

# Personhood and the Medieval Imagination

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At no time in Church history has the term «person» been so well developed theologically as in the Middle Ages. Can or should the Christian genius of the Middle Ages inform and perhaps even correct our own age? Fresh under the impressions of the Second Vatican Council and especially of *Gaudium et Spes* 22 and 24, Joseph Ratzinger will state in 1966 – not in contradiction, but in contrast to an observation made by Karl Rahner almost ten years earlier: «The concept of person, as well as the idea that stands behind this concept, is a product of Christian theology»<sup>1</sup>. The theologian Karl Rahner (1904-1984) – echoing Augustine's and Anselm of Canterbury's reservations – had problematized the term «person», though doctrinally well-established in doctrinal and papal teaching<sup>2</sup>, as ill-suited for the Blessed Trinity, and posited it should be replaced by the phrase «distinkte Subsistenzweise» – distinct

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<sup>1</sup> J. RATZINGER, *Retrieving the Tradition. Concerning the notion of person in theology*, in *Communio* 17 (1990) 439-454, at 439. Originally a lecture delivered 1966 at a congress: J. RATZINGER, *Zum Personverständnis in der Theologie*, in J. SPECK (ed.), *Das Personverständnis in der Pädagogik und ihren Nachbarwissenschaften*, Münster 1966, 157-171.

<sup>2</sup> DAMASUS I, *Fragments of Letters to the Eastern Bishops*, 384 AD, DH 144. LEO I, *Quam laudabiliter*, 447 AD, DH 284. *Ibid.*, *Tomus Leonis*, 449 AD, DH 295. *Council of Chalcedon*, 451 AD, DH 302. TERTULLIAN, *Adversus Praxeum* 6, 1; 8; 18, 2 is the first instance the term person is used in Christian literature: *una substantia – tres personae*. Cfr. *Tertulliani Adversus Praxeum liber*, ed. and trans. by E. Evans, London 1948. C. ANDERSEN, *Zur Entstehung und Geschichte des trinitarischen Personbegriffs*, in *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirchen* 52 (1961) 1-38. A. GRILLMEIER, *Die theologische und sprachliche Vorbereitung des Konzils von Chalkedon*, in *Id.* (ed.), *Das Konzil von Chalkedon*, Würzburg 1979, 102-117. DH refers to H. DENZINGER – P. HÜNERMANN, *Enchiridion Symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, San Francisco 2012.

manner of subsistence<sup>3</sup>. Overwhelmingly since, theologians have not accepted Rahner's suggestion<sup>4</sup>. It does, however, invite the opposite question: can the human being be person if God is not a personal reality? This is a provocative question. Is it not a most thrilling notion to perceive personhood as the common feature both infinity and finite human beings share? Does not such a realization turn everything into bliss?

## 1. Introduction: The Homunculus – a Utopia?

Is indeed human personhood in jeopardy in our age and time? It is suggested we live in a society offering a perplexing multitude of options. The human being is now celebrated as one capable of even frequent reinventions of the self. There is no gainsaying, three factors are dominant: technology, economics and ideology, and they equally endanger the human person. In what ways does this occur? 1. Constantly infatuated by technology, we become oblivious to natural revelation. The transcendentals of beauty, goodness and truth are no longer immediately present. 2. Economic exigencies are omnipresent. From preschool through college everything must be optimized to secure grants and scholarships and the attendant need for gainful employment to offset the prohibitive costs of education. Education is the high road to participation in, alas, increasingly impersonal economic processes. The outcome is a high performing, well-schooled person, alas with little formation by the humanities, as these have become financially less lucrative. 3. Ideology sees ultimately all human interactions as power struggle and under the merciless «transactional» command of the dehumanizing *do ut des* – as supposedly only this guarantees equality – this beguiling illusion of the French Revolution: *égalité*. Such thoroughly reified reality defines postmodernity. It leaves little space to encounter a human being as purpose unto him- or herself – Kant's *Zweck an sich selbst*<sup>5</sup>. Self-less sacrifice is folly. The «amateur» parents are replaced by narrowly trained educators from pre-school to college. The workplace and the almost faceless crowd of «befriended» individuals intrude upon family life by the total availability of everyone for almost anyone via the electronic media. Family as hearth, as the protected haven where everyone is living in mutual, unconditional trust and uncalculating solidarity for one another,

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<sup>3</sup> K. RAHNER, *Der dreifaltige Gott als transzendornter Urgrund der Heilsgeschichte*, in *Mysterium Salutis*, vol. 2, Einsiedeln 1967, 317-397. This thesis is criticized by F.-X. BANTLE, *Person und Personbegriff in der Trinitätslehre K. Rahners*, in *Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift* 43 (1979) 11-24.

<sup>4</sup> The subsequent discussions were well summarized in B. J. HILBERATH, *Personbegriff der Trinitätstheologie in Rückfrage von K. Rahner zu Tertullians «Adversus Praxeans»* (Innsbrucker Theologische Studien, 17), Innsbruck 1986, esp. 16-66, 295-327.

<sup>5</sup> I. KANT, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Cambridge (IN) 1993, B 67; BA 76f; BA 83.

mutates to a place to either rest breathlessly just to thrust oneself reenergized again into the economic process or to organize reciprocally beneficial pastimes. To the 21<sup>st</sup> century, idyllic Victorian domesticity seems surreally distant. Educational institutions and economic entities appear as the all-dominant realties that form and deform the human being; people no longer transcend toward a common good, captured in social or political categories. The attendant consequences are: 1. the human person is dispossessed of his childhood, 2. the bliss of a hearth as *the* formative locus of a person is replaced by constantly rotating, paid individuals, 3. liturgy is no longer experienced as the high point and fulfillment of the human person's *telos*, 4. the ultimately undefinable magic of the world is replaced at best by pragmatically defined goals, at worst by cynicism, and 5. the growing inability to develop a sense of mutual trust and bonding is conducive to the individual adapting to flexible work hours and shifting work places – all for the greater glory of the corporate world. Ergo, nothing short of a brutal desolidarization and depersonalizing collectivization of all aspects of life seem the inevitable outcome. Some speak of an epochal process where the human being can only justify his existence exclusively either as a performer or as a consumer – *tertium non datur*: his signal personhood falls on the wayside – unnoticed and unmourned.

Frighteningly, an efficient variant to Cicero's *homunculus*<sup>6</sup>, void of individuating features, personal will or vision for the self, laboring exclusively for the sake of a society's or an ideology's ends and a company's profit margin is no more utopian. Matrimony and family life are subservient to the dictates of abstract ideologies, self-serving apparatuses, the ever-expanding, supposedly benevolent welfare state and company interests dictate. All these inexorable phenomena seem to suggest a historically unprecedented event: the human being experiences being a person as burdensome, if not increasingly impossible and – dare one say – even undesirable? Are the *Bills of Rights* (England: 1689 and USA: 1791), the *French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*, (1789) and the United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* of 1948 passé?

Thus, the opening question to this paper: does the Medieval understanding of person or personhood have something to offer postmodernity?

## 2. The Early Middle Ages

The Medieval mind developed a deeper appreciation of human personhood than antiquity by negotiating two Greek terms: *πρόσωπον* (*prosopon*) (role, mask, function or rank) and *'ύπόστασις* (*hypostasis*) (the concrete reality of an individual being) and

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. CICERO, *Tusculum Disputations*, 1, 17: «homunculus, unus et multis conjectura sequens». See CICERO, *Tusculum Disputations*, in *Loeb Classics*, vol. 141, Cambridge 1927<sup>2</sup>.

confronting these with the Latin terms *persona* and *substantia*<sup>7</sup>. Controversies and developments during the Patristic era in the areas of Christology and trinitarian theology had decidedly promoted this development<sup>8</sup>. Divine being had been prayerfully acknowledged and solemnly dogmatized as consisting of three persons, while celebrating and defining Jesus Christ as one person with two natures – divine and human.

By the time the Middle Ages arrive, the term *persona* connotes both a significant human individual as well as a public dignitary or functionary<sup>9</sup>. The concept of a temporarily assumed «role» in a theatre play is lost (with exceptions), as the latter is – since the Arab conquest of Gibraltar by Tariq in 711 – gradually replaced by the Arab term «mask» (Arab *maskharah*). Thus, Wipo († after 1046), his biographer, praises Emperor Conrad II as *gloriosus in persona*<sup>10</sup>.

The biblical understanding, as transmitted by the Latin Vulgate, seems dominant and key to understanding the development of this term during the Middle Ages: *deus personam hominis non accipit* («God shows no partiality [to the human person]», Gal 2,6)<sup>11</sup>. God prefers no one on account of his social standing: *non est acceptor*

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<sup>7</sup> In general for this topic cfr. J. MARITAIN, *Person and the Common Good*, trans. J. J. Fitzgerald, Notre Dame (IN) 1966. J. HEINRICH, *Person*, in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, Studienausgabe Teil II, vol. 26, New York-Berlin 1996, 220-231. G. MENSCHING, *Selbstwusstsein und Person im Mittelalter*, Würzburg 2005.

<sup>8</sup> J. TIXERONT, *Des Concepts de 'Nature' et de 'Personne' dans les Pères et Écrivains ecclésiastiques des Ve et VI<sup>e</sup> siècles*, in *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 8 (1903) 582-592. A. GRILLMEIER, *Person II*, in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 8, Freiburg i. Br. 1963, 290-292. B. STUDER, *Der Personenbegriff in der frühen kirchenamtlichen Trinitätslehre*, in *Theologie und Philosophie* 57 (1982) 161-177. G. GLOEGE, *Person and Personalismus*, in *Evangelisches Kirchenlexikon*, vol. III, Göttingen 1997, 128-134. J. RATZINGER, *Concerning the notion of person in theology*, in *Communio* 17 (Fall 1990) 439-454. J. ZIZIOLAS, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, Crestwood 1985.

<sup>9</sup> For this age in general see: M. BERGERON, *La structure du Concept latin de Personne*, in *Etudes d'histoire littéraire et doctrine du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris-Ottawa 1932, 121-161. H. RHEINFELDER, *Das Wort Persona. Geschichte seiner Bedeutungen mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des französischen und italienischen Mittelalters* (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie, 77), Halle an der Saale 1928. C. J. DE VOGEL, *The Concept of Personality in Greek and Christian Thought*, in *Studien zur Problemgeschichte der antiken und mittelalterlichen Philosophie* 2 (1962) 20-60. J. F. NIERMEYER, *Mediae Latinitas Lexicon Minus*, Leiden 1976, 790b-792a. A. BORST, *Findung und Spaltung der öffentlichen Persönlichkeit* (6.-13. Jh.), in O. MARQUARD – K. STIERE (eds.), *Identität*, München 1979, 620-641. N. HARTMANN, *Person in Einsamkeit und Gemeinsamkeit*, in *Wissenschaft und Weisheit* 47 (1984) 37-60. T. KOBUSCH, *Die Entdeckung der Person: Metaphysik der Freiheit und Modernes Menschenbild*, Freiburg i. Br. 1993. M. BURGER – M. LUTZ-BACHMANN, *Person*, in *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, vol. VI, *Lukasbilder bis Plautagenet*, eds. R. Auty – R.-H. Bautier, München-Zürich 1999, 1900-1903. S. A. HIPP, *Existential Relation as Principle of Individuation*, in *The Thomist* 72 (2008) 67-106. R. CROSS, *Disability, Impairment, and some Medieval Accounts of the Incarnation: Suggestions for a Theology of Personhood*, in *Modern Theology* 24/4 (2011) 639-658.

<sup>10</sup> WIPO, *Gesta Chuondradi II. Imperatoris*, c. 40, in R. C. BENSON (ed.), *Imperial Lives and Letters of the eleventh Century*, trans. T. F. Mommsen – K. F. Morrison, introduction K. F. Morrison, New York 2000, 52ff.

<sup>11</sup> The *Catholic Revised Standard Version*, second edition is used consistently.

*personarum apud deum* («For God shows no partiality [to persons]», Rom 2,11). Significantly, in both cases the Latin Vulgate had added *persona*. In addition, the Chalcedonian formula of 451 echoes through the centuries: «(We confess) one and the same Lord Jesus Christ ... in two natures, without confusion or change, without division or separation ... one Person and one hypostasis»<sup>12</sup>.

«The Apostle of Germany», Boniface (ca. 675-754) mentions a *laicus magnae personae*, «a layman of great personage»<sup>13</sup>. Accordingly, the French theologian-poet Alanus ab Insulis (of Lille, ca. 1128-1202/3) describes the term in juridical categories: *persona dicitur aliquis aliqua dignitate praeditus* (person means someone occupying an exalted rank)<sup>14</sup>. These examples document how synonymous the individual as person and his office still were in the Carolingian era. In fact, since Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604) one encounters the phrase *persona publica*<sup>15</sup>. The regal dignitary was a *persona ministerium* (a person of significant office or duty)<sup>16</sup>. Beginning in the 11<sup>th</sup> century the close link between person and office was somewhat loosened. Still, the word *persona* signifies alternatingly either the dignitary himself or the dignity he is vested with. Expressly a Norman Anonymus distinguishes around 1100 between the natural individual and the dignity conferred upon him by sacramental anointment/unction<sup>17</sup>. This ambivalence will continue to characterize administrative parlance on the parochial level throughout the Middle Ages, where it may either mean the prelate as the owner of titles to benefices, or the actual position that results in ownership of feudal holdings.

Not surprisingly, the accomplished Latinist John of Salisbury (ca. 1115-80) discusses extensively the *reverentia* of a *persona*: his origin, performance of his duties, ethical composure, etc. Nevertheless, John still carries over the ancient meaning of «*persona*» as mask. On one occasion he employs the term to describe the pretense of sacrifice, but actually hypocritical doings by a human being on the grand stage of society<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> DH 302.

<sup>13</sup> *Bonifatii et Lullii Epistolae*, ed. M. Tangl, *MG Ep. sel.* 1, 1916, (reprint München 1978) 83, 31.

<sup>14</sup> ALANUS AB INSULIS, *Distinctiones Dictionum Theologicalium*, in *Patrologia Latina* (PL) 210, 899A.

<sup>15</sup> GREGORIUS I, *Registrum Epistolarum* 4, 9, ed. D. Norberg, Turnhout 1982, 241, 7.

<sup>16</sup> Thus the abbot of St. Mihiel († after 825). SMARAGDUS OF ST. MIHIEL, *Via regia* 18, PL 102, 958B.

<sup>17</sup> ANONYMUS NORMANNUS, *Tractatus* J 24, in *Die Texte des Normannischen Anonymus*, ed. by K. Pellens, Wiesbaden 1966, 129f.

<sup>18</sup> JOANNES SARSBERIENSIS, *Policraticus, sive de Nugis curialium et vestigiis philosophorum* 5, 4, ed. C. C. I. Webb, Oxford 1909, 289ff. Cfr. also *Policraticus*, 3, 4, 178f., 3, 8, 190f.

## 3. High Middle Ages

### 3.1. Remigius of Auxerre, Abelard, Richard of St. Victor, Alexander of Hales, Gilbert of Poitiers

The term «person» is now discussed primarily theologically: in the contexts of Trinitarian Theology, Christology and Angelology. So to speak as an afterthought, benefitting from a theologically sharper appreciation of the term, the human person *qua homo*, irrespective of his titles, accomplishments or offices gradually comes into focus. The monk Remigius of Auxerre (ca. 841-ca. 908) derives the term etymologically *persona dicitur eo quod per se sonat*<sup>19</sup> («one calls person every human being for something sounds or resonates through him»). Consequently, Bonaventure and others see in the «person» sovereign self-actuation manifested<sup>20</sup>. From early Christianity onward, in theological discussions this term is preferred, as it is able to maintain the unity of Jesus Christ as an eternal being, despite his incarnation in the temporal order. Abelard (1079-1142/3) designates Christ's person as *Persona quippe quasi per se una dicitur*<sup>21</sup>, – as an independent being standing on his own. Alanus ab Insulis<sup>22</sup> and Simon of Tournai (ca. 1130-1201) apprehend in *per se una* both the unity of an individual and his individuating differences well captured in the Latin term *persona: unde hoc nomen persona duo importat, et significationem unitatis et consignificationem personalis distinctionis quam designat iunctura verborum per se unum* («where it introduces the term person it conveys two things, unity and distinct personality as it designates a combination of words as one»)<sup>23</sup>.

The background to all Medieval discussions on person is Boethius' (ca. 480-ca. 524) considerably earlier, but classic determination – dating from around 500 AD: *persona est rationalis naturae individua substantia* («the individual substance of a rational nature»)<sup>24</sup>. While underappreciated in his own day, he wielded considerable influence from the Carolingian Age onward. Upon this succinct, but still rather imprecise circumscription, the Victorine theologian Richard of St. Victor († 1173) sup-

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<sup>19</sup> REMIGIUS OF AUXERRE, *In artem Donati minorum commentum*, ed. W. Fox, Leipzig 1902, 33.

<sup>20</sup> BONAVENTURA, 2 *Sententiarum* 3, p. I, 2, q. 2, in *Opera omnia*, t. 2, Ad Claras Aquas 1885, 106. Cfr. *Works of St. Bonaventure*, vol. XVI, St. Bonaventure (NY) 1979, 73ff.

<sup>21</sup> PETRUS AB AELARDUS, *In symbolo Athanasii*, I, ed. V. Cousin, Hildesheim 1970, 610.

<sup>22</sup> ALANUS AB INSULIS, *Regulae theologiae* XXXII, CII, Freiburg i. Br. 2009.

<sup>23</sup> SIMON OF TOURNAI, *Die Texte der Trinitätslehre des Simon von Tournai*, ed. M. Schmaus, in *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 4 (1932) 62.

<sup>24</sup> BOETHIUS, *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium* 3, in PL 64, 1343. M. LUTZ-BACHMANN, 'Natur' und 'Person' in den 'Opuscula Sacra' des A. M. S. Boethius, in *Theologie und Philosophie* 58 (1983) 48-70. M. ELSÄSSER, *Das Personenverständnis des Boethius*, Münster 1973.

plies his more developed definitions 1. *persona est intellectualis naturae incommunicabilis existentia* («person is of intelligent nature and possesses an existence it does not share with someone else»)<sup>25</sup> and 2. *existens per se solum juxta singularem quondam rationalis existentiae modum* («existing through itself according to a unique manner as reasonable existence»)<sup>26</sup>. The *Doctor Irrefragabilis* («the doctor permitting no objection»!) and founder of the Franciscan School, Alexander of Hales (ca. 1186-1245), will further enrich these insights by stating *persona est hypostasis distincta proprietate ad dignitatem pertinente* («person is a hypostasis distinguished by a dignity related to a characteristic feature»)<sup>27</sup>.

These definitions supply the key terms for subsequent discussions, such as: reasonable nature, individuality, incommunicability (i.e. a being not shared with or transferrable to someone else), substantiality and inherent, inalienable dignity. Significantly, to achieve the uniqueness of a person, however, its essential relationality need be assumed and correlated with its self-standing substantiality. This is by no means an easy task, as already Augustine must have recognized. He had considered *persona* an absolute term: *ad se* (per se) and not *ad aliud* (standing on one's own and not dependent on another). As a substantial term, he considers the concept person ill-suited to designate the relations within triune divine being – *nota bene* long before Chalcedon<sup>28</sup>. With guarded reservations, he allows that the mystery of the Blessed Trinity be revealed to the pagan as a *quid tres*, who are *tres personae*<sup>29</sup>, as it is better to supply some response than to leave it unanswered altogether. In the area of Christology, he does, however, concede that the unity of divine and human natures in Jesus is captured well in the term *person*<sup>30</sup>. One detects a cautiousness reservation

<sup>25</sup> RICHARD OF ST. VICTOR, *De Trinitate* 4, 22, ed. J. Ribaillier, Paris 1959. English trans.: RICHARD OF ST. VICTOR, *On the Trinity*, trans. R. Angelici, Eugene (OR) 2011, 163. Cfr. H. R. SCHLETTE, *Das unterschiedliche Personverständnis im theologischen Denken Hugos und Richards von St. Viktor*, in *Miscellanea Martin Grabmann*, München 1959, 55-72. H. WIPFLER, *Die Trinitätspekulation des Petrus v. Poitiers und die Trinitätsspekulation des Richard v. St. Victor*, Münster 1965. RICHARD VON ST. VIKTOR, *Die Dreieinigkeit*, trans. and ed. H. U. von Balthasar, Einsiedeln 1980. P. HOFMANN, *Analogie und Person. Zur Trinitätspekulation Richard von St. Victor*, in *Theologie und Philosophie* 59 (1984) 191-234. Cfr. in general HILBERATH, *Der Personbegriff der Trinitätstheologie*.

<sup>26</sup> RICHARD OF ST. VICTOR, *De Trinitate*, 4, 25.

<sup>27</sup> ALEXANDER OF HALES, *Glossa in quatuor libros Sententiarum Petri Lombardi*, 1, 23, 9b, in *Bibliotheca Franciscana Scholastica Medii Aevi* 12, Quaracchi 1951, 226. A.-F. VON GUNTEN, *La Notion de Personne dans la Trinité d'après Alexandre de Hales*, in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* 28, Paris 1950, 32-62. W. H. PRINCIPE, *Alexander of Hales' Theology of the Hypostatic Union* (Studies and Texts, 7), Toronto 1967.

<sup>28</sup> AUGUSTINE, *De Trinitate* V, 9-12, in *Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina*, vol. 50, Turnholti 1968, 216ff; VII, 9-11, *ibid.* 259ff. English: SAINT AUGUSTINE, *The Trinity*, Hyde Park (NY) 2012, 227-234.

<sup>29</sup> AUGUSTINE, *De Trinitate* VII, 6, 11.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, XIII, 22ff., 412ff.

as concerns defining divine aseity echoed – with no direct reference to the issue at hand – by the IV. Lateran Council (1215)<sup>31</sup>.

Following the *Doctor Gratiae*, Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) shares Augustine's unease of the Trinity defined as a personal threefold: «three, I know not what» (*tres nescio quid*). Since the terms person, essence and substance are as yet undefined, Anselm claims God is as little three substances as three persons. Nevertheless, he adheres to Boethius' definition of person<sup>32</sup>.

The role of Gilbert de la Porrée († 1154) is not insignificant in this context; notwithstanding the fact that he had been accused of heresy (two persons in Christ; «God is one, God is three») at the Synod of Reims in 1148. He is little concerned about verified facts, Scripture or conciliar decrees, but delights in logic and language. God as a personal reality is an inexpressible and incomprehensible mystery to him. Therefore, the term «person», originating in the natural order, can be applied to God at best by way of analogy, as the one divine person is precisely person through what another divine person is person. He distinguishes *quo est* (through which it is) and *quot est* (how many it is). Created beings can be distinguished by way of their respective, delimiting and specific *quo est*, while divine persons are defined by a single *quo est*, namely *divinitas*<sup>33</sup>. The divine persons are interrelated as no two human persons are. His example are Plato and Cicero. Something is added from outside, that renders the divine person person in the first place (*extrinsecus affixarum rerum oppositione*)<sup>34</sup>. Essence and person are not found on the same level in this case. He rejects saying *pater est divinitas*. Rather, the Father is the one who possesses *divinitas* in the manner of fatherhood. His notion that person is a subject possessing nature (*habens naturam*) will prevail and be accepted even by his opponents; although he had been accused of considering personhood as accidental in the case of God. Consonant with apprehending an ontological difference between divine personhood and the human person, he denies the bodiless human soul possessing personhood.

Richard of St. Victor regards Boethius' definition deficient as it gave rise to Gilbert's heresy. On the other hand, he confidently asserts the incontestability of the conciliar definitions of God prior to Boethius. His *point d'appui* is the Blessed Trinity as one individual substance, but consisting of three persons<sup>35</sup>. While difficult for contingent intelligence to apprehend this in the divine sphere, he observes that the human person is also a composite of two substances: namely of body and soul. In con-

<sup>31</sup> «... quia inter creatorem et creaturam non potest tanta similitudo notari, quin inter eos maior sit dissimilitudo notanda», DH 806.

<sup>32</sup> ANSELM OF CANTERBURY, *Monologion* 79, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. F. S. Schmitt, Stuttgart 1968, 1, 85.

<sup>33</sup> GILBERT OF POITIERS, *In libro de Trinitate* 1, 5, 39ff, ed. N. Häring, Toronto 1966, 147f.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, 5, 44, 148.

<sup>35</sup> RICHARD OF ST. VICTOR, *De Trinitate*, 4, 22.

trast to Augustine, he does not hesitate to use the term «person» for God and even holds the Holy Spirit inspired its use in theological discourse. This notwithstanding, he considers substance a term inapplicable to God, as God is not a *sub [accidentibus] stare* (does not exist by virtue of accidents). Rather, *-sistere* (as of a particular, determined constitution) is a quality common to both created and uncreated being<sup>36</sup>. Over and against substance, it is property or characteristic feature that designates a specific person. He surmises *existentia* as the preferable term, since it permits considering equally the *modus essendi* (quality, constitution *-sistere*) and *modus obtinendi* (origin, *ex-*) of all persons. The *quis* (particular identity) of a person can only be stated on the basis of the common substance *quid* (that). He strives to find a definition suitable for human beings, angels and God alike: existing as person entails a unique way of reasonable existence *existens per se solum iuxta singularem quondam rationalis existentiae modum* (existing by itself in the way of a rational existence)<sup>37</sup>. The unique *modus obtinentiae* (manner of acquiring) personhood sets divine persons apart. Each divine person possesses a unique and incommunicable, i.e. unshared characteristic (*habens divinum esse ex proprietate incommunicabili*)<sup>38</sup>. As regards angels, their origin does not set them apart from one another. Concerning human beings, however, both origin as well as quality set them apart from one each other.

His position impacts the subsequent Franciscan School and Thomas Aquinas. But Thomas does not critique Boethius as much as Richard, Peter of Poitiers (ca. 1130-ca. 1215) and Praepositinus (ca. 1140-ca. 1210) have done: yet he admits that the executed Roman thinker *magis fuit philosophus quam theologus* (was more a philosopher than a theologian)<sup>39</sup>. Robert of Melun, Hugh of St. Victor, William of Auxerre, Stephen Langton, Godfrey of Poitiers and Philip the Chancellor continue discussing the notion of person and hold jointly that person has a reasonable substance. Still in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, this occasions apprehending *persona est res iuris* – as a juridical subject; i.e. his legal status as the person's ontological substrate<sup>40</sup>. Following the early councils – memorably Chalcedon's definition of Jesus Christ – *eis en prosopon kai hypostasin*<sup>41</sup>, in William of Auxerre's estimation, there can be only one person in Christ, as his human nature is absorbed by the divine person. He postulates three elements

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, 4 and 4, 25.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, 24.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, 18. See also his two definitions of «person»: «*Persona est rationalis naturae incommunicabilis existentia*» and «*Persona est existens per se solum iuxta singularem quemdam rationalis existentiae modum*», in RICHARD OF ST. VICTOR, *De Trinitate*. IV, 22, 24, ed. Ribaillier, 188f.

<sup>39</sup> RICHARD OF ST. VICTOR, *De Trinitate* 4, 18. BERGERON, *La Structure du Concept latin de Personne*, 139.

<sup>40</sup> B. T. KIBLE, *Person, II. Hoch- und Spätscholastik; Meister Eckhart; Luther*, in *Historisches Wörterbuch zur Philosophie*, vol. 7, Darmstadt 1989, 283-300, at 286-288.

<sup>41</sup> DH 302.

as indispensable for personhood: unique existence, immediacy and specific dignity<sup>42</sup>.

To Alexander of Hales there are three orders of being, best expressed by way of recourse to Christology: natural, rational and moral. He assigns three terms to these areas: *subiectum*, *individuum* and *persona*: *Persona ad mores refertur et est nomen moris, individuum pertinent ad rationalem, subiectum ad naturalem* (person refers to mores and is a moral designation, [while the term] individual relates to the rational [aspect] subjected to the natural order). To his mind, morality is connected to ontology and therefore defines freedom. Thus, his definition of person supplements the earlier definitions of person by Boethius and Richard: *potest autem et sic definiri persona est hypostasis distincta proprietate ad dignitatem pertinente* (one can also define person: person is a hypostasis, distinguished by the dignity of a property or quality)<sup>43</sup>. This insight he connects with Christ: to speak of Jesus Christ as person, means to speak morally of him – as a moral agent<sup>44</sup>. While every person is hypostasis and an individual (in the sense of separate and distinct), only an *excellens proprietas* constitutes a person<sup>45</sup>. It is the term individual that connects between nature and person<sup>46</sup>.

### 3.2. Bonaventure

Alexander's pupil and confrère Bonaventure (ca. 1217-1274) further refines the term «person». First, he recapitulates the etymological origin of the word. He admits that *persona* is used primarily to designate worldly and religious dignitaries and officeholders<sup>47</sup>. However, the *Doctor Seraphicus* continues, possessing reasonable nature is of and in itself a dignity proper and commensurate to every human being *qua homo*. The evidences are their innate ability to differentiate between good and evil, right and wrong, true and false. Following the promptings of the Holy Spirit – thus Bonaventure argues, human reflection on personhood applied the term to the divine *supposita*, on account of this reality's exalted dignity.

Characteristic of his understanding, Bonaventure derives *persona* from *per se una*

<sup>42</sup> WILLIAM OF AUXERRE, *Summa Aurea* III, q. 8, t. 32, in B. T. COOLMAN, *Knowing God by Experience. The spiritual Senses of William of Auxerre*, Washington (DC) 2009, 72-92. Cfr. C. OTTAVIANO, *Guglielmo d'Auxerre († 1231). La Vita, le Opere, il Pensiero* (Biblioteca di Filosofia e Scienze, 12), Roma 1929. W. BREUNING, *Die hypostatische Union in der Theologie des Wilhelm v. Auxerre, Hugos von St. Cher und Rolands von Cremona* (Trierer Theologische Studien, 11), Trier 1962.

<sup>43</sup> ALEXANDER OF HALES, *Glossa* 1, 2, 9a.b.

<sup>44</sup> «persona res moris est, quia dicit proprietatem dignitatis; personaliter loqui de ipso est loqui moraliter», *ibid.*, 3, 6, 38.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, *Glossa* 3, 5, 20.

<sup>46</sup> A. HUFNAGEL, *Das Wesen der Person nach Alexander von Hales*, in *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 4 (1957) 148-174.

<sup>47</sup> BONAVENTURE, *1 Sententiarum* 23, I, 1, in *Opera Omnia* 1, 405.

and *a personando* – which indicates in his judgment the innate human ability for independent speech. He has the benefit of building upon the definitions supplied by Boethius, Richard of St. Victor and Alexander of Hales. Inspired especially by the Alexandrian variant, he states person is a *hypostasis distincta proprietate ad nobilitatem pertinente* (hypostasis relates to a distinct characteristic aiming at an exalted state [*visio beatifica?*])<sup>48</sup> – it is a *suppositum* (in Greek *hypostasis*) distinguished by a property characteristic of and commensurate to its dignity.

To his mind, a person is integer and complete, without being part of anything else. As an immediate substance, it is not a component of a composite. Also, he rejects the claims of Peter Lombard and Hugh of St. Victor that the human soul remains an intact person after the body's death<sup>49</sup>. For human persons the body is an indispensable constituent. Significantly for someone representing the illuminatist trajectory of intellectual history, he argues that otherwise one would be too Platonic and assume the body and this world are but prisons of the soul<sup>50</sup>. On this point, Plato is corrected by Christianity via the mystery of the incarnation. In the person of Jesus Christ, the human body is united to the divine Verbum. Three features define the person: *singularitas, incommunicabilitas, and supereminens dignitas*. Thereby he overcomes the *dilemmata* posed by the *anima separata* and the incarnation<sup>51</sup>. The constitutive element for personhood lies in its form. It is in the reciprocal appropriations of matter and form that individuation occurs<sup>52</sup>. *Persona* is analogous in the sense that what can be observed as regards the divine persons *per prius*, can be also stated of angels and of human beings *per posterius*<sup>53</sup>. Much like Richard, he sees in the unique ontological origin of the three divine persons the distinguishing feature that sets the Blessed Trinity apart from any other person. Angels are demarcated by quality and human beings by both origin and quality<sup>54</sup>.

### 3.3. Albert the Great

This Dominican († 1280) is at first hesitant to add yet another definition to the term person. Rather, he prefers accepting all previous definitions as we are *in statu*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* 25, I, 2, in *Opera Omnia* 1, 441.

<sup>49</sup> BONAVENTURE, 3 *Sententiarum* 5, 2, 3, in *Opera Omnia* 3, 137.

<sup>50</sup> PLATO, *Phaedo* 63e4-67d3, trans. and ed. by D. Gallop, Oxford 1993.

<sup>51</sup> BONAVENTURE, 3 *Sententiarum* 5, II, 2 ad 1, in *Opera Omnia* 3, 133.

<sup>52</sup> BONAVENTURE, 2 *Sententiarum* 3, I, 2, 3, in *Opera omnia* 2, 110. A. HUFNAGEL, «Bonaventuras Personenverständnis, in J. AUER – H. VOLK (eds.), *Theologie in Geschichte und Gegenwart, FS for Michael Schmaus*, München 1957, 843-860, at 853.

<sup>53</sup> BONAVENTURE, 1 *Sententiarum* I, 25, 2, q. I, I, 442.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* 25, II, 2 concl., 1, 444.

viatoris<sup>55</sup>. Nevertheless, he provides a preliminary circumscription: *hypostasis sive substantia substantialiter et perfecte existens, proprietate personali determinata* (person is essentially a hypostasis or substance and exists perfectly; defined by a personal feature)<sup>56</sup>. He sees already Boethius capturing rather felicitously what is common to God, angels and human beings alike. Richard elevates the discussion to the divine realm and corrects Boethius. His definition replaces *esse rationale* with *esse intellectuale*, and *individuum* with *singulare*. More importantly, «standing on oneself» is now replaced by the inherent relationality of persons. Albert proposes upon this background as definition: *persona autem est suppositum rationalis naturae distinctum proprietate pertinente ad dignitatem vel naturalem vel moralem*<sup>57</sup> (person is a suppositum of a rational nature, differentiated by a characteristic feature concerning [his] natural or moral dignity). In God's being the particular determination is reflected in relations, but only as regards the three divine persons' origin. Another form of difference is unimaginable, given the absolute simplicity of God. The divine persons are set apart exclusively by the way they possess divine nature. Finally, personhood can be applied to God only by way of analogy. Albert does not develop the dimension of inner-trinitarian relationality for personhood to come about there in the first place, but lays its foundations, upon which his student Thomas will build.

### 3.4. Thomas Aquinas

In principle, Thomas (ca. 1215-1274) is more accepting of Boethius' definition than even his teacher Albert the Great or the Franciscans had been<sup>58</sup>. The Aristote-

<sup>55</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS, 1 *Sententiarum*, 23, 3, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. D. Sidler, Münster 1978. Cfr. A. HÜFNAGEL, *Das Person-Problem bei Albertus Magnus*, in *Studia Albertina FS für Bernhard Geyer*, Münster 1952, 202-233. F.-J. NOCKE, *Sakrament und personaler Vollzug bei Albertus Magnus* (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters, Band XLI, Heft 4), Münster 1967.

<sup>56</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Summa theologiae* 10, q. 44, c. 1, in *Opera Omnia*, XXXV/1, ed. D. Siedler, Münster 1978, 345.

<sup>57</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *De Incarnatione* 3, q. 3, a. 4, in *Opera Omnia* XXVI, ed. S. Backes, Münster 1958, 202.

<sup>58</sup> E. SCHLITZ, *La Notion de Personne d'après saint Thomas*, in *Ephemerides theologicae Lovaniensis* 10 (1933) 409-426. G. B. PHELAN, *Person and Liberty*, in *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 16 (1940) 53-69. A. MALET, *Personne et Amour dans la Théologie Trinitaire de Saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Bibliothèque Thomiste, 32), Paris 1956. O. SCHWEIZER, *Person und Hypostatische Union bei Thomas von Aquin* (*Studia Friburgensia*, NF 16), Fribourg 1957. J. ENDRES, *Thomasischer Personbegriff und neuzeitlicher Personalismus*, in W. P. ECKERT (ed.), *Thomas von Aquino*, Mainz 1974, 117-143. A. HÜFNAGEL, *Der Mensch als Person nach Thomas v. Aquin*, in *Tommaso d'Aquino nel suo Settimo Centenario. Atti del Congresso Internazionale (Roma-Napoli, 17-24 aprile 1974)*, VII: *L'uomo*, Napoli 1978, 257-264. H. C. SCHMIDBAUR, *Personarum trinitatis. Die trinitarische Gotteslehre des heiligen Thomas von Aquin*, St. Ottilien 1995. J. JACOBS, *The Person as an Object of Science in Aquinas*, in *The Heythrop Journal* LIII (2012) 574-584. F. CARPENTERO, *La dignidad humana en Tomás Aquino*, in

lian antithesis of potency and act is a recurring *topos* in his *corpus*. It seems logical to him to refer to an individual as person since he is *in rationali natura*: and thus someone who truly (*proprie*) acts and in fact (*vere*) through himself, and is thus self-actuated<sup>59</sup>. This reminds one of the Aristotelian αὐτοκίνεσις in the *Physica*<sup>60</sup>. Like Richard of St. Victor, he believes the councils use the term «persona» as a result of the promptings of the Holy Spirit (*divinitus inspirati*)<sup>61</sup>. Unsurprisingly, while he refers to a supposed etymology of the term person, he cautions against confusing the primordial, original meaning of a term (*id a quo nomen imponitur*) and how this term is subsequently used in Christian theology (*id ad quod significandum*)<sup>62</sup>. «Persona» designates a dignity that excels beyond anything else, as it is *per se existere*<sup>63</sup>. This excellent manner of the human person's sovereign independence resides in his unique ability to complement the immanent acts of recognition and volition with truth and freedom: *habent dominum sui actus, et non solum aguntur, sicut alia, sed per se agunt* (to possess mastery over one's own action, and not only act by outside influence, but on one's own accord)<sup>64</sup>. Freedom in turn renders the person *perfectissimum in tota natura*. Freedom, again, is grounded in reason. While other terms (*res naturae, subsistenta* and *hypostasis*) designate various kinds of substances, the predicate «person» is reserved for the rational substance<sup>65</sup>.

He does not deny the merits of the definitions the Magistri had supplied. It is in simplicity, however, that he makes out the special *dignitas* of a person, and sees it fully realized in the Godhead, as the *actus purus*<sup>66</sup>. He is *d'accord* with the Boethian formula, as long as it is not perceived as delimiting. *Rationalis* implies not only rational discourse, but the person capable of apprehending the first principles (*Wesensschau?*). The Boethian term *individua* implies incommunicability, or standing on one's own, and being substance as *subsistere* – and not *substare accidentibus* (to exist on account of accidents) which must be excluded for God. Divine hypostases must also be bearers of *proprietates personales* (personal characteristics)<sup>67</sup>.

Thomas sees in the word *individuum* not monotony, but indivisibility conveyed.

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<sup>59</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia Dei* 9, 2c.

<sup>60</sup> ARISTOTLE, *Physica* VIII, 5, esp. 258a Iff. See ARISTOTLE, *Physics*, Oxford 2008.

<sup>61</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *De Potentia Dei* 9, 4c.

<sup>62</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *De Potentia Dei* 9, 3 ad 1; 1 *Sententiarum*, 23, 1, 2, ad 1.

<sup>63</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *De Potentia Dei* 9, 3c.

<sup>64</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I, 29, 1 c.

<sup>65</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I, 29, 1c.

<sup>66</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Scriptum super Libros Sententiarum* here: 2 *Sententiarum* 3, 3, 2 ad 3.

<sup>67</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *De Potentia Dei* 9, 3 ad 7. Cfr. ID., *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 30, a. 4.

It is distinct and not an other. Person is a reality resting in itself – a self-contained entity. *In extremis* it may suggest detached isolation. And yet, there can never be one person in isolation. The term independence, as resting in one's own being, requires a plurality of persons. «One person is no person» as Kible succinctly summarizes<sup>68</sup>. By way of analogy, this applies to human beings and to divine persons alike. Thomas underscores that the inner-trinitarian persons are neither an *unum quod est* [existent being] *principium numeri* nor a *multitudo*. Whatever differentiation is stated, it is counterbalanced by a more foundational relationality of origin. Such origin does not circumscribe accidents, but divine essence. Thereby one sees Thomas rejecting the concept of a Blessed Trinity as assumed in Gilbert de la Porrée's thesis of *relationes extrinsecus affixae* (relations affixed from outside)<sup>69</sup>. It is in divine essence that the three persons are identical according to their subsistence: defying human comprehension, they are *relationes ut subsistentes* (in order to subsist they are relations). He defines the divine persons as *distinctum relatione subsistens in essentia divina* (distinct by relation, they subsist in divine essence)<sup>70</sup>. While creatures are composed of borrowed existence and nature, God alone is self-subsistent being. In God a relation is not an accident, but a mode of being of a substantial kind – he refers to it as *per modum substantiae* and *per modum absoluti*<sup>71</sup>. At this point Thomas cancels the commonly held structure of substance-accident. Contingent human cognition becomes mindful of its limits when pondering matters eternal, precisely by reflecting on both God and his creation – probably consciously echoing the famous definition of the IV. Lateran Council, formulated around the time of his birth: *quia inter creatorem et creaturam non potest tanta similitudo notari, quin inter eos maior sit dissimilitudo notanda*<sup>72</sup>. Vaguely reminiscent of Karl Jaspers words, the human person is posited into a *Grenzsituation*, a border situation – and is mindful of it<sup>73</sup>.

Like Richard of St. Victor and Bonaventure before him, Thomas sees the categories of God, pure spirits and human beings helpful for distilling a proper understanding of the term person. All three kinds of person hold in common *substantia* and *essentia*. As concerns finite substances, essence and *suppositum* are not completely identical as they may have determinations that are common to the species (color?) and contribute to individuation. A bouquet of accidentals may come into play. The *subsistens* is not exhausted in the terms *natura* or *essentia* such as for instance *hu-*

<sup>68</sup> KIBLE, *Person II. Hoch- und Spätscholastik*; Meister Eckhart; Luther, 291.

<sup>69</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I, 28, 2c.

<sup>70</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *De Potentia Dei* 9, 4c.

<sup>71</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I, 29, 4c.

<sup>72</sup> IV LATERAN COUNCIL (1215), *Chapter 2. The False Doctrine of Joachim* of Fiore, DH 806; see above fn. 2.

<sup>73</sup> K. JASPERS, *Einführung in die Philosophie*, Zürich 1950, 157.

*manitas* for the human being. Though nonmaterial, also angels are a composition. As always *esse* must be added to *essentia* in order for something to be the case. For angels, individuation occurs via *subsistentia* and *essentia*. Unlike Plato, he holds that the human being is a single, composite whole, which vouches for the continued unity of the dead and living body in Jesus Christ – the Aristotelian *anima forma corporis* is echoed<sup>74</sup>. Exclusively in the case of God are essence and being necessarily identical. There is no accidental composition. Here *essentia* and *supposita* are synonymous<sup>75</sup>.

In the *Summa* a person is defined by a species, such as «*homo*» and a proper name, such as Socrates. The word *persona* indicates the general *modus existendi*. It signifies some kind of individuation – an *individuum vagum* as he puts it. Thus, person suggests more than a generic notion or species. The uniqueness is indicated by the term, yet without spelling it out. In a particular person, therefore, the individuating feature(s) must ever again be discovered in order to do justice to the dignity arising from his inherent personhood<sup>76</sup>.

For the *Doctor Angelicus* the term «*persona*» implies something whole and complete. In fact, it is the most complete in the known world. It follows that person is an *individuum rationalis naturae quae est completissima et ubi stat tota intentio naturae, habet quod significat completissimam ultima completione, post quam non est aliq*<sup>77</sup>; thus, his definition of person: a subsistent individual of a rational nature, in itself most complete and no other one<sup>78</sup>.

This is for him the decisive consideration to deny Jesus Christ's human nature human personhood, independent from his divine personhood. Jesus is a divine person. It lacks the particular individual accidental subsistence, as subsistence is to him also a divine substance<sup>79</sup> – the *esse per se*. The person of Jesus Christ subsists in two natures – namely as *persona composita*<sup>80</sup>. He possesses only one form of being, as everything that is, must be one. The being of the divine Logos, however, does no harm unto the dignity of the human nature of Jesus, since its *essentia* is not deficient. Surely, to be *per se* is more valuable than being through an *aliquid*. However, this *secundum quid* is no disadvantage if the other is of a higher order. In the unique case of Jesus Christ this holds true: the *ratio assumptibilis* is in evidence in his individual human nature<sup>81</sup>.

<sup>74</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* Ia 75.6 and 76.1. Cfr. ARISTOTLE, *De Anima*, ed. Ross, Oxford 1961, C 1412b5.

<sup>75</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *De Potentia Dei* 9, 1c; *Quodlibet* II, 2c. Id., *Summa Theologiae* III, 2, 4.

<sup>76</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I, 30, 4c.

<sup>77</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *3 Sententiarum* 6, 1, 1.

<sup>78</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I, 29, 3.c.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* I, q. 29 a. 3 ad 4.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* III, 2, 4.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* III, 2, 2 ad 2.

Consequently, to Thomas' mind, as it is not *ens completum*, also the human *anima separata* is not person by itself. The body needs a *forma*, a soul as its form. Retaining its *unibilitas* even after death, the human soul remains ordered toward reunification with his body. Otherwise the unity of body and soul would not be essential, but merely accidental.

Within the context of theology, the abstract term *personalitas* is introduced in the Middle Ages. It designates the manner of being person within the Blessed Trinity in the unity of their essence. Thomas observes that «The form, designated through the name “person” is not essence or nature, but *personalitas*». He continues stating that there are in Father, Son and Holy Spirit *tres personalitates*<sup>82</sup>.

In Thomas Aquinas' understanding of personhood, the whole of tradition is systematized without allowing for contradictions. It is from the lofty perspective of the Blessed Trinity that Thomas resolves the question whether person is a *nomen absolutum* or *nomen relationis*. Only the divine persons are constituted and differentiated through relations of origin. Exclusively there do origin and substance conflate. Only in the Godhead does personhood imply relation in a substantial way. All other persons can be defined by *subsistere*, *ratiocinari*, *individuum* and *incommunicabilitas* in varying ways and to different degrees. Nevertheless, all these terms bear out a person's particular dignity<sup>83</sup>.

### 3.5. Duns Scotus

The Franciscan scholar John Duns Scotus (ca. 1265-1308) shares Richard of St. Victor's skepticism as regards Boethius' definition, as one cannot predicate *divinitas* and the human soul at the same time and under the same consideration as persons<sup>84</sup>. Duns Scotus underlines the univocal use of the term person when speaking of absolute (i.e. not relative) and created persons. In order to preserve nevertheless the term person for both, he introduces to the discussion two modes of incommunicability. This dimension of incommunicability is described with the expressions *ut quod* (in what regard) and *ut quo* (the means)<sup>85</sup>. The word «incommunicability» can be ap-

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* I, 39, 3 ad 4.

<sup>83</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, 2 *Sententiarum* 3, 1, 2.

<sup>84</sup> JOHN DUNS SCOTUS, 1 *Sententiarum* 23, n. 4, q. unica, *Opera Omnia* 5 /2, Lyon 1639, reprint Hildesheim 1968ff, 1073. M. BURGER, *Personalität im Horizont absoluter Prädestination: Untersuchungen zur Christologie des Johannes Duns Scotus und ihrer Rezeption in modernen theologischen Ansätzen*, Münster 1994. R. CROSS, *Duns Scotus on God*, Aldershot 2005. N. DEN BOCK – M. BAC – A. J. BECK – K. BOM – E. DEKKER – G. LABOOY – H. VELDHUIS – A. VOS, *More than just an Individual. Scotus's Concept of Person. From the Christological Context of Lectura III*, in *Franciscan Studies* 66 (2008) 169-196. This is a collaborative essay.

<sup>85</sup> JOHN DUNS SCOTUS, *Ordinatio* I, d. 23, q. un. N. 15f.; JOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Opera Omnia*, Civitas Vaticana 1950, 356f.

plied in the same manner to both Socrates and Cicero. On the other hand, the human soul as form must communicate with the body, in order for a human being to come about. This is the outstanding mark of Scotist teaching: to distinguish different kinds of incommunicability<sup>86</sup>. Duns Scotus follows Richard of St. Victor's noted criticism of Boethius' definition *persona individua substantia rationalis naturae est*. Boethius apprehended in individuality the distinguishing feature of personhood. Duns Scotus expands it by defining the person as *existentia incommunicabilis* (an existence resting in itself). This adds to Boethian individuality the dimension of independence as an additional characteristic of the reason-gifted individual<sup>87</sup>.

Using the figure of independence, he argues the negation of potential dependences only applies to divine persons<sup>88</sup>. God's nature cannot be communicated to a person of another nature. Human nature is churned up and is tossed to and from between dependence and independence. It is his aim to relate Christology and anthropology to one another and thereby to harmonize human dependence and independence. The dogma of Chalcedon affirms the two natures of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ did not assume human nature in general, but a particular and individual one *in atomo* (referencing John of Damascus) without this nature having a personality to it. This demonstrates that singularity of human nature need not entail personality<sup>89</sup>. Nevertheless, the divine Logos assumed everything that is proper to human nature. Apart from its singularity, there is nothing positive about it. «It is dependent according to three modes of dependence: *dependentia actualis*, *dependentia potentialis* and *dependentia apitudinalis* [of disposition]»<sup>90</sup>. Actual dependence means presence without intending additional specification. Potential dependence is the case if there may be a dependence that is not necessary, but also there is no resistance for it to exist. For instance, to assert angels have four wings may or may not be true. There is nothing that prevents angels from having four wings. It does not jeopardize, but enables angels to fly. However, possessing wings in general is part of an aptitudinal dependence, as it advances angels in a manner essential for them: namely to fly.

Personhood implies more than negating its dependence on another person. In modern language, he seems to argue personhood does not imply autarky but autonomy. This fact also does not deny the passive ability of a human person for a *potentia oboedientialis*. For Duns Scotus it follows, that human nature possesses the chance

<sup>86</sup> JOHN DUNS SCOTUS, *3 Sententiarum* 1, 1, 3, *Opera Omnia* 12, 507ff. H. MÜHLEN, *Sein und Person nach Johannes Duns Scotus*, Werl 1954, 78ff.

<sup>87</sup> JOHN DUNS SCOTUS, *Lectura III*. Cfr. ARISTOTLE, *Organon, Topoi* I, 5, 102a.

<sup>88</sup> JOHN DUNS SCOTUS, *Ordinatio III*, d. I, q. I, n. 9, ed. Viv. XIV, 26.

<sup>89</sup> KIBLE, *Person, II. Hoch- und Spätscholastik; Meister Eckhart; Luther*, 293.

<sup>90</sup> JOHN DUNS SCOTUS, *3 Sententiarum* 1, 1, 3, n. 9, *Opera Omnia* 7/1, 15; *Quodlibet q. XIX*, 3, n. 18, *Opera Omnia* 12, 508.

to acknowledge its dependence on a divine person. This does not, however, establish in the natural order a suitability (*aptitudo*) for such dependence, but rather a mere relative *independentia aptitudinalis*. Unification of human nature with a divine decree is wholly supernatural. There exists at best a negative point of connection with the divine in human nature in the form of a hypothetical non-repugnance.

It belongs to the very nature of a human being to have two negations of dependence: actual and of aptitude. Par excellence incommunicability can be found only in the persons of the Blessed Trinity: there is no possibility of a reliance on anything else. For this reason, only in the Godhead can there be a proper, complete and self-contained personality: *nulla erit perfecta persona nisi divina* (no person is perfect [i.e. self-supporting] unless it is the divine person)<sup>91</sup> – as Duns Scotus concludes. The essence and relations explain a person's difference. Duns Scotus, the *Doctor Subtilis*, assumes it is common knowledge that essence and relation constitute every person: *essentia et relatio secundum omnes constituant personam* (essence and relation according to everything constitute a person)<sup>92</sup>. The tension between *esse ad se* and *esse ad alterum* abides and is perceived ultimately as fruitful. Only in intellectual abstraction is there an opposition. In reality, however, person is unimaginable without relation: *quamvis in re non sit persona nisi quae est ad alterum* (how little in reality something can be person unless through another)<sup>93</sup>. The irreducibility of the term person from relation in Duns Scotus' thinking is comparable to his reflections on being. Since *ens in quantum ens* (being insofar as being) is, he considers being as univocal. Like *ens*, also *persona* is not defined by the alternatives of substance or accident, etc. but rests in itself. The question arose whether Duns Scotus is able to consistently maintain the univocity of the term person when it is confronted with relationality. He does not in principle deny the possibility of an absolute constitution of personhood for divine persons.

Persons are determined by transcendental relations. There is only the transcendental relation of essence and being – which expresses itself in self-realization. Every created object has such a transcendental, enabling relationship to the creator. This finds expression in the passive *potentia oboedientialis* of every created person vis-à-vis the second person of the Blessed Trinity, by way of supernatural assistance. This has been realized fully and perfectly only by one human person, namely Mary, the Mother of God. It is on this background, that Duns Scotus, also called *Doctor Marianus*, can argue that every human person finds its *raison d'être* not in its own nature, but in that personal reality, namely God, to which it owes dependence. He seems to imply an indwelling entelechy of every contingent human being to constitute a

<sup>91</sup> JOHN DUNS SCOTUS, 3 *Sententiarum* 1, 1, 3, n. 10, *Opera Omnia* 7/1, 16.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, 1, n. 17, *Opera Omnia* 7/1, 25.

<sup>93</sup> JOHN DUNS SCOTUS, *Quodlibet*, q. III, n. 4, *Opera Omnia* 12, 70.

relationship to divine realities. The point of fullest realization of every human person occurs in the negation of autarkic independence in the form of Christian discipleship. Paradoxically, all human independence becomes fully actuated in self-surrender as conscious self-donation. This is expressed in Mary's excellent ontic and ethical holiness. The *potentia oboedientialis* is perfectly realized in Mary's active participation in the work of salvation. Duns Scotus emphasizes that the human person Mary collaborated with the (tri-)personal God. In modern language, she consciously entered into dialogue and relationship with God through the Angel Gabriel. Already Augustine had observed *Deo nihil secundum accidens dicitur, sed secundum substantiam aut secundum relationem* (in God there is nothing accidental, but only substance and relation)<sup>94</sup>. This results in the human woman Mary standing higher than all other created persons, including the angels<sup>95</sup>. She anticipates and has already taken to heart Our Lord's words: «Only the one who loses himself can find himself» (Mt 10,39). Over the centuries, Duns Scotus holds forth to the postmodern human being the *Theotokos* as the one who overcomes paradigmatically for all the postlapsarian, existential *ultima solitudo*<sup>96</sup> of the human subject and liberates him to an engraced *ultima relatio*, that is, to living in responsible responsoriality<sup>97</sup>.

The renewing effects of the incarnation are central to understanding its restorative power for human personhood. The logician Giles of Rome (ca. 1243-1316) summarizes well: «A human nature separated from the divinity is an efficient cause, and constitutes [a *suppositum*]; but the human nature joined to the divinity does not constitute a *suppositum*, but is as it were an instrument of the divinity, grounded in its hypostasis, through the mediation of which [viz. the human nature] the god-man does everything»<sup>98</sup>.

By way of a penetrating understanding of the term «person», Duns Scotus establishes how illuminative and thus salutary both the Doctrine of God and Christology are for anthropology<sup>99</sup>. The finite human person's realization of his indebtedness to infinite persons for his being person, is the chance for a deeper understanding and

<sup>94</sup> JOHN DUNS SCOTUS, *Ordinatio* 3, 1, 1. 1, n. 68.

<sup>95</sup> Cfr. R. ZAVALLONI – E. MARIANI (eds.), *La Dottrina mariologica di Giovanni Duns Scoto*, Roma 1987.

<sup>96</sup> JOHN DUNS SCOTUS, *Ordinatio* 3, 1, 1. 1, n. 68.

<sup>97</sup> JOHN DUNS SCOTUS, *Reportatio parisiensis* 1, d. 25, q. 2, n. 14, *Opera Omnia* 11/1, 134. Cfr. JOHN DUNS SCOTUS, *The Examined Report of the Paris Lecture Reportatio I-A*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. by A. B. Wolter – O. V. Bychkov, St. Bonaventure (NY) 2008, 51-64.

<sup>98</sup> R. CROSS, *Disability, Impairment, and some medieval Accounts of the Incarnation: Suggestions for a Theology of Personhood*, 656, fn. 19, translating Giles of Rome, *Lectura* 3.1, in C. LUNA, *La Reportatio della lettura di Egidio Romano sul Libro III delle Sentenze (Clm. 8005) e il problema dell'autenticità dell'Ordinatio*, in *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale*, 1, Firenze 1990, 113-225; 2 (1991) 75-126 at 1; 3 (1992) 181.

<sup>99</sup> KIBLE, *Person, II. Hoch- und Spätscholastik; Meister Eckhart; Luther*, 295.

actuation of his personhood. Paradoxically, the human being becomes free to Duns Scotus' mind by freely choosing within the pattern established by God *a priori*. The moral quality of a person depends on voluntarily fulfilling God's will. Human personal existence vis-à-vis the triune persons does not imply a rivalry for the human person with God – as sadly claimed by Nietzsche or Sartre – but the chance for grateful friendship with God – a friendship transcending time and space. There is something essentially weak or wanting in the human person as long as he is not seeking such unity with and conformation to the second divine person. Thus, the essential uniqueness, *haecceitas*, as Duns Scotus calls the ontological determinant of the individual human person, comes into prominent focus in his *potentia oboedientialis*. Mindful of personhood establishing such a relationality between God and humankind, the human being gratefully acknowledges being this singular crown of a personally and divinely willed creation<sup>100</sup>.

#### 4. Conclusion: Personhood – an Invitation to a *Sacra Conversazione*

What is the *desideratum* of this brief survey? Wholly unexpected by pagan antiquity, in the Middle Ages a spiritualization and interiorization of the term person occurs. Christianity definitively overcomes the undifferentiated and therefore impersonal *Hen* of Plotinus' God, appreciates the Triune God, and by way of the catalyst of the Christological definition of Chalcedon now «celebrates the dignity of every human being».

To the ancients of Greece and Rome life's vicissitudes must be borne with imperturbable *ataraxia* or *aequanimitas*. The inspired psalmist, however, asks God «what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?» and responds: «You have given him dominion over the works of your hands» (Ps 8,4.6a). Pondering the meaning of personhood on the basis of the Chalcedonian definition of Jesus Christ, the Medieval genius explicates Psalm 8.

As the Medieval mind has ascended to such sublime insights concerning the term person, it is understandable that with this achievement an age comes to a gradual end. This survey illustrates how very contrary to the essence of the human person postmodernity's studied isolation of the individual is. It

<sup>100</sup> C. BÉRUBÉ, *De l'homme à Dieu selon: Duns Scot, Henri de Gand et Olivi* (Bibliotheca seraphico-capucina, 27), Roma 1983. B. M. BONANSEA, *Man and his Approach to God in John Duns Scotus*, Langham (MD) 1987.

shows how crucial and indispensable God, and more to the point, God as Blessed Trinity is to the development of the terms «person» and «personhood». The vacation of God from the public square may well be the single one cause for a decline of civility in public discourse and therefore explain the predicaments the democratic process faces. Should not the human person of all ages and cultures both shudder and be thrilled when it occurs to him that God and he alike are persons? Gratitude must overcome him when he considers that irrespective of the vagaries of history, he is called to the eternal *visio beatifica facialis* with the tripersonal God.

Does not the medieval mind suggest we need eradicate with renewed resolve our personhood confidently in the *Imago Christi*, the divine Word, in order to recover an awareness of our being created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1,26), the cause of our *joie de vivre*?

In Alasdair MacIntyre's memorable phrase, human beings are «dependent rational animals»<sup>101</sup>. The rational illumination of the meaning of *persona* leads human beings to gradually discover their God-given and God-gifted personhood. The doctrine of God, Christology and anthropology are intricately interwoven in the mystery of personhood. While there may indeed be the misunderstanding of emphasizing occasionally an individualistic dimension of personhood, we see Thomas and Duns Scotus felicitously overcome this imbalance by their robust theocentric perspectives. «In Christ, in the man who is completely with God, human existence is not cancelled out, but comes to its highest possibility»<sup>102</sup> Ratzinger succinctly underscores. This the Second Vatican Council solemnly enshrined: «it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear» (*Gaudium et Spes* 22).

Is it perhaps a kind irony or ruse of Christian *Geistesgeschichte*, of intellectual history that while the Franciscan Duns Scotus described in theological terms the fullest realization of responsorial, free and obedient personhood as manifested in the figure of Our Lady, the Dominican painter, *il Beato*, Fra Angelico (1395/1400-55) depicted it incomparably in his hauntingly beautiful rendition of the Annunciation in San Marco Monastery, Florence, where the *Fiat* of the reverent and humble, because infinitely grateful Mary invites the viewer to enter with her into the *sacra conversazione* with God<sup>103</sup>?

<sup>101</sup> A. MACINTYRE, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, Chicago-Lasalle (IL) 1999.

<sup>102</sup> RATZINGER, *Retrieving the Tradition, Concerning the notion of person in theology*, 452.

<sup>103</sup> Cfr. for instance W. HOOD, *Fra Angelico at San Marco*, New Haven (CT) 1993.

### **Abstract**

This essay surveys the evolution of the term “person” during the early and high Middle Ages. It makes out Boethius’ often quoted definition of person around 500 AD as the *point d’appui* for Medieval reflections on the human person. However, the actual catalyst for a more penetrating appreciation of human personhood can be detected in the Chalcedonian definition of the Godman Jesus Christ as one divine person with both a divine and human nature in 451 AD. With Richard of St. Victor, Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus this process reaches heights unimaginable to antiquity. It is in Mary that the Medieval mind apprehends human personhood fully realized. This insight Fra Angelico transposes into art in one of his celebrated frescos in the Florentine monastery of San Marco: the Annunciation scene.