**Trinity in Thomas Aquinas:**

**A Close Reading of *ST* QQ 27–43**

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**Course Description**

This course is a lecture-based, close reading of Thomas’s *Summa Theologica* qq 27–43 on the doctrine of the Trinity. Thomas designed the *Summa* as a student text for teachers to use to guide the course of theological instruction; in that spirit, the lectures will expound Thomas’s thought using the *ST* as a base and other works as supplementary, especially the *De potentia* and I *Sent*. The primary aim and focus will be to articulate the concerns and coherence of his thought on the Trinity especially in light of the wider field of his Aristotelian/Neoplatonic metaphysics but most critically in light of his theological commitments to orthodoxy as represented in the creedal tradition and expounded systematically in the spirit of the *fides quaerens intellectum*.

To further elucidate Thomas’s own position, we will compare and contrast with figures who formulate the more immediate backdrop to Thomas (e.g., Boethius, Peter Lombard, Albertus Magnus) as well as other near-contemporary high Medievals (e.g., Bonaventure, Scotus, Henry of Ghent). Furthermore, we will note the reception of Thomas’s thought by tracing its development or departures particularly in later significant Thomist commentators (e.g. Suarez, John of St. Thomas, etc.), up to and including the resurgence of Thomist studies in the twentieth century particularly in Germany and France. Inasmuch as Thomas stands in line with prior tradition, both West and East, remarks will be made as to his use of church fathers such as Augustine as well as his mediation of the tension after the Great Schism on issues such as the Filioque (the thought of Greek Fathers such as John of Damascus and Maximus and their similarities to Thomas’s account will be noted). Finally, while the course aims to expound Thomas’s own account, it aims toward a systematic understanding of the Trinity rather than a bare historical presentation; therefore, comments will be made when appropriate regarding contemporary (post-twentieth-century) work on Trinity in an effort to give the student the foundation for systematically articulating Trinity in light of positions that claim Thomas as a significant forebear (e.g., Rahner, Balthasar, Lonergan, etc.) as well as ones that diverge significantly from either Thomas and/or the orthodox position (Barth, Moltmann, Jungel, etc.).

**Student Requirements**

The course will be conducted in English and the only required readings will also be in English; however, most of the best secondary sources on Trinity are in Latin, French, German, and Italian, and reading recommendations will be given in all of these; it will be helpful but not necessary for the student to be familiar with at least some of these languages (esp. Latin). The target educational level is seminary-level and above (i.e., training that is at least equivalent to a seminary education, but a seminary degree is not required). It is preferable to have worked through the required readings prior to the course (esp. Emery), to gain a sense of the whole.

**Course Objectives**

* Students will be able to articulate not just the basics of Thomas’s account of Trinity but understand its underlying logic and core commitment to apprehend God as Father, Son, Spirit while preserving his transcendence as such. The student should be able to know the difference between an account of Trinity that allows us to know *that* God is Father, Son, Spirit without knowing *what* Father, Son, Spirit are, and an account that attempts to collapse the immanent Father, Son, Spirit into the defined concepts of the economic Trinity. Notably, the student should gather precisely how Thomas leaves space for gaining some real and true (as well as life-changing) understanding of who God is in himself as such even while refusing to know *what* Father, Son, Spirit are.
* Students will be able to understand the strengths and vulnerabilities of a “relations account” of Trinity and understand why this has generally been throughout church history the preferred account the orthodox have adopted, albeit several other broad schools of options have been held. The student will be supported in the attempt to mediate the issue of simultaneously preserving orthodoxy while maintaining a strong irenicism that recognizes the complexity of the historic tradition and what this entails for the contemporary church in all her forms of communion.
* Students will be able to articulate the place of Trinity within the entire sphere of theological loci. The student will be able to take advantage of the way Thomas structures the interplay of Trinity with other doctrines, especially how Trinity distributes in Christology and soteriology specifically without allowing Trinity to be swallowed up by either (as is the case in many significant Trinity accounts today).
* Students will be able to evaluate the input (pros and cons) of the philosophical tools yielded by Aristotelianism and Platonism (e.g., act/potency, participation metaphysics) as philosophy encounters a Trinity account. The student will be equipped to recognize how the changes in philosophical preferences throughout church history and especially in the contemporary context helps or hinders the faith with respect to Trinity, and especially how Thomas himself views philosophy’s relationship to theology and vice versa: *theologia non destruit sed supponit et perficit philosphiam*. Especially in the postmodern context with the return of participation metaphysics as a viable option for natural theology, the student will be able to have a healthy regard for the significance of contemporary work in philosophy for the contemporary church’s attempt to systematize its thought on Trinity while continuing to maintain philosophy as subordinate to the higher order of supernatural theology and special revelation.
* Students will be able to navigate contemporary accounts of Trinity as well as areas related to theology proper, especially in light of the resurgence of Trinity since the mid-twentieth century e.g. in the wake of Rahner’s Grundaxiom, the rise of social trinitarianism, as well as issues more localized to the Reformed (e.g., ESS, etc.). The student will be expected to humbly evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of accounts currently on offer and adjudicate them from the standpoint of orthodoxy while continually preserving the spirit of irenicism, especially as informed by the Reformed commitment to Holy Scripture and its intense articulation without perverted speculation.
* Students will be introduced especially to the pastoral/practical implications of Trinity and pushed to deploy the doctrine to promote “knowledge unto piety” both in themselves and in others within the universal church. The student will be expected to avoid falling into vain speculation even with the difficulty of navigating Thomas’s own account, and pushed to recall the fact that “the Trinity was revealed for our salvation,” as Thomas says, and not for satisfying our sinful intellectual appetites.

**Required Reading**

Thomas Aquinas, *ST* qq 27–43. (If Latin is known, please read the commentary Cajetan provides on these questions—available in the *Leonine* edition of Thomas, vol. 4 [I can provide this pdf].) Available here: <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~ST.I>; additionally: <https://isidore.co/aquinas/>.

Thomas Aquinas, *De potentia* qq 7–10. Available at links above.

Gilles Emery, *Trinitarian Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*. (If this work has been read and the student would like, this may be replaced with the more technical: Bernard Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics*.)

**Course Schedule**

Over 10 weeks, 1-hour lectures.

**Recommended Secondary Sources**

TBD.