction is to be drawn between adopting and being father. For whoever generates, necessarily acquires a relation of paternity, and vice versa.²⁰ Therefore since the whole Trinity is said to adopt, the whole Trinity must also necessarily be a father.

This same point is made again when St. Thomas faces the very objection raised by Fr. de Régnon and Fr. Galtier. The argument runs that to adopt is proper to the Father alone, since only one who generates sons can be said to adopt; but in the Trinity the Father alone generates a natural son. Further, by adoption we become brothers of Christ (Rom. 8:29); but Christ is Son of God the Father alone; therefore, we also are by adoption sons of the Father alone.²¹ In answer, St. Thomas argues that God is called our father precisely in so far as He has adopted us; but the whole Trinity is called our father; therefore the whole Trinity adopts us. A further argument in refutation is the universal principle that grace does not destroy the fundamental relation and distinction between creature and God but rather supposes it: "Adoption implies an effect worked in the creature."²² It is by this principle (enuniated also as "all divine operations *ad extra* are common"²³)

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, ad 2m. Cf. St. Augustine, *De trinitate*, V, 11 (*PL*, XLII, 918-19).

¹⁹ *Sum. theol.*, I, q. 33, a. 3; cf. a. 2.

²⁰ *In III Sent.*, d. 4, q. 1, a. 2, "Et ideo dicendum est aliter."

²¹ *In III Sent.*, d. 10, q. 2, a. 1, qtl. 2, obj. 1 and 2.

²² *Ibid.*, "Sed contra."

²³ *Ibid.*, sol. 2.

that St. Thomas preserves the divine transcendence, and thereby the very essence of the supernatural order.

From the foregoing discussion St. Thomas' solution of the question may be summarized as follows. Filiation and paternity are relations consequent upon generation, that is, upon the communication of nature in likeness. Christ as God receives the divine nature from the Father alone, in perfect likeness within the unity of essence; He is therefore the natural Son of the Father alone. As man He receives His human nature from His mother in likeness, and is the Son of Mary. Other men, through habitual grace, receive a communication of the divine nature by an operation of the whole Trinity. From the latter, however, they remain really distinct, because they remain creatures; there is a very intimate union with God, but no identity. And precisely because God is our Father not by nature but by grace—that is, by reason of His infinite goodness and free love which extends itself to a term distinct from the divine essence—, He is our Father not by reason of His necessary and eternal paternity within the divinity, but by reason of a free generation: "Of His own will He has begotten us" (James 1:18). Men therefore are said to be sons of the Trinity from which they remain really distinct; and consequently the whole Trinity is said to be their father and to adopt them.²⁴

The connection between creation and adoption must be borne in mind. Adoption by grace remains essentially something contingent, freely produced by God, something communicated to a creature who remains personally and absolutely distinct from God, not something communicated to a divine Person within the unity of the same substance. A "son by grace" remains a created son, "factus"; he does not become a "Son who is God," "genitus non factus consubstantialis Patri." It is on this account that filiation by grace does not concern the relations which distinguish the Trinity. Let us repeat that it is this fundamental principle of the irreducible distinction between Creator and creature that preserves the divine transcendence and the very existence of grace.²⁵

²⁴ *Ibid.*, ad 1m.

²⁵ *Sum. theol.*, I, q. 33, a. 3: "In creatura filiatio invenitur respectu Dei, non secundum perfectam rationem, cum non sit una natura Creatoris et creaturae. . . ."

This same principle must be the basis for our understanding of this mysterious indwelling:

Let all agree uncompromisingly on this, if they would not err from truth and from the orthodox teaching of the Church: to reject every kind of mystic union, by which the faithful would in any way pass beyond the sphere of creatures and rashly enter the divine even to the extent of one single attribute of the eternal Godhead being predicated of them as their own.²⁶

To the objection, therefore, that we are brothers of Christ, St. Thomas answers that we are by grace brothers of Christ only inasmuch as we may be said to be sons of God the Father, and this does not prevent our being also called sons of the Son or of the Holy Spirit.²⁷ This is consonant with Fr. Galtier's explanation: "Being Himself the Son of Him whom He reveals to us as the Father, the Word whose brothers we have become by adoption cannot under this precise aspect be also called our adoptive father."²⁸ For St. Thomas grants that we cannot be from one and the same viewpoint both brothers of the Son and sons of the Son. Therefore if Fr. Galtier's words "under this same aspect" refer to the denomination "brothers," then certainly Christ cannot, from this same viewpoint, be called our father. But if his words refer to "adoption," then since adoption itself can be regarded from many viewpoints, the same Son can be our brother and our adoptive father by reason of different aspects of the same adoption. There is this difference, however, as we shall see, that "father" is said of Him in common with the other three Persons, without appropriation, while "brother" is predicated of Him by appropriation, because of the reference to His hypostatic property. This introduces us to our second question: Are the correlative titles of the Christian soul and of the Persons assigned by "propriety" or by appropriation?

APPROPRIATION OR PROPRIETY?

For, after our previous discussion, the question immediately arises: Why are we said to be sons of God and brothers of Christ because of

²⁶ Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis* (AAS, XXXV [1943], 231; America Press translation, p. 35).

²⁷ *In III Sent.*, d. 10, q. 2, a. 1, ad 2m.

²⁸ Paul Galtier, S.J., "La Sainte Trinité en elle-même et en nous," *Revue apologetique*, XLIX (1929), p. 150.

our union with Him, yet never called fathers or holy spirits, though we are as intimately united to the Father and the Holy Spirit as to the Son? Again, how are we to explain Scripture and Christian tradition when they say that the Father generates or adopts us in His Son and as brothers to Him, by the gift of the Holy Spirit? Further, there is the fact that on the social plane of redemption Christ is the Head of the Mystical Body, and the Holy Spirit its soul. Such exclusive and restricted denominations seem to contradict our previous stand upon common adoption and common paternity. Nor can appropriation sufficiently explain these exclusive denominations. For attribution by appropriation is not a property of the Person and may therefore be extended to other Persons. Thus, when I say that the Father is omnipotence, the Son wisdom, and the Holy Spirit goodness, these attributes are not so exclusively predicated of one Person that they cannot be predicated of the others as well; for the three Persons are, singly and equally, omnipotence, wisdom, and goodness. But in our present matter, while we say that we are the brothers of Christ or that He is our brother, we may not say that we are brothers of the Father or of the Holy Spirit, or that correlatively the Father or the Holy Spirit are our brothers. Likewise, we are called sons of God, but not fathers of God nor holy spirits. Must not these titles, then, which we attribute to the Persons, be predicated of them by propriety and not by appropriation?

This seems to be precisely the argument forwarded by Fr. de Régnon: "We are brothers of the Son and of the Son alone; we are adoptive sons of God the Father. . . . There is nothing of appropriation in these titles of the Christian soul."²⁹

St. Thomas himself notes that while God is called our father, as Christ is our brother, yet never is any divine Person called our holy spirit or our son. It would seem, then, that the former titles imply really distinct relations of the soul to the Persons. As there is between us and Christ alone a relation of brotherhood, whereby He is called our brother, so there would be between us and the Father alone relations of paternity and filiation, whereby He alone would be called our Father.

St. Thomas, however, denies the parity and offers a twofold explana-

²⁹ Th. de Régnon, S.J., *Etudes de théologie positive sur la Sainte Trinité*, IV, 536, 552.

tion for the diversity in attribution. The first reason is based upon the divine transcendence, and is enuniated in the principle already mentioned: the relation of God to creatures, even in the order of grace, remains always a relation of cause to effect, of act to potency. The second reason lies in the explanation of appropriation.

Appropriation and Adoption

1) As a first principle to be presupposed in all discussion of these titles, St. Thomas notes that, because of the adjective "our," these divine denominations arising out of adoption signify relations between God and creatures. But immediately another principle comes into play, one which holds universally in the orders both of nature and of grace: God cannot be related to us save as a cause, efficient, final, or exemplary.³⁰ He cannot, therefore, receive denominations which imply relations to creatures—those titles which are modified by the adjective "our"—unless they qualify Him as our principle or cause. He can be called, therefore, our father but not our son, because father implies the relation of principle, while son implies rather the relation of "from a principle."

For the same reason the Holy Spirit cannot be called "our gift," because "gift" of itself implies only an aptitudinal relationship to the one who receives it. It cannot be called "his" until it has actually been given to him; and even then it is not a "gift to be given" (*donum dantis*: a gift which he can in turn give to another), but a "gift received" (*datum nostrum, donum accipientis*).³¹ The same principle of solution must be applied to the denomination "our Holy Spirit": the Holy Spirit, as a subsisting Person, is characterized by a relation not of principle but of principiated; He cannot, therefore, be called "ours."³²

But "the Son is given to us!" Yes: but He is not given to be our Son, so as to be related to us as to a principle of His filiation. Rather He is given to us to be our Teacher and Savior, and may thus be called

³⁰ *In I Sent.*, d. 18, q. 1, a. 5, sol.

³¹ *Ibid.*, ad 1m: "dicendum, quod donum importat quamdam relationem in actu, scilicet ad dantem, et quamdam solum in aptitudine, quantum est in ratione sui nominis, scilicet ad eum cui datur; et ideo potest semper dici donum dantis; sed non est ejus cui datur, nisi quando sibi est datum in actu; et propter hoc dicimus datum nostrum et non donum nostrum."

³² *Ibid.*, ad 2m.

“our Teacher,” “our Savior,” and so on, but not “our Son.”³³ The denomination “our brother” shall interest us at greater length later on. For the moment let us say that we are brothers of Christ—that is, sons of the same Father—not univocally but analogously; He is the principle and exemplar of our filiation and may therefore be called the first-born of many brothers.³⁴

By correlation, the Father is not called our father by reason of His necessary and eternal paternity, for He is thereby the Father of the natural Son alone.³⁵ Our conclusion holds, therefore, that in relation to creatures the name “father” can be extended to the other Persons but not the names “son” or “holy spirit,” because paternity alone involves a relation of principle.³⁶

The Scripture passages referred to by Fr. Galtier are discussed and explained by St. Thomas in the light of the doctrine he has proposed. Thus, for example, he explains the denomination “Pater noster” in the Lord’s Prayer as addressed to the whole Trinity.³⁷ But objection is raised against this solution, that men by adoption become brothers of Christ. Brothers, however, are those who are sons of the same father; this is indicated when the Lord says: “Ascendo ad Patrem meum et ad Patrem vestrum” (John 20:17). Therefore it is only the Father of Christ who has adoptive sons. St. Thomas replies, as we have seen, that Christ and we have indeed the same Father; but the latter’s fatherhood of Christ is proper to Himself, whereas His fatherhood of us is shared by the other two Persons. Christ, then, is not the son of the Trinity as we are.³⁸ We could hardly ask for a clearer answer. Therefore let us turn now to the second step in our solution: the manner in which St. Thomas understands and applies appropriation to adoption.

2) Appropriation is the attribution to one divine Person of an essential property or quality, of a common operation or relation to crea-

³³ *Ibid.*, ad 5m.

³⁴ *In III Sent.*, d. 4, q. 1, a. 2, sol. 2, ad 2m. Cf. *Sum. theol.*, III, q. 23, a. 2, ad 2m; I, q. 33, a. 3, ad 1m and 2m.

³⁵ *In I Sent.*, d. 18, q. 1, a. 5, ad 3m.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, ad 3m.

³⁷ *Sum. theol.*, III, q. 23, a. 2, sed contra. Cf. I, q. 33, a. 3, obj. 1: “Hoc nomen pater secundum quod essentialiter sumitur est commune toti Trinitati, nam toti Trinitati dicimus ‘Pater noster’”—which St. Thomas concedes in his reply.

³⁸ *Sum. theol.*, III, q. 23, a. 2, ad 2m.

tures. The reason for the attribution is some special suitability—in general, the similitude between the common operation, etc., and the hypostatic property of the Person.³⁹

Thus, in adoption we can distinguish three elements: paternity, which signifies the adoption from the side of its author; filiation, which signifies it from the side of its term; and the form or nature communicated, which is the foundation or formal cause of the adoption. Adoption, therefore, if viewed as a paternity, has a similarity to the property of the Father, and for this reason is attributed or appropriated to Him as to its author. Signified as a filiation, adoption has a similarity to the proper relation of the Son, and is therefore appropriated to Him as to its exemplar; thus He can be said to be the first-born of many brothers. Finally, when considered from the viewpoint of the nature which is communicated, which conveys the right of inheritance and is, as it were, the inherent formal cause of filiation, adoption then signifies either sanctifying grace or charity. But these latter have, in turn, a similarity to the property of the Holy Spirit, and adoption is for this reason appropriated to Him.⁴⁰

How are we now to evaluate Fr. de Régnon's statement that when we are called sons of the Father, brothers of the Son, and "spiritual"

³⁹ Cf. *In I Sent.*, d. 3, q. 1, a. 4; q. 2, a. 1; d. 31, q. 1, a. 2, sol. and ad 3m; *In III Sent.*, d. 4, q. 1, a. 1, sol.; d. 10, q. 2, a. 1, sol. 2; *De Ver.*, q. 7, a. 3; q. 27, a. 1; a. 2 ad 3m; *Sum. theol.*, I, q. 39, aa. 7 and 8.

⁴⁰ St. Thomas distributes as follows the different elements in adoption and the different resultant appropriations: "Dicendum quod haec praepositio *per* potest notare duplicem causam: scilicet agentem mediam; et sic sumus adoptati a Deo Patre per Filium, *ut appropriate loquamur*, quia per eum Deus Pater multos filios in gloriam adduxit, ut dicitur ad Hebr. 2, 10, secundum quod eum misit in mundum Salvatorem. Potest etiam notare formalem causam; et hoc dupliciter: vel inhaerentem vel exemplarem. Si inhaerentem, sic adoptati sumus per Spiritum Sanctum cui appropriatur caritas, secundum quam formaliter meremur. Ideo dicitur Ephes. 1, 13: 'Signati estis Spiritu promissionis sancto, qui est pignus hereditatis nostrae.' Si vero designat causam exemplarem formalem, sic sumus adoptati per Filium. Unde dicitur Rom 8, 29: 'Quos praescivit conformes fieri imaginis Filii sui, ut sit ipse primogenitus in multis fratribus'" (*In III Sent.*, d. 10, q. 2, a. 1, sol. 3). The doctrine is summarized in this passage from the third part of the *Summa*: "Filiatio adoptiva est quaedam similitudo filiationis aeternae; sicut omnia quae in tempore facta sunt, similitudines quaedam sunt eorum quae ab aeterno fuerunt. Assimilatur autem homo splendori aeterni Filii per gratiae claritatem, quae attribuitur Spiritui Sancto. Et ideo adoptatio, licet sit toti Trinitati, appropriatur tamen Patri ut auctori, Filio ut exemplari, Spiritui Sancto ut imprimenti in nobis huius similitudinem exemplaris" (III, q. 23, a. 2, ad 3m).

men in the Holy Spirit, there is no appropriation or accomodation at work in these titles, and that "our sanctification, though caused by the whole Trinity, nonetheless establishes between us and the divine Persons distinct relations which we designate by different names"?⁴¹ If we limit our discussion for the moment to adoption and its consequent filiation, St. Thomas supplies us with a very confident answer: We are adoptive sons of the three Persons in such fashion that, consequent upon our adoption and terminating our relation of filiation, there is one and the same relation of paternity common to the three Persons.

Yet, within this common adoption and paternity, there is room for further exploration of the mystery of grace, via the different denominations by which we attempt to conceive it. Are these denominations "our father," "sons of God," "brothers of Christ," to be understood as appropriations or as attributions by propriety, indicating distinct relations to the three Persons? The answer to this question demands the asking of three further questions: (a) What is the exact notion, with regard to our subject matter, of attribution by appropriation and attribution by propriety? (b) What consequently must be the force of the expressions, "our father," etc., in the present matter? (c) What is the ultimate reason which demands this intepretation of these titles?

Appropriation and Propriety

Ordinarily, "proper" predication is opposed to metaphorical or figurative. In regard to the Persons of the Trinity, attribution by propriety means, in addition, that the attribute predicated of the Person is His very hypostatic property; such are the following attributions: the first Person is Father, the Father generates; the second Person is Son, the Son is the Word of the Father, etc. Appropriation, on the other hand, is, as we have already pointed out, the operation of the mind whereby it predicates of one Person a divine attribute which is not the property of that Person but common to the three, yet has a special similarity to the property of that Person.

Now, in addition to predications which have for direct subject a divine Person, there is another type of proposition which attempts to

⁴¹ Th. de Régnon, S.J., *op. cit.*, IV, 552.

express the mystery. In such propositions the grammatical subject is not a Person, but there is implicit a judgment which does have for logical and metaphysical subject a divine Person and involves therefore either appropriation or attribution by propriety. For instance, when we say that we are sons of God or brothers of Christ, the necessarily implicit judgment is formed that God is our father and Christ our brother. This second judgment in turn implies appropriation if it means that the attribute predicated of the Person is not His property but does have a special similarity with His property.

Interpretation of Titles

How then are we to interpret the denominations "our father," etc.? They are to be understood, of course, in their "proper" sense, inasmuch as "proper" is opposed to the purely figurative. (This is true independently of what we may consider to be the proper and figurative meanings of such words as "father," etc.) These titles must also be understood in an analogous, not a univocal, sense. But are they attributed by propriety or by appropriation?

1) *Father*. When the first Person of the Trinity is said to be father to us, His fatherhood is here to be taken as analogous to His fatherhood of His natural Son. The reason is that towards us He is father by grace, by adoption, and therefore our father in common with the Son and the Holy Spirit, while towards His natural Son He is Father by nature within the unity of substance, and therefore Father by property and in opposition to the other Persons.

In other words, the meaning of the word "father" in a given predication is the total meaning of the paternity which is directly affirmed of the subject, and not the limited meaning of that paternity which is the prime analogue. Now the total meaning of the paternity of God towards us is not quite the same as the meaning of the paternity of the Father towards the Son. For the Father is Father of the eternal Son by natural generation within the absolute unity of substance and being, while towards us He is father by free adoption, leaving intact the radical distinction of being and substance.⁴² To be father to creatures is, therefore, not proper to the Father nor to any single Person, but is common

⁴² Cf. *In III Sent.*, d. 4, q. 1, a. 2, sol. 2, ad 2m.

to the three; yet such fatherhood has an analogous likeness to the property of the Father and is for this reason appropriated to Him.

2) *Son of God*. Correlatively, the term "son" involves corresponding meanings. "Son" is taken analogously: we are sons of God by grace of adoption, and not natural sons. In other words, we are sons, but we are not the Son, the only begotten of the Father. We are united to this Son, but we are not really identical with Him so as to be, like Christ, one physical person with Him. And if we realize the infinite distance between being God in person and not being God in person, this alone is enough to show us why our sonship is not the same as the sonship of the only natural Son. But the filiation of the Son is a principle and an exemplar of ours, and has, therefore, a special likeness to our filiation, which justifies the appropriation. Corresponding to our filiation is the paternity which is common to the three Persons; corresponding to the natural filiation is the paternity which is proper to the Father.

3) "*Spiritual*" men. The term "spiritual" is clearly to be taken as analogous to the property of the Holy Spirit, since the very word indicates a mere participation by likeness in this property.

But if these titles of God in relation to us are not properties of the Persons, how is it that they are exclusively predicated and cannot be extended to the other Persons?

In answer we must take careful note that even in appropriation the Person who is the subject of the appropriation is considered in His hypostatic property, for the perfection predicated of Him is appropriated precisely because of its similitude to that property. The subject of such predications is therefore the Person considered separately and as distinguished from the other Persons by His hypostatic property. As Fr. Galtier rightly points out, when in Scripture Christ speaks of His Father and ours, when in tradition or in liturgical texts the Church addresses to the Father the sacrifice of His Son, it is the Father in person who is designated, that Person who is Father to Christ by hypostatic property and to us by appropriation. For appropriation, in its strict and formal sense, considers the Person in His property.⁴⁸ It is

⁴⁸ *In I Sent.*, d. 31, q. 1, a. 2, ad 3m: "Appropriatum potest sumi dupliciter: aut materialiter, id est id quod appropriatum est, et sic illud attributum non sequitur rationem

correct, then, to say that, in the predications we have been considering, the Person is the subject precisely in His hypostatic property and as distinguished from the other Persons. But this does not exclude appropriation in such cases, since appropriation also is based precisely upon the property of the Person in view of which a common attribute is referred to Him. In other words, not only predication by propriety but also appropriation formally taken is restricted to one Person.

It is in this light that we are to understand Fr. Galtier's statement that when the Father alone is designated as our father, this cannot be but by reason of His eternal and necessary paternity. It is not that being father to us is the very hypostatic property of the Father, or that His eternal and necessary paternity is really and simply the reason for His fatherhood towards us. The point is rather that, since appropriation is based on hypostatic properties, the appropriation to the Father of the divine paternity towards us must be based on His hypostatic property, that is, upon His eternal and necessary paternity, to which the temporal paternity bears a likeness which justifies the appropriation.

Yet at this point a further objection may be urged. Appropriation is the attribution to one Person of a perfection which is not the property of that Person. Now such a perfection, if not a property, should be predicable of the three Persons; thus, omnipotence, wisdom, goodness, and fatherhood may be predicated of the three Persons. Yet in our present matter such attributions as "brother" cannot be extended but are restricted to one Person exclusively. How then can they be called appropriations?

The general answer to this difficulty is that appropriation may be regarded formally or materially. It is taken materially when the common attribute—for instance, wisdom or fatherhood—is considered without reference to any hypostatic property of the Persons; the perfection is then simply common and may be extended. Appropriation is taken formally when the attribute is regarded precisely inasmuch as it bears a special likeness to the property of a Person. In this case it cannot be extended to the other Persons.⁴⁴ Thus, for instance, when

proprii; aut formaliter, id est in quantum appropriatum est, et sic in ratione sua propria, proprii rationem includit."

⁴⁴ Cf. note 43.

omnipotence is appropriated to the Father, this appropriation is based upon the property of the Father. Omnipotence, then, when predicated precisely because of its likeness to the Father's property, which is to be the unprincipiated principle, cannot likewise be appropriated to the Son or to the Holy Spirit. Their hypostatic properties will not permit the formal appropriation to them of omnipotence.

The fact, then, that some titles may not be extended to other Persons does not immediately argue that these titles are attributed by propriety, since neither may formal appropriations be extended to other Persons. It is clear, in addition, that some titles necessarily imply such formal appropriations. Thus, "brother" necessarily means "son of the same father," and therefore formally implies likeness in sonship, that is, the likeness of our adoptive sonship to the hypostatic property of the Son.

In regard to this particular title, "brother," further considerations are in place. Brotherhood is community in filiation. Christ, because of His two natures, has a twofold filiation.⁴⁵ Our brotherhood with Him is, therefore, either community in the same human nature—and then we are properly and univocally called His brothers, since we have a nature univocally the same—or community in the divine nature and with respect to the same Father. In the first case, when it is said that Christ as man is our brother, the implication is that the Son alone is incarnated. Thus there is implicit reference to the property of His Person, with which His human nature is hypostatically united. In the second case, that of a community of filiation with respect to the divine nature and to the same Father, "brother" is predicated analogically, because different filiations and different paternities are involved. We are analogously brothers of Christ, as the Father is analogously our Father.

But still we may ask: Why is this title or relation of fraternity exclusively attributed to the Son? Should we say with Fr. de Régnon that there is no appropriation in such a denomination? To determine whether or not appropriation is involved in the proposition: "We are

⁴⁵ Christ is really the Son of God the Father, and really the Son of Mary. By reason of the former filiation, He is a subsistent relation to the Father; by reason of the latter filiation, He has a relation of reason to Mary, although Mary has a real relation of maternity to Him.

brothers of Christ," the proposition must be converted into one which has for subject the divine Person: "The Son, and the Son alone, is our brother," that is, He alone is a son of the same father as we. What is the precise meaning of this latter statement? Are we simply affirming the hypostatic property of the Son? If so, we mean that the property of the Son is to be our brother. This, however, is impossible, since He is the eternal Son without necessarily being our brother. The title, "our brother," is, then, not predicated of the Son by propriety. On the other hand, any appropriation implicitly affirms the property on which it is founded. Appropriation is, then, when regarded formally, just as exclusive as predication by propriety. Nothing is appropriated in this strict sense unless the property of the Person is being considered. Thus, when Christ is said to be our brother or son of the same father, this proposition implicitly affirms that Christ is Son of the Father; it implicitly affirms His hypostatic property. The fact that Christ alone can be called our brother, does not, therefore, mean that fraternity with creatures is His hypostatic property; but the statement is nonetheless true even if it be an appropriation, for the appropriation must be founded on the Son's hypostatic property. The title "brother" cannot be predicated save of one who is a son: fraternity cannot be attributed to any divine Person save the second, the Son.

In summary, the attribute "brother," though not a property of the second Person, cannot be extended to the other Persons. The reason is that brotherhood necessarily involves sonship and necessarily constitutes an appropriation in the strict or formal sense, since it necessarily refers to the hypostatic property of the second Person. In parallel fashion, omnipotence, when understood as referring to the unprincipiated principle, can be predicated of the Father alone, since it necessarily refers to His hypostatic property. We are, then, both brothers of Christ and sons of Christ, but under different aspects: brothers, inasmuch as we are by grace sons of God the Father; sons, inasmuch as we are sons of the whole Trinity.⁴⁶

Foundation of Doctrine

The principle which gives full meaning to St. Thomas' doctrine on adoption and appropriation, is that adoption is always an effect in

⁴⁶ *In III Sent.*, d. 10, q. 2, a. 1, sol. 2, ad 2m.

the creature. For this reason, the operation which brings it about is common to the whole Trinity. This principle is central in the discussion of adoption in the third part of the *Summa*, and recurs in all other treatments of the subject.⁴⁷ In brief: God the Father is alone the Father of the only-begotten Son, because of the relations which distinguish these two Persons one from another within the identity of the common divine essence; God is father to creatures in a relationship wherein the creature is opposed to Him, and therefore to each divine Person, in a radical and absolute distinction of essence.⁴⁸

CONCLUSION

Our conclusion will be twofold and will regard, first, the limited problem of attribution of titles, with which we have dealt, and, secondly, the whole mystery of grace.

Attribution of Titles

The doctrine of St. Thomas on the point we have been discussing seems quite clear. The attributions to the divine Persons of the titles consequent upon our adoption by grace are not direct affirmations of hypostatic properties, but appropriations. Yet these appropriations have implicit reference to the properties of the Persons, and thus implicitly affirm distinct relations of similitude between the hypostatic properties and the perfections attributed. Correlatively, the propositions affirming titles of the Christian soul and involving corresponding titles of the divine Persons, are also appropriations. Finally, the relations of likeness to the hypostatic properties affirm a community and participation of creatures in these properties, and simultaneously maintain a radical personal distinction between the divine Persons and the creatures thus admitted into such a communion in sonship and in spirituality.

Yet St. Thomas in this solution to the problem of appropriation did not express the whole mystery of grace. The mystery of trinitarian life is ineffable. In trying to conceive it, the human word, necessarily multiple, cannot at once express all its richness, for the intellect is

⁴⁷ *Sum. theol.*, III, q. 23, a. 2. Cf., e.g., *Sum. theol.*, I, q. 33, a. 3; *In III Sent.*, d. 10, q. 2, a. 1, ad 1m.

⁴⁸ Cf. *De ver.*, q. 10, a. 13.

always limited by its own human way of thinking the divine reality. St. Thomas, who noted with precision the various elements of our thought, distinguished those which are due to the nature of the object and those which are due to the structure of the intellect. These latter include not only the modes of thought naturally common to all men, but also other modes that are due to convention and are consecrated by usage in society or, in the Church, canonized by divine authority. In thinking out a divine mystery, the human mind must, if it is to enter into intimate communion with the total truth, remain conscious of these various distinctions.

Elements in the Mystery of Grace

With these remarks for background, let us enumerate the basic factors to be considered in the mystery of grace.

1) In this mystery of grace, the basic fact, which any theory must respect, is the radical distinction between God and creature. Whatever may be the intimacy of our union with God, it never reaches identity of being. The creature always remains personally distinct from the Persons to whom he is united.

2) Since our intellects cannot express at once all aspects of the truth, some concepts will express primarily one side of the mystery, without however losing sight of the others. These latter are necessary for that total conception which alone is non-distorting. Thus, in the mystery at hand, some judgments will directly express the intimate union of the soul with the divine Persons, maintaining nonetheless the fundamental distinction between God and creature. Other judgments will express directly the distinction, while not denying the union.

3) The concepts expressing the mystery of grace in terms of adoption, paternity, filiation, and so forth, are but a part of the expression of this mystery to be found in Scripture and tradition. That the divine life in us should be expressed in different ways, is only to be expected when we see that the mystery of the divine life in itself is expressed either in terms of the relations of Father to Son and Holy Spirit, or in terms of the relations of Word and Wisdom to its principle, and of Love to the proceeding Word.

In the mystery of grace, it is necessary to consider, besides adoption, the relations between Christ and ourselves which are involved in

His Incarnation and in our incorporation into the Mystical Body, as well as our relations to the Word and to the Holy Spirit as the terms of our supernatural operations. St. John and St. Paul express the intimacy with God which we attain through grace, by saying either that the divine life is given to us, or that we are made members of the trinitarian society:⁴⁹ two conceptions of the same reality, which do not however admit of the same developments in our limited modes of thought.⁵⁰

4) Among the expressions designating the divine Persons, some, like "Father" or "Son," signify directly the Person;⁵¹ others, such as "Word" or "Love," signify directly an operation or the term of an operation. Now, in this mystery of grace, there exists between the creature and God a very intimate union of life and operation together with a radical distinction of persons. Thus it is that, when in order to describe the relations of the Persons to creatures, we use terms which immediately designate the Persons, the distinction of created and uncreated is always immediately connoted. The terms, therefore, are being used by appropriation. On the other hand, since the concepts "Word" and "Love" do not, to our way of thinking, signify persons, but rather operations or the terms of operations, they may more easily be employed to describe the penetration of the divine life in us. Thus S. I. Dockx, O.P., has shown how the Word and the Love which is the third Person become, by grace, our Word and our Love. This does not mean, of course, that our soul can be the principle of such a Word or such a Love; it means that the Father Himself is, within our soul, the principle of a new thought which is His very Word, which He Himself speaks or generates within us, and of a new love, which is the common Love of Father and Son spirated in us. For neither flesh and blood nor any created power can speak such a Word or spirate such a Love; the Father alone reveals the Word and, together with this Word, sends down His Spirit into our hearts.⁵²

⁴⁹ I John 1:3: "ut . . . societas nostra sit cum Patre et cum Filio ejus Jesu Christo"; Eph. 2:19: "estis cives sanctorum et domestici Dei."

⁵⁰ We have seen that St. Thomas notes, for example, how the Son is given to us to be our own, not, however, to be our Son, but to be our Savior and teacher (*In I Sent.*, d. 18, q. 1, a. 5, ad 4m).

⁵¹ *Sum. theol.*, III, q. 23, a. 4.

⁵² S. I. Dockx, O.P., *Fils de Dieu par grâce* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1948).

This description of what takes place within us by reason of grace fits perfectly with the description given by St. John and St. Paul. For, by faith we receive within us the Word of the Father (St. John), or the Wisdom of God, which is Christ (St. Paul). By charity we receive the Love of Father and Son, and are thus raised to the intimacy of the trinitarian life, being identified with the Persons, not personally but "according to operation," that is, in the term and object of our operations.

5) There are many and quite diverse developments of the theology of grace, all true but limited. Perhaps they may find a way out of their limitations and reach mutual completion, by further consideration of this aspect of the divine life in us—the identity of God and creature "according to operation."

Fr. de la Taille has given prominence to the theory that sanctification is an actuation of the soul by God. This is the only explanation which permits an intimate and personal communion of the soul with the divine Persons themselves, as has been pointed out by many theologians, especially Scheeben. Any union by way of efficient causality or similitude is, as such, extrinsic; it does not introduce the creature into the intimacy of the divine life, terminating as it does at the common essence, not at the Persons. But an actuation by the divine essence, by God as formally operating in His interior life, results in a personal union. The prime analogue of such a union is the Incarnation wherein the Word, in His hypostatic property, is united to created nature.

If, however, the explanation of our intimate union with the trinitarian life were to be developed in a conceptual framework of adoption and filiation, one would be defeated in advance. For these concepts denote directly the persons involved in the union, and since in the union by grace the personalities of God and man remain ever distinct, any perfect unity is from this viewpoint impossible of explanation.

But if development were sought in a conceptual framework of operations, one might well reach a satisfactory theory of perfect unity through actuation, which would simultaneously account for a most intimate personal communion. For, while the Son and Holy Spirit cannot so be given to us that we become, in our being, the Son and

Holy Spirit, or that they become our Son and our Spirit, yet the Word and the Love can be given to us so as to become our Word and our Love. In them we know and love God as He is in Himself, as He knows and loves Himself in Himself. Thus indirectly we reach union with the Persons.

It is here that St. Thomas' explanation of indwelling by way of operation is so rich and fruitful. But to take advantage of it, we must surmount a difficulty inherent in our modes of thought. For the concepts of Word and Love, of object of knowledge and love, do not connote to us the concept of person: neither then does the concept of Word and Love dwelling within the soul connote the concept of the real presence of persons within us. Only when reason illumined by faith has come to understand that in the fullness of Absolute Being the Word and the Love are Persons, do we realize how the presence within us of the Word of God and the Love of God is actually the presence of the Son and the Holy Spirit, together with the Father as principle of both. Our task lies in understanding the identity of Word and Son, of Holy Spirit and Love, and in seeing that the operations of intellection and love are intrinsic acts of a spiritual being.

This conception of the indwelling alone completes the intelligible picture of our intimate insertion into the divine society. It gives divine adoption and sonship their full meaning, by showing how intimately the divine life and therefore the divine nature are communicated to men. It does the same for the concept of grace. Habitual grace, or assimilation to God, explains one aspect of the mystery of our deification; but the full meaning of the latter is not grasped until one realizes how habitual grace results in communion with the divine essence through operation, thus developing in us the divine trinitarian life of thought and love. In similar fashion, finally, the full meaning of actuation by the divine Act in sanctifying grace is not grasped until it is understood as a union of operation.

These remarks are enough to indicate the depth and richness, the fidelity to Scripture, of the explanation which St. Thomas, following St. Augustine, has left us of the divine indwelling. It was this explanation that was adopted by Pope Pius XII in his *Mystici Corporis*: "*The Divine Persons are said to be indwelling in as much as They are present*

to intellectual creatures in a way that lies beyond human comprehension, and *are known and loved by them* in a purely supernatural manner alone within the deepest sanctuary of the soul."⁵³

Final Remarks

Some final remarks on appropriation are called for by the fact that many regard appropriation as limiting or at least as insufficiently expressing the mystery with which it deals. We must note once again by way of preface that appropriations are only one of the means whereby we attempt to understand and express the mystery. There are other judgments, other modes of thought, which are not appropriations but which nonetheless also express the mystery in their fashion. As we have already pointed out, we express the same reality when we say that by grace we are made sons of God and brothers of Christ, that the Father becomes our father by generating in us His Son, and when we say that by grace the three Persons come and dwell within us, or that the Father sends us His Son and both give us their Holy Spirit, or that by faith we receive the Word of God, revealed to us by the Father who is in heaven, and by charity the Holy Spirit. In the first group of expressions the mystery is expressed by a series of appropriations: for it is by appropriation that the Father is our father and generates us. But the second group is a series of predications by propriety: for it is the property of the Word to proceed from the Father, of the Holy Spirit to proceed from both; in missions these processions are extended to creatures. It is true, then, that many propositions are appropriations, not predications by propriety. But it is also true that we have other expressions of the mystery which explicitly state the hypostatic properties and the processions of the divine Persons.

What we wish to emphasize, however, is that appropriation, if correctly understood, expresses the same mystery of our intimacy with the divine Persons. This is clear from an enumeration of the elements that enter into an appropriation. (1) There is affirmed of a divine Person a relation to a creature, and vice versa: The Father is our father; we are sons of the Father. (2) We understand such propositions

⁵³ Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis* (AAS, XXXV [1943], 231-32; America Press translation, p. 35); italics added.

to mean that the creature is related to that one Person as distinguished from the others by His hypostatic property. For the hypostatic property of the Person is the foundation of the appropriation. (3) We also realize, however, that such propositions do not intend to affirm that the predicate (e.g., "to be father to creatures") is identically the property or personal relation of the divine Person. (4) Therefore, finally, we understand by these propositions that there is a God-creature relation involving an intimate union with the divine Persons, although this union is not simply the identification of the hypostatic property or eternal relation of the Person with His relation to the creature, nor a personal identification of the divine Person with the creature.

Such a conception of appropriation involves a relation of the creature to the very personalities of the divine Persons. Simultaneously it preserves the radical distinction between Creator and creature, divine Person and human person. This distinction, in terms of operation, implies the exercise of efficient causality; in terms of relation, it implies a relation of a cause to an effect distinct from the cause; and, in trinitarian theology, it implies necessarily that whereby God is distinct from creatures, namely, the Being common to the three Persons.

It is because that which distinguishes God from creatures—His aseity—is necessarily absolute and common to the three Persons, that any predication connoting this distinction always involves an appropriation. Herein lies the root of the doctrine on appropriation which we have been expounding. In other words, in this mystery of our union with the divine Persons, appropriation is the translation in the order of Persons of the law of trinitarian theology, that every exercise of efficient causality is common to the three Persons.

This fundamental law is the one which *Mystici Corporis* stresses as a basic norm in the explanation of the intimate supernatural union between creature and Creator: there must always be preserved the distinction in being and nature between creature and Creator. The union cannot be on the level of being and nature, because God is transcendent, *a se*. This distinction remains even in the Incarnation where in the hypostatic unity no confusion of natures can be allowed. It remains still more in the union of grace, for here there is the added distinction of divine and created personalities.

Since the union of grace is a union of Creator and creature, efficient causality is necessarily involved. In the natural order, the very existence of the creature implies efficient causality, since the creature is distinct from God, is not *a se* but *ab alio*. In the supernatural order, this is even more true: the deification of the creature can never be *a se*, never immanent, but must be *ab alio*, from the only one who is God *a se*; this means that the creature's deification is by efficient grace. Now since that by which God is *a se*—the divinity—is necessarily common to all the Persons, the necessary distinction between creature and Creator means a relation of the creature to that which is common to the three Persons. This is why the exercise of efficient causality towards creatures is necessarily common to the three Persons. This truth simply expresses, in terms of causality, the transcendence of God or the basic distinction of Creator and creature, which is the foundation of the supernatural order.

Appropriation, then, as applied to the different concepts which attempt to express our intimate union with the Persons of the Trinity, is the translation within this unity of the distinction between God and creatures, of the transcendence of God, without which the supernatural order as such has no reality. It is the application to the order of persons of the philosophy of participation by similitude in the order of being and perfection. Participation by similitude means a communion of the creature with God in being and perfection, within a radical distinction of subjects and existential acts. Appropriation, in adoption, affirms an intimate communion of creatures with the divine Persons, processions, and relations, within a distinction of personalities. Appropriation, then, far from limiting or betraying the richness of the mystery, alone preserves it.

But we must notice once again, in closing, that the picture of the divine indwelling given us by the appropriations, though a true one, is incomplete and must be filled out by the use of other approaches. If this is done, the mind, conscious of the limitations of its own modes of thought, yet ever keeping before itself the object of its contemplation, can always correct its own insights, and thus contemplate the divine truth in ever greater depth and clarity. For the counsel is given to us: "Seek His face always" (Ps. 104:4). And the understanding

soul answers with the Apostle: "If anyone thinks that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know" (I Cor. 8:2). "Let us therefore seek as men who shall find, and let us find as men who shall yet seek. For 'when a man hath done, then shall he begin!' (Eccli. 18:6)." ⁶⁴

⁶⁴ St. Augustine, *De trinitate*, IX, 1 (*PL*, XLII, 961).