McCabe on the Persons of the Trinity

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Abstract: Some analytical philosophers of religion characterize the persons of the Trinity using a notion of person borrowed from modern philosophy. It is the Cartesian one of the person as a center of consciousness. Herbert McCabe is a theologian who opposed this thesis because he asserts that God is not a person. Nor are the persons of the Trinity persons in that typically modern sense. This leads McCabe to prefer the Thomistic conception of the Trinity, and to propose a form of "mysterianism."

Keywords: Trinity, Person, Mysterianism, Thomas Aquinas, Herbert McCabe

> *What passes for thinking about God these days*
> *is of a crudity and naivety that would astonished Aquinas.*
> Herbert McCabe[1]

1. Introduction

It would be right to say that Herbert McCabe does not occupy, within what is sometimes called a "Trinitarian revival in Analytic Tradition", the kind of place granted, with good reason, to Richard Swinburne, Peter Van Inwagen, William Hasker, Dale Tuggy, Jeffrey Brower, Michael Rea, and some others.[2] One might even say that McCabe does not deserve *any* place within this context. One reason is that McCabe doubts the usefulness, with regard to the Trinity, of the notion of a *person*, at least as this notion is very often understood by analytic philosophers of religion. In their efforts to frame a rational reconstruction of the Trinity, these philosophers typically characterize a *person* as *an individual centre of consciousness and will.* McCabe argues that this notion of person is not apposite for a doctrine to the Trinity.

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[1] Herbert McCabe, "Eternity" (2016, 102).

[2] See William Hasker, *Metaphysics & the Tri-Personal God* (2013).

McCabe claims that, for Aquinas, "the key to the Trinity is not the notion of person but of relation, and in fact in my account of his teaching, I have not found it necessary, to use the word 'person' at all" (1999, 282).[3] This paper is intended to clarify this statement. If it is correct, the efforts of analytical philosophers in the field of the theology of the Trinity may be less successful, or at least less exceptional, than some of them apparently think. William Hasker speaks about this "Trinitarian Revival in Analytic tradition" as nothing less than a "'New' Fourth Century" (2013). He refers to the extraordinarily pervasive (even if quite polemical) intellectual effort during the Fourth Century that ultimately led to the setting of the doctrine of the Trinity at the Council of Nicaea, dismissing heresies. But are we really in a "'New' Fourth Century", thanks to analytic philosophers? Following McCabe, I suggest that the notion of a person commonly used today in analytic theology does not support such optimism.

But if Trinity is identical to "one God in three divine persons", is it not *nonsensical*, when it comes to the Trinity, to do *without* the notion of person, as proposed by McCabe in the just-quoted passage? Is it not like doubts about the concept of angle when one pretends to do geometry? There is an apparently analytic relationship between the two notions of the Trinity and the one of the *persons* of the Trinity.[4] The "three-in-oneness" problem seems to clearly be related to the notion of person! Does it make sense to want to do without it when it comes to the Trinity?

2. God Is not a Person

Augustine himself was also not completely convinced that speaking of "persons" is helpful for articulating a doctrine of the Trinity.

> For, in truth, as the Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Father, and that Holy Spirit who is also called the gift of God is neither the Father nor the Son, certainly they are three. And so it is said plurally, "I and my Father are one." For He has not said, "is one," as the Sabellians say; but, "are one." Yet, when the question is asked, What three? human language labors altogether under great poverty of speech. The answer, however, is given, three "persons", not that it might be [completely] spoken, but that it might not be left [wholly] unspoken. (Augustine, *On Trinity*, V, 10)

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[3] This article is also in *The McCabe Reader*, edited by B. Davies and P. Kucharski (2016).

[4] The title of my paper "McCabe on the Persons of the Trinity" adds another paradox (and perhaps nonsense), since McCabe intends to dispense with the concept of person to speak of the Trinity, and his intention concerning the Trinity is to do without persons!

Against the Sabellians (whom we today could call "Modalists"), it must be said that God is three in one. But talking about the Trinity in terms of "three persons" is, for Augustine, a last resort. In this expression "three" seems more important than "persons"; for the immediately pressing question is, "What three?". In trying to answer this question, "human language labors altogether under great poverty of speech", Augustine tells us; and to say that these three are three *persons* does not seem to be at all enlightening! We have words to designate the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, so that our answer need not "be left [wholly] unspoken". But as to the nature of what we call a "person" in such a case, Augustine's confidence seems very limited; and even he suggests the idea that the use of this term might deceive us.

According to McCabe, "if we say there are three persons in God, *in the ordinary sense* of person, we are tritheists" (1999, 282; my italics). But what is meant by "in the ordinary sense"? McCabe says we ordinarily use this term to mean "an individual subject, a distinct centre of consciousness" (1999, 282). In other words, we use this notion to characterize a certain way of describing ourselves as humans. We are supposed to be rightly described as mentally autonomous and reflexively self-conscious. We could even be said to be essentially self-conscious. We are taken to be persons, let us say, because we are minds or egos. We grossly accept a Cartesian description making us bodiless individuals that are centres of consciousness and will. It is very difficult for us to put aside this sense, which is overloaded by a certain philosophy of the mind disseminated in modern thought. The result is that some philosophers are tempted to think about the persons of the Trinity with the same mentalism and introspectionism they consider philosophically appropriate to adopt when generally thinking of themselves as persons.

McCabe rejects the thesis that "God is a person", understood as an individual having a pure, limitless and intentional mental life. That God is "personal" means rather that God is not a kind of impersonal reality, as a pantheist (or a panentheist), a Spinozist, or an absolute idealist might think. To say that God is personal means that He is not an immense and confusing reality, but one who speaks, and the one to whom we pray. He rewards, judges, has mercy. He has a Son who becomes flesh and gives his Spirit. But He is not thereby to be thought of as a very special sort of person: one without human limitations. It does not mean that both sorts of persons, divine and human ones, belong to a single, common kind. Is God really a being of a certain sort sharing personhood, in one and the same sense, with non-godly people, although lacking their limitations? Is that what we have to believe to be Christian? And is it even believable? How could God be understood in this way if He is the source of all that exists—the answer to the question of why there is something

rather than nothing? How could He be a person *in the ordinary sense*, even if we imagine Him to be immeasurably better than human persons?

As Brian Davies says:

> It is [. . .] often said that God is a person. What do people mean when they say this? It is dangerous to generalise, but many of them are clearly saying that God is something like an invisible human being, albeit one with more knowledge and power than most of us. Sometimes it is said that God thinks, has beliefs, and makes decisions. And it is often said that God is an agent who acts on things by existing alongside them, albeit invisibly, and changing them somehow. Sometimes it is suggested that much that happens in the world is something to which God stands as a kind of onlooker. (Davies 1996, 346)[5]

Now, if God is not a person in this sense, then the "persons" of the Trinity cannot be persons in this sense either. It is hardly tempting to think that the persons of the Trinity are, as persons, something that God is not. This is why McCabe rehearses the doctrine of the Trinity as understood by Aquinas without resorting to the notion of person, which, however, does not imply that we cannot speak of the "persons of the Trinity". What is necessary is that we discard a certain notion of person that is a theological obstacle, i.e. the "ordinary" notion of person as a *centre of consciousness*, the notion to which modern philosophy of mind has accustomed us and the content of the supposed ordinary sense of the term.

Peter Geach once protested against the refusal to give its most ordinary sense to the word "person" in "the persons of the Trinity."[6]

> The familiar concept of a person finds linguistic expression in the use of a noun for "person" but also in the use of the personal pronouns 'I, you, he". And so it is also when we speak of the Divine Persons . . . And in the Scriptures, "I" and "you" are used for the discourse of the Divine Persons . . . . (Geach 1977, 76)

But is this "familiar" concept that Geach talks about the one dismissed by McCabe? The familiar way of conceptualizing a being as a "person" is, for Geach, to understand it to be apposite to use personal pronouns in addressing or describing the being in question. It is *not* the modern (and dualist) idea that identifies the person with a mind separable from a body, or as emergent from material reality but irreducible to it. (A reading of Geach's *Mental Acts* really does not encourage one to think that these things are what he had in mind!) When a person talks to his beloved child or his beloved wife by saying "you",

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[5] See also Roger Pouivet (2018).

[6] Peter van Inwagen also says so, quoting Peter Geach, in "Yet There Are No Three Gods but One God" (1988).

and he or she responds by saying "I", is this really to be understood as an exchange between persons in the sense given to this term in a "personalistic" doctrine of the Trinity (the supposed "ordinary sense")? It is *that* sense, the personalistic one, that McCabe questions, in line with a Wittgensteinian critique of the Cartesian philosophy of mind that Geach shares. The personalistic sense of person is not implied in using "I" and "you", in our ordinary way. What McCabe rejects is thus a conception of the Trinity in which *Cartesian individuals*, or even any "individuals", on a mental model of the notion of "individual", would be bound by their logical inseparability.[7]

Perhaps it would be enlightening to understand what McCabe says in the following way (even if it is not his way): There is a strong difference between "person-of-the-Trinity", an unbreakable expression, and "person of the Trinity". The latter employs a general notion of person, and the belonging of three individual persons to a social group, the Trinity. But the first expression, unbreakable, does not imply that the persons of the Trinity are persons that belong to a social group. When we say that the Son is a person-of-the-Trinity, we do not claim that He is an individual person who then belongs to a group. Thus, the fact that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are persons-of-the-Trinity does not imply that God—or any of these—is a person.

3. Subsisting Relationships

The key to the Trinity is, however, not the notion of person, but that of a role.

> Aquinas could have made better use of the original sense of *prosopon* or *persona* as the player's mask or megaphone, and his doctrine of the Trinity might be more easily grasped if we spoke of three *roles* in the strict sense of three roles in a theatrical cast—though we have to forget that in the theatre there are people with the roles. We should have to think just of the roles as such and notice how they each have meaning only in relation to and distinction from each other. We could speak of the role of parenthood, the role of childhood and the role of love or delight. This is not to speak of the Trinity as a matter simply of three aspects of God, three ways in which God appears to us, as Sabellius is alleged to have taught, for essential to this whole teaching is that God turns only one aspect to us, "*opera ad extra sunt indivisa*"; it is in his immanent activity of self-understanding and self-love, delight, that the roles are generated. (1999, 282–283)

The roles are manifested in missions of the persons of the Trinity, apprehended in the biblical story itself: the saving obedience of Christ in his eternal sonship,

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[7] A doctrine that could be inspired by the Victorine view of three persons' cooperation in non-possessive love transmutes into the social life of three quasi-Cartesian Divine selves.

and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as the procession from the Father through the Son. These roles, as missions, are also present in the human time and in the history of Mankind: the Son became incarnate; the Holy Spirit manifested itself in history. Here, we are very far from the dualist philosophy of the mind that haunts the account of the Trinity that McCabe rejects, the one that haunts also a large part of the Trinitarian revival in analytic philosophy of religion.

There is no passive potentiality in God, no "accidents". As McCabe says, "with God everything he is just his being God" (1999, 273). Which, to say the least, makes the use of the notion of person in the "ordinary" sense quite inappropriate to speak of the "persons of the Trinity" (although, in fact, this post-Cartesian sense is rather *extraordinary*). However, this does not preclude saying something *relational* about God or using an appropriate notion of person, as Person-of-the-Trinity, to speak about God. And that is why the notion of *relation* is so essential in order to apprehend the nature of the divine persons. As Aquinas says:

> It is . . . manifest that a real relation in God is really identical to God's essence, and only differs in our way of thinking, in so far as the relation implies a reference to its opposed term, which is not implied by the term "essence". Therefore it is clear that in God there is no distinction of being-as-relation and essential-being: this is one and the same being. (*ST* I, 28, 2)[8]

God's knowledge of a person, as well as the fact that He has created that person, is a relational predicate true of God because of a reality in that person and not because of a change in God. In the same way, as McCabe remarks in "Aquinas on the Trinity", when he, McCabe, became an uncle, it was not because of a change in him, but because of the birth of his niece. And, in this sense, even if McCabe does not say it this way, it means that he acquired a new role, and even perhaps a new mission.

God knows everything by knowing himself. He, therefore, knows one thing not by having a concept distinct from something else than himself, but by knowing himself as the creator of everything. There are no different realities in God, since everything in God is just his being God. And what about God's understanding of himself? McCabe's answer, borrowed from Aquinas, is as follows: "What God understands is himself identical with himself but in understanding he conceives the concept, the *verbum mentis,* and this because eternally produced, brought forth by him is not him" (1999, 278). It is not a question here of drawing the Trinity from the intellectuality of God. And it has nothing to do with a notion of God as a person without limitation, particularly reflexive, but also a little bit narcissistic. The right distinction is between God's

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[8] See also *ST* I, 39, 1.

activity that passes outside of him, in creatures, mainly when they are created, and the immanent activity of his self-understanding, the internal life of God.

> In the former case there is no reality in God on which the relationship of being created or being understood is based; it is a reality in the creature and a merely verbal thing in God, a change in what is to be said of him. In the latter case, however, there is a reality, a concept, in God himself. A reality distinct from God in God. (1999, 278)

Gilles Emery, in an enlightening way, comments upon the notion of relation in God:

> In God, relation is not something which *inheres*: it *is* what God is. Its existence is that of the incomprehensible being which God is: from this angle, relation is identified with an 'absolute' in God . . . The connection between the existence and the *ratio* of the relation are thus different in God than in creatures. Whereas, in creatures, a real relation adds to the subject who has it, and is really different from this subject, in God the absolute and the relation "are one and the same reality" (*ST,* I, 28, 2, ad. 2). (2007, 94; 95)

If God forms a concept of himself, it is not an accident in him or based on an accident in Him. It is in God a reality distinct from God. The relationship of God to his creature is real, in a way, but only on one side, that of the creature, since nothing is really changed in God by the creation and the reality of the creature. On the other hand, in God, the relation of God with himself is real in God. The Divine mind and the *verbum* it produces are distinct as the ends of a relationship. The Father *generates* the Son, the Son is generated by the Father; but they share all they are. The only thing that distinguishes them is that they are at the opposite ends of their relationship. *So the Father is a relation, and the Son is also a relation.* It means, according to McCabe, that,

> [. . .] nothing supervenes on God. In him there are no accidents. Whatever really is in God is the essence of God. So the Father does not have a relationship of Fatherhood to the Son; he is that relationship subsisting as God. And the Son is the relation of being generated by the Father subsisting as God. (1999, 279)

As the activity of knowing (or understanding) involves a *processio,* so does that of the will. What proceeds in the second case is the love of this object of rational desire. We may suppose that God is inclined to self-knowledge and that he loves this operation of self-knowledge and its end. God and his Verb stand to each other in a real relationship; this is the relation of paternity or filiation. God, his Verb and his Love also stand to each other in a real relationship; this is a

relation of breathing, a procession of the Spirit as the love that arises in God; and this relation is not less real on the opposite ends than the one of filiation, and it proceeds both from the Father and the Son.

> We see then that the only distinction in God is that of being at opposite ends of a relationship due to an act or "process" within the Godhead . . . God turns to creatures, as his creatures, the single unified face of the one God, the unchanging, the eternal, the single source of all that is. It is only with God's own interior life, his own self- understanding, that there is a basis for distinction. (1999, 280)

Sure, we are talking about the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as Divine persons; of course, the notion of person appears in Christian liturgy. But, Divine persons are what Aquinas presents as "roles", if we speak metaphorically, and "subsisting relationships", if we speak in a metaphysically technical way. It means that the fatherhood in God is God the Father. The "ordinary" notion of person does not help. It is an obstacle when it comes to talking about the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as "subsisting relationships", because the notion of "person" as a "centre of consciousness" is too far from the notion of relationship. The notion of "surviving relationships" is certainly not ordinary; and it does not really correspond to the supposed "normal use" we make of the term "person".

Geach claims that the "normal use" of the term "person", by which, as I have already said, Geach is unlikely to mean a dualist or emergentist notion, and the technical theological use are not equivocal. In that respect, he is right. And since they are not univocal either, one may think they are rather analogical. The two uses then have certain things in common and not others. Two aspects allow the analogy: self-knowledge and will are attributed to the beings addressed by "I" and "you"; and we attribute these also (analogically) to God. So, it makes sense to say that the Divine persons know and will because God knows and wills. Does it make sense to say that the Divine persons know and will because they are persons, in the sense of "centres of consciousness"? No. We are not at all tempted to think that a person, in the so-called "normal use" of that term, is the relationship in which it stands, as Divine persons or roles are.

Many unbelievers could even consider that one cannot believe in Trinity *because* a "subsisting relation", as they claim, does not make sense; but not because the notion of person does not make sense. However, it is unconvincing to overstate the analogy between Divine persons and a person in an "ordinary" sense—the sense of a "centre of consciousness"—inherited from modern philosophers. On the contrary, there is reason to be wary of accepting such an analogy between the notion of person, in this so-called "ordinary sense", and the persons of the Trinity.

> Now the consciousness of the Son is the consciousness of the Father and of the Holy Spirit, it is simply God's consciousness. There are not three knowledges or three lovings in God. The Word simply is the way in which God is self-conscious, knows what he is, as the Spirit simply is the delight God takes in what he is when he is knowing it. (1999, 282)

McCabe uses the term "consciousness" here. But, clearly, what he means has little to do with what is meant, ordinary or normally, by "consciousness". The important thing is that if God is understood in terms of consciousness, He is one consciousness and not three centres of consciousness. And, clearly, what is proposed with this idea of persons of the Trinity by some analytic theologians and philosophers, I mean persons as "centres of consciousness", is incompatible with divine simplicity.

The analogy between intellectual human life and God's life supposes that all intellectual thought involves the production of a kind of likeness of the thing thought of, distinct both from it and from the thinker. This theory is essential in a Thomistic theory of knowledge. The begetting of the Son is thought by analogy with this operation of the mind. But of course, there remains a radical difference—exactly the one included in the notion of "subsisting relationship". What Aquinas said about the Spirit is suggested by the theory that wanting or appetition involves the arising of some kind of love distinct both from the wanter and from the object of appetition.[9]

This is why, according to McCabe, the notion of "person" is not indispensable to the doctrine of the Trinity—certainly not if this notion means "a centre of consciousness", but even if we depart from that notion. Aquinas quotes the definition of the person by Boethius: "an individual substance of rational nature." But, the "persons" of the Trinity are not individuals if they are relations. Is there any reason to be tempted by a social theory of the Trinity, on the model of Swinburne?[10] Not really. For, according to McCabe, "even if we criticise this individualism, even if we try to put the human being back into a social context as a part of various communities, the notion of person does not become relational enough to use it in an account of the Trinity" (1999, 282). The social theory of the Trinity describes a relationship between individuals, and does not envision the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as relations in God.

4. McCabe's Mysterianism

"Need I say", McCabe adds, "that the notion of a subsisting relation is

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[9] See William Charlton (1999, 494).

[10] For a presentation of this account, see Richard Swinburne, "The Social Theory of the Trinity" (2018).

mysterious to us, we do not know what it would mean or what it would be like, but (to repeat) we do not know what subsisting wisdom would mean or what God would mean or what God would be like" (1999, 279–80). Is adopting the notion of the "subsisting relation", even if it is incomprehensible, not to support *mysterianism*? Yes, it is. But, which mysterianism? It is certainly not a mysterianism in which one would be satisfied with an absurd notion of Trinity and would believe it all the more *because* it is absurd. (This is sort of anti-rational scarecrow that is sometimes confused with apophatism.) There is also a mysterianism, recently defended by John Anderson: the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation are *paradoxical*—that is, they appear to involve implicit contradictions, saying both that God is one and three. Yet Christians can still be rational in affirming and believing those doctrines, Anderson pretends.[11] McCabe's mysterianism, the one he attributes to Aquinas himself, is quite different both from the cult of the absurd or the mysterianism which tries to show that the paradox is only apparent. McCabe says that "Aquinas thinks we can prove the existence of God by natural reason whereas unaided natural reason could tell us nothing of the Trinity" (1999, 268). According to McCabe:

> Thomas Aquinas thought that theologians don't know what they are talking about. They try to talk about God, but Aquinas was most insistent that they do not, and cannot know what God is. He was, I suppose, the most agnostic [*sic*] theologian in the Western Christian tradition—not agnostic in the sense of doubting whether God exists, but agnostic in the sense of being quite clear and certain that God is a mystery beyond any understanding we can now have. (2007, 96)

An epistemology of God as Trinity will thus be an effort to understand the Trinity *as a mystery*.

However, does it make sense to *understand* something *as a mystery*? Hasker says that "appeals to mystery are all very well, but eventually the doubt is likely to surface whether such appeals may be a smokescreen to cover up an ultimate incoherence" (2013, 76). I fear, however, that this statement bears witness to a frequent misunderstanding of what "mystery" means in "the Mystery of the Trinity". This mystery obviously *hides* nothing, since it is even a revelation, a disclosure. Mystery makes things coherent rather than hiding something fishy. The Mystery of Incarnation or the Mystery of the Trinity, or even the Mystery of Faith, do not make our thought more obscure but on the contrary make it clearer. "Let us proclaim the Mystery of Faith", said at the beginning of the memorial acclamation in the Eucharistic prayer by the

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[11] See James Anderson, *Paradox in Christian Theology* (2007). It's not clear to me how Anderson can say that!

celebrant, does not mean: "Let's say something so obscure that it borders on nothing and in any case something that is apparently incoherent!" The Mystery of the Trinity, of an incomprehensible God as a relation, permits us to give sense to a large part of the New Testament and, for Christians, of the Old Testament. *Christian Mysteries, joyful, luminous, sorrowful and glorious, enlighten us.* (What a Catholic knows when reciting the Rosary.) Part of this enlightenment consists of removing obstacles to the Christian life. I allow myself to sketch a comparison. It happened once, a long time ago, that I took out a flashlight in front of one of my sons to light the bottom of a cellar. He asked: "In the light, where does the light come from?" He found the phenomenon very mysterious. I stammered an explanation about the batteries in the flashlight case. But in fact the mystery remained complete. And then suddenly, he said: "But we can see better with this light!" A mystery illuminates in cellars and in Christian life.

The Mystery of the Trinity, especially, throws light on prayer, for example.[12] In his paper, "Prayer", McCabe says:

> The prayer of Jesus which is his crucifixion, his absolute renunciation of himself in love to the Father, is the eternal relationship of Father and Son made available as part of our history, part of the web of mankind of which we are fragments, a part of the web that gives it a new centre, a new pattern. (2016, 152)

This means that the persons of the Trinity have more to do with prayer than with centres of consciousness. McCabe says that "[A]ll our prayer . . . is a sharing into the sacrifice of Christ and therefore a sharing into the life of the Trinity, a sharing that is the Spirit" (2016, 152). Prayer is the expression of our Trinitarian life—identification with Christ and indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Understood this way, prayer is also what we call faith in the Mystery of the Trinity.

What McCabe means by "mystery" is thus not related to confusion or obscurity of mind; it is not related to a contradiction or apparent contradiction. The fact that there is a Mystery of Faith is not a failure to give a logically consistent formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity, as if without it we would have to accept obscurity or contradiction. The Mystery of God and the Mystery of the Trinity are related to our use of the word "God" and the word "Trinity". "We have the word 'God' because *the existence of things* instead of *there not being anything* is mysterious to us (and, Aquinas argues in the five ways, ought to be mysterious to us)" (1999, 269–70). Concerning the Mystery of the Trinity, McCabe says:

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[12] See Herbert McCabe, "The Trinity and Prayer" (2002, 55).

> To say that there is Father, Son and Holy Spirit who are God is for [Aquinas] no more mysterious than to say there is God at all. In neither case do we know what we are saying, but in neither case are we talking nonsense by contradicting ourselves. (1999, 270)

The semantic question of what "God" means, or what is meant when we say that there is one God in three persons, is in this sense deeper than that of a possible contradiction between propositions in which we purport to make evident that the doctrine of the Trinity is paradoxical. The reason is that we must already know what we are saying in speaking of Trinity when it comes to formulating the contradiction inherent in the doctrine of the Trinity. That is why to speak of the Mystery of the Trinity is not to struggle with a paradox that could be formulated. It is rather; as Karen Kilby says, that "one should renounce the very idea that the point of the doctrine [of the Trinity] is to give insight into God" (2000, 443). To speak of the Trinity is not to describe the divine and is not to give a picture of the relations between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

5. Conclusion

This is perhaps what can lead to limiting enthusiasm for Trinitarian revivalism in the analytic tradition. If this revivalism consists in pretending to describe the Trinity by saying that it consists of three persons understood as three centres of consciousness, who nevertheless do not make up more than only one God, it is not certain that this should lead us to speak about this Trinitarian revival as a "'New' Fourth Century", as Hasker proposes.

   I conclude with Aquinas and McCabe. Aquinas says:

> The "divine Person" means relation as something subsisting (*relatio ut subsistens*). Otherwise put, it means the relation by way of that substance which is the subsistent hypostasis in the divine nature (*relatio per modum substantiae quae est hypostasis subsistens in natura divina*); though that which subsists in the divine nature is nothing other than the divine nature. (*ST* I, 29, 4)

This acceptation of the relational notion of person constitutes the luminosity of the Mystery of the Trinity. It means that the relation distinguishes and constitutes the person, even though the relation is the person himself.[13] This is the fundamental reason why it is better to abandon the idea that the notion of

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[13] According to Emery (2007, 125), such is Cajetan's account of the doctrine of the Persons of the Trinity. Historically, it was Duns Scot who was the first to conceive the constitution of the divine person not by a relationship, but by an absolute reality (2007, 124, note 109).

person in "person of the Trinity" would be "ordinary" and would amount to the one we use in speaking of ourselves as "centres of consciousness", for those at least who think themselves that way! That, I believe, is Father McCabe's lesson about the Trinity.

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