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Shadows of the Triune God:
The Hermeneutics of Old Testament Revelation in Lombard, Aquinas, and their Interlocutors

Abstract. The question of whether the Trinity is revealed in the Old Testament represents a fault line between pre-modern dogmatics and modern historical criticism. This article investigates this hermeneutical tension through the lens of Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas, arguing that the transition from the former to the latter represents a movement from exegetical collection to epistemological refinement. This study begins by analyzing Lombard's thesis of continuity, where grammatical anomalies (such as the plural *elohim*) and prosopological texts are classified as "explicit documents" of the triune nature. It traces the systematization of this consensus in Albert the Great and Bonaventure, who developed rigorous semiotic modes to explain divine insinuation. Central to the argument is Aquinas's intervention: while maintaining the objective presence of the mystery in ancient theophanies, Aquinas retrieves a mystagogical distinction found in Lombard's own soteriology. He argues that the Trinity was explicitly believed by the *maiores* (prophets) while remaining a veiled object of implicit faith for the *minores*. This article then confronts the challenge of modern historical criticism, which tends towards positing a hermeneutic of rupture based on Israel's strict monotheism. Finally, it offers a constructive retrieval by engaging the explicitist thesis of Andy Saville. By validating the logic of apostolic rebuke and employing the Thomistic understanding of the *lumen propheticum*, the article bridges the gap between the prophet's explicit mind and the text's veiled form. By recovering the cognitive principle of judicative certitude, it concludes that the medieval intuition is vindicated: reading the Trinity in the Old Testament is not anachronistic, but indispensable for maintaining the theological unity of the Christian canon.

Keywords: Trinity, Old Testament, Hermeneutics, Peter Lombard, Thomas Aquinas, Divine Economy, Vestigium Trinitatis.

Introduction

The question of whether the Trinity is revealed in the Old Testament is a persistent problem in the history of theology, situated at the fault line between dogmatic theology and biblical exegesis. For the medieval masters, the answer was affirmative: the triune God spoke in the Law, sang in the Psalms, and appeared in the Prophets. For modern historical criticism, the answer is largely negative: the strict monotheism of Israel precludes any awareness of internal divine plurality.

This article investigates this hermeneutical tension through the lens of Peter Lombard and his greatest commentator, Thomas Aquinas. Despite the extensive scholarship on Aquinas and the foundational importance of Lombard to the medieval curriculum (Rosemann 2004, 3), there is a distinct gap in the literature addressing their specific exegetical arguments regarding Trinitarian revelation in the Old Testament. While their doctrines of the Trinity are well-charted,[1] their biblical hermeneutics—specifically their defense of the plurality texts in Genesis or the personifications in Wisdom literature—remain largely unexplored in comparative perspective.

This study aims to fill that gap. It argues that the transition from Lombard to Aquinas represents a development from exegetical collection to epistemological refinement. Where Lombard gathers "explicit documents" (*expressa documenta*) of the Trinity from the ancient text,[2] Aquinas applies the Master's own distinction regarding who knew the mystery (the *maiores*) and how it was signified (through angelic mediation). This medieval synthesis is then placed in dialogue with modern theology, demonstrating that contemporary retrievals—specifically the explicitist thesis of Andy Saville (Saville 2013)[3]—provide a hermeneutical defense of the medieval position against the skepticism of historical criticism.

This article's argument unfolds in five movements. The first section, "The Medieval Consensus," establishes Peter Lombard's thesis of continuity. It analyzes his canonical survey of the Old Testament in Distinction 2, where he identifies grammatical anomalies (*elohim*, *faciamus*) and liturgical repetitions (*trisagion*) as proofs of the triune nature.

The second section, "The Systematization of the Mystery," examines how the thirteenth-century masters, Albert the Great and Bonaventure, transformed Lombard's collection of proof-texts into a rigorous science. It details Albert's taxonomy of the nine ways the Trinity is insinuated and Bonaventure's logical analysis of signification and supposition.

The third section, "The Veiled Mystery and the Explicit Faith," turns to Aquinas. It demonstrates how he developed a precise epistemology of revelation to refine the Master's position. By distinguishing between the objective sign (theophany) and the subjective capacity of the believer (*maiores* versus *minores*), Aquinas secures Lombard's thesis while accounting for the historical progression of faith.

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[1] On Lombard's Trinitarian doctrines in the first book of the *Sentences*, see Rosemann 2004, 71–92. Publications on Aquinas's Trinitarian theology abound; see, especially, Emery 2007 and White 2022.

[2] Lombard, *Sent*. I, d. 2, c. 4, n. 9. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Lombard are taken from Peter Lombard 1971. All English translations are my own.

[3] A more detailed analysis of the insights from this article will follow later in this article.

The fourth section, "The Hermeneutical Shift," confronts the modern challenge to Lombard's confident hermeneutics. It details the rise of a counter-narrative represented by Pierre Grelot and Michael Schmaus, who argue that the literal sense of the Old Testament reflects a strict monotheism where the concept of a multi-personal God was historically unavailable. This section examines how these authors redefine key pneumatological texts—reading Spirit as divine power rather than a distinct hypostasis—and analyzes the *Catechism of the Catholic Church's* nuanced position, which affirms traces (*vestigia*) of the Trinity while denying epistemological access to the mystery prior to the Incarnation.

The fifth section, "The Theological Retrieval," offers a constructive resolution. It pivots to the explicitist thesis of the Anglican theologian Andy Saville, arguing that his exegetical defense—grounded in the logic of apostolic rebuke and apologetic persuasion—unwittingly vindicates Aquinas's specific claim regarding the explicit faith of the prophets. The article concludes by bridging the gap between the prophet's explicit mind and the text's veiled form through the Thomistic theology of prophecy. Drawing on Paul Rogers and Thomas Joseph White, it utilizes the concept of gratuitous grace (*gratia gratis data*) to explain how the *maiores* possessed judicative certitude of the Trinity while signifying it in the shadows of the ancient types.

1. The Medieval Consensus: Lombard's Thesis of Continuity

In Distinction 2 of the First Book of the *Sentences*, Peter Lombard establishes the epistemological foundation of his Trinitarian project. Before any dialectical inquiry can begin, the theologian must first bow before the *auctoritas* of the sacred text. For Lombard, the mystery of the Trinity is not a philosophical deduction but a revealed truth to be "held by true and devout faith."[4]

Lombard operates with a profound conviction regarding the unity of divine revelation. While acknowledging the distinct novelty of the New Testament, he posits that the "truth of the divine unity and trinity" is objectively demonstrated across both Testaments, albeit with differing degrees of clarity.[5] For Lombard, the Old Testament is not silent on the Trinity; rather, it contains the "initial words [*exordia*]" of the doctrine, waiting to be illuminated by the "burning coal taken from the altar [*calculus de altari*]" of the New.[6]

1.1. The Grammar of Plurality in the Old Testament

Lombard's exegesis of the Old Testament is driven by a keen attention to grammar—specifically, the interplay between singular and plural forms. He argues that the sacred authors utilized grammatical anomalies to signify and insinuate the mystery of a God who is one and triune.

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[4] Lombard, *Sent.* I, d. 2, c. 1, n. 1.

[5] Lombard, *Sent.* I, d. 2, c. 4, n. 1.

[6] Lombard, *Sent.* I, d. 2, c. 5, n. 1.

Lombard begins this inquiry in the Pentateuch, where he identifies the fundamental tension of Trinitarian theology: the grammatical hints of a multipersonal Godhead juxtaposed with the absolute revelation of divine oneness. The very first verse of Scripture provides Lombard with his primary evidence. He appeals to the Hebrew truth (*hebraica veritas*) of Genesis 1:1 ("In the beginning God [*elohim*] created"),[7] arguing that the use of the plural noun *elohim* joined with the singular verb *creavit* is not a grammatical accident but a theological signifier of the plurality of persons acting through a single essence. Moreover, Lombard adopts a Christological reading of the syntax. He argues that "in the beginning" (*in principio*) refers not merely to the commencement of time, but to the person of the Son (the beginning or principle). Thus, the verse signifies that God the Father created heaven and earth *in* the Son, establishing the consubstantial agency of the persons from the first moment of creation.[8]

This implicit plurality becomes explicit in Genesis 1:26 ("Let us make man to our image and likeness"), which serves as Lombard's *locus classicus*. He identifies a deliberate grammatical dissonance here: the cohortative plural "Let us make" and the possessive "our" prove the existence of a consortium or partnership within God—for "a solitary being does not speak to himself." Yet, the singular object "to our image" serves as the immediate corrective, proving that these multiple persons share one and the same nature.[9] Furthermore, citing Hilary of Poitiers, Lombard clarifies that this plurality excludes solitude just as much as unity excludes diversity. The God of Genesis is one, but he is not solitary.[10]

Having established the plurality of creating agents, Lombard turns to the texts of the Law to secure the unity of the essence. He cites Exodus 3:14 ("I am who am") and Deuteronomy 6:4 ("the Lord our God is one Lord") to declare the absolute unity of the divine nature. The use of the singular verb "I am" (*sum*, not *sumus*) excludes a plurality of gods, affirming that the divine essence is one and distinct from all else.[11]

Moving from the Law to the Psalms, Lombard finds the Trinity embedded in the prayer life of Israel. Here, the text serves to name the persons distinctively and to attribute specific operations to them. Lombard employs a prosopological exegesis of Psalm 2:7 ("The Lord hath said to me: Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee"),[12] hearing in it the voice of the pre-incarnate Son. He treats this as an "open testimony" (*apertum testimonium*) of eternal generation, where "this day" (*hodie*) signifies the eternal present.[13] He further identifies the distinct names of the persons in Psalm 32:6 ("By the word of the Lord the heavens were

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[7] Unless otherwise noted, the English text of the Bible quoted in this article is taken from the Douay-Rheims.

[8] Lombard, *Sent.* I, d. 2, c. 4, n. 5.

[9] Lombard, *Sent.* I, d. 2, c. 4, n. 2.

[10] Lombard, *Sent.* I, d. 2, c. 4, nn. 3–4.

[11] Lombard, *Sent.* I, d. 2, c. 4, n. 1.

[12] Prosopological exegesis is a technique of interpreting Scripture common in the early church. See Bates 2012, 183: "[prosopological exegesis] explains a text by suggesting that the author of the text identified various persons or characters (*prosopa*) as speakers or addressees in a pre-text, even though it is not clear from the pre-text itself that such persons are in view."

[13] Lombard, *Sent.* I, d. 2, c. 4, n. 8.

established; and all the power of them by the spirit of his mouth"), where the "Lord" (Father), the "word" (Son), and the "spirit" cooperate in creation. Even in the confession of unity, Lombard discerns a trinitarian structure. He reads Psalm 66:7–8 ("May God, our God bless us, May God bless us: and all the ends of the earth fear him") as a structural mirror of the Godhead: the threefold repetition of *God* corresponds to the three persons, while the singular pronoun *him* preserves the unity of essence.[14] Similarly, he cites Psalm 67:5 ("the Lord is his name") and Psalm 81:9 ("there shall be no new god in thee: neither shalt thou adore a strange god") to prove that the Son and the Spirit are co-eternal and con-substantial with the Father, not "strange" deities.[15]

Finally, Lombard turns to the Prophets and Wisdom literature to provide dogmatic precision regarding the relations of origin. He cites Proverbs 8:22–27 and Sirach 24:3 to demonstrate the pre-existence of the Son, interpreting Wisdom not as a created attribute but as a person generated from the substance of the Father.[16] The prophetic *trisagion* of Isaiah 6:3 ("Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God of hosts") serves as the summary of this theology: the threefold *holy* signifies the distinction of persons, while the singular *Lord* denotes the indivisible essence.[17] Regarding the Spirit, Lombard isolates texts such as Genesis 1:2 ("the spirit of God moved over the waters") and Isaiah 61:1 ("The spirit of the Lord is upon me"). It is critical to note the confidence of Lombard's assertions here. Unlike later theologians who might view these texts as mere traces or adumbrations (White 2022, 62–64), Lombard classifies the Old Testament evidence regarding the Spirit as "explicit documents" (*expressa documenta*).[18] For the Master, the Trinity was not merely hidden in the Old Law; it was, for those with eyes to see, clearly declared. However, it is crucial to note that Lombard's claim of "explicit documents" in Book I primarily concerns the objective content of the revelation, not necessarily the subjective grasp of every Israelite. As we shall see, Lombard himself was aware of this tension. In Book III, he would later distinguish between the *revelatio distincta* given to the patriarchs and the *fides velata* of the common people—a distinction that would become the cornerstone of the Thomistic resolution.

1.2. The Clarity of the New Testament

While Lombard labors to excavate these Trinitarian testimonies from the Old Testament, he acknowledges a shift in the New. However, this shift is not a transition from absence to presence, but from the specific to the universal. The sporadic oracles of the Old Law give way to the pervasive light of the Truth.[19] This clarity is reflected in the very structure of Lombard's text: he devotes nearly twice as much space to the Old Testament testimonies as to the New

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[14] Lombard, *Sent*. I, d. 2, c. 4, n. 7.
[15] Lombard, *Sent*. I, d. 2, c. 4, nn. 6–7.
[16] Lombard, *Sent*. I, d. 2, c. 4, n. 8.
[17] Lombard, *Sent*. I, d. 2, c. 4, n. 7.
[18] Lombard, *Sent*. I, d. 2, c. 4, n. 9.
[19] Lombard, *Sent*. I, d. 2, c. 2, n. 2.

(nine paragraphs versus five). This brevity is not a sign of neglect, but of acknowledgement. Because "almost every single syllable" of the New Testament consistently suggests the truth of the Trinity, the Master feels less need to labor over the proofs.[20]

He highlights the baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19 as the supreme dogmatic standard: the singular "in the name" protects the unity of essence, while the three distinct names—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—establish the real distinction of persons.[21]

Furthermore, Lombard employs the prepositions of Paul to map the Trinitarian relations. Citing Romans 11:36—"For of him, and by him, and in him, are all things"—he appropriates the preposition "of" (*ex*) to the Father as source, "by" (*per*) to the Son as cause, and "in" (*in*) to the Holy Spirit as the sphere of preservation. By this exegetical move, Lombard finds the Trinity inscribed not only in the names of God but in the very grammar of causality.[22]

2. The Systematization of the Mystery: Albert and Bonaventure

While Peter Lombard established the fact of Old Testament Trinitarian revelation, his thirteenth-century successors sought to classify the manner of that revelation. For the great scholastics of the next generation, the task was no longer simply to collect proof-texts, but to construct a hermeneutical framework that could explain how the one God of Israel signaled his triune life to the ancient patriarchs.

2.1. Albert the Great: The Taxonomy of Revelation

In his commentary on the *Sentences*, Albert the Great accepts Lombard's fundamental premise: the theologian must proceed first by authority, then by reason. Citing Augustine and Bernard, he affirms that in this sacred science, faith precedes understanding; thus, "we must attribute belief to authority, understanding to reason, and opinion to error."[23] For Albert, the Old Testament is not merely a repository of shadows, but a structured pedagogy where the Trinity is unveiled through distinct semiotic modes.[24]

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[20] Lombard, *Sent.* I, d. 2, c. 5, n. 5.

[21] Lombard, *Sent.* I, d. 2, c. 5, n. 2.

[22] Lombard, *Sent.* I, d. 2, c. 5, n. 4.

[23] Albert the Great, *Super Sent.* I, d. 2, c. 3, a. 10. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Albert the Great are taken from Albert the Great 1894. All English translations are my own.

[24] In this context, *semiotic* refers to the theological analysis of signs (*signa*) and signification (*significatio*). Following Augustine, medieval theologians understood a sign as a reality that communicates something beyond itself to the mind (e.g., a word, a grammatical form, or a visual apparition). When Aquinas and his contemporaries distinguish between the sign and the thing signified (*res significata*), they are employing a semiotic distinction to explain how a finite medium—whether a plural verb in Genesis or a created angel at Mamre—can refer the mind to an infinite reality (the triune God) without being identical to it.

2.1.1. The Metaphysics of Divine Speech

Before analyzing the specific modes of revelation, Albert confronts a metaphysical objection regarding the very nature of divine speech in the Old Testament. When God says to Moses, "I am who am" (Exod 3:14), who is speaking? Is it the divine essence or a divine person? The objection posits that "to speak" (*loqui*) is an act of a person, not a nature; therefore, the "I am" must refer to a specific person, not the common essence.[25] Albert resolves this by distinguishing between the agent of speech and the content of speech. He argues that while the act of speaking indeed belongs to a person (specifically, the Son as the Word), the name revealed ("I am who am") belongs to the essence. It signifies the "simplicity and property of the divine nature in being." Thus, the voice at the burning bush is the voice of the Son revealing the common nature of the Trinity. Albert further clarifies that even if we abstracted the distinction of persons, God would still be "a certain person distinguished in himself" capable of speaking through a creature.[26]

Regarding the plural "Let us make" in Genesis 1:26, Albert offers a precise analysis of the grammar. He argues that the singular verb *creavit* in Genesis 1:1 implies a unity of the active essence (*essentia agens*), while the plural cohortative "Let us make" signifies that this single operation proceeds from diverse *supposita*. The phrase "our image" refers to the divine essence directly and to the three persons obliquely, revealing the Trinity as "one essence in three persons imitating themselves in the same essence."[27]

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[25] Albert the Great, *Super Sent*. I, d. 2, c. 4, a. 12, obj. 1.

[26] Albert the Great, *Super Sent*. I, d. 2, c. 4, a. 12, ad 1: "Ad hoc autem quod objicitur quod loqui est personae, dicendum quod verum est, sed non personae sic distinctae: imo si non essent tres personae in rationibus quibus distinctae sunt in fide, adhuc Deus esset quaedam persona seipsa ab alius essentius et naturis rerum distincta, et illi hoc modo per subjectam creaturam loqui conveniret: sicut dicit Hieronymus quod illud verbum per Angelum Moysi dixit: quia tamen Filius verbum et os Patris est, quod locutum est eum in mundo, ideo per appropriationem attribuitur Filio."—"Now regarding the objection that speaking belongs to a person, it must be said that this is true, but not to a person distinct in this way: indeed, if there were not three persons in the respects by which they are distinguished in the faith, God would still be a certain person distinguished in himself from other essences and the natures of things, and it would be fitting for him to speak in this way through a subject creature: just as Jerome says that he spoke that word through an Angel to Moses: however, because the Son is the Word and mouth of the Father, who spoke in the world, therefore it is attributed to the Son by appropriation."

[27] Albert the Great, *Super Sent*. I, d. 2, c. 4, a. 18, co.: "Ad ista dico sine praejudicio, quod imago et similitudo hic dicunt essentiam divinam in recto, et tres personas in obliquo. Unde imago est essentia una in tribus personis se in eadem essentia imitantibus. . . . cum enim dicitur, *faciamus*, actus unus numero verbi intelligitur egredi a diversis suppositis personis: et hoc non potest esse nisi illa sint unum in essentia agente. Similiter cum dicitur, nostram, notatur plurium esse una numero ratio imaginis et natura: et hoc est quod dicit, quod professio consorti per ly nostram, et faciamus, sustulit intelligentiam singularis: et sic ponit plures personas."—"To these matters I say, without prejudice, that *imago* and *similitudo* here signify the divine essence *in recto*, and the three persons *in obliquo*. Whence image is one essence in three persons imitating themselves in the same essence. . . . for when it is said, *Let us make*, a single act in number of the word is understood to proceed from diverse personal *supposita*: and this cannot be unless those are one in the acting essence. Similarly, when *our* is said, it is noted that there is a single *ratio* in number of the image and nature of several persons: and this is what he says, that the profession of fellowship through the *ly our*, and *Let us make*, has removed the understanding of the singular: and thus he posits several persons."

2.1.2. The Nine Modes of Signification

Albert expands Lombard's ad hoc collection of verses into a systematic list of nine ways by which the Trinity is insinuated in the Old Law and Prophets.[28] This taxonomy demonstrates Albert's desire to exhaustively categorize the semiotics of revelation. He begins with: (1) the co-signification of plural number, pointing to the grammatical anomaly of *elohim* ("gods") functioning as a singular subject; (2) proper names, such as the explicit mentions of the Word and Spirit (e.g., Ps 32:6); (3) the order of words, seen in the threefold repetition of the divine name in the Aaronic blessing or Psalm 66:7–8, where the sequence mirrors the order of the divine processions; and (4) the number of terms, arguing that the *trisagion* of Isaiah 6:3 ("Holy, holy, holy") repeats the attribute exactly three times—neither more nor less—which can have "no other reason" than the trinity of persons.

Furthermore, Albert identifies modes related to personal agency and property: (5) personal act, seen in internal dialogues within the Godhead, such as "The Lord said to my Lord" (Ps 109:1), where a distinct *I* addresses a distinct *thou*; (6) personal property, found in texts that describe unique characteristics like the passive generation of the Son in Isaiah 53:8 ("who shall declare his generation?"); and (7) appropriation, where attributes like wisdom or power, common to the essence, are appropriated to specific persons to reveal their character (e.g., "The Lord possessed me" in Proverbs 8:22). Finally, he notes modes related to the divine economy: (8) the order of creation, linking the eternal procession of the Son to the temporal creation of the world ("I came out of the mouth of the most High" in Sirach 24:3); and (9) the order of incarnation, seen in prophecies linking the eternal origin to the temporal birth in Bethlehem (Mic 5:2). Through this classification, Albert transforms Lombard's exegetical intuition into a scientific method. The Old Testament is no longer just a collection of hints; it is a semiotic system designed to prepare the intellect for the disclosure of the Trinitarian mystery in the New.

2.2. Bonaventure: The Modes of Insinuation

If Albert the Great focused on the metaphysics of revelation, Bonaventure focuses on its methodology.[29] In his commentary on Distinction 2, Bonaventure places the discussion of Old Testament texts within a broader epistemological framework. He argues that the Trinity must be approached in a threefold order: first, it must be believed; second, what is believed must be understood; and third, what is understood must be expressed. Scripture belongs strictly to the first stage: "Believing is through authority." Thus, the Old Testament citations are not proofs for reason, but foundations for faith. Bonaventure insists that the "manner of writing" about the Trinity must be grounded in "modesty and fear" because of the peril of error.[30]

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[28] Albert the Great, *Super Sent*. I, d. 2, c. 4, a. 25, co.

[29] For a general overview of Bonaventure's doctrine of the triune mystery, consult Osborne 2011. For the influence of Albert's thought on Bonaventure, see Togni 2024.

[30] Bonaventure, *Super Sent*. I, d. 2, div. text.: "De ipsa autem sacratissima Trinitate tripliciter contingit tractare, quoniam primo contingit ipsam *credere*, secundo creditam *intelligere*, tertio intellectam *dicere* sive

Bonaventure refines Lombard's canonical analysis by dividing the Old Testament authorities into two distinct phases of revelation, corresponding to the Law and the Prophets (*Super Sent.* I, d. 2, div. text.). Within the testimonies of the Law, the argument proceeds from the proof of the unity of essence to the simultaneous demonstration of unity and trinity, exemplified by the plural "Let us make" (Gen 1:26). In the testimonies of the Prophets, the revelation deepens, moving from the general plurality of persons to the specific relations of origin. Here, Bonaventure notes that the Prophets explicitly reveal the eternal generation of the Son (Ps 2:7) and the procession of the Holy Spirit (Ps 32:6).

In a *dubium* regarding the phrase *in principio* (Gen 1:1), Bonaventure is asked why the name *God* in Genesis 1:1 should stand for the Father rather than the Son. In his response, he synthesizes the medieval hermeneutic into eight modes by which the plurality of persons is insinuated in Scripture.[31] While Albert listed nine, Bonaventure's list is distinct for its focus on grammatical and logical operations. He identifies: (1) signification in the explicit naming of the persons, such as the New Testament baptismal formula (Matt 28:19); (2) co-signification in the use of grammatical forms that imply plurality, such as the Hebrew *elohim* (plural) used with a singular verb (Gen 1:1); (3) supposition, where a term stands for a distinct subject in a proposition, such as "God begot God" (cf. Prov 8:25); and (4) appropriation, where a common attribute is applied to a specific person (as "beginning" is appropriated to the Son in Genesis 1:1). Furthermore, Bonaventure lists: (5) iteration in the repetition of terms like *holy* in Isaiah 6:3; (6) the specific order of words in the blessings in Psalm 66:7–8; (7) connotation in mission, where an action implies a sender and a sent, such as "God sent" (Gal 4:4); and (8) apparition, referring to the visual manifestation of plurality, such as the three men who appeared to Abraham (Gen 18). Through these eight modes, Bonaventure defends Lombard's thesis that the Trinity was not absent from the Old Testament but was woven into its very grammar and narrative structure, waiting for the "Catholic and rational discourse" of the New Testament to articulate it fully.[32]

2.3. Synthesis: From Collection to Science

When viewed in comparison, the commentaries of Albert the Great and Bonaventure reveal a development in hermeneutical method. Both masters accept Lombard's fundamental thesis—that the Old Testament contains a genuine, albeit veiled, revelation of the Trinity—but they

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enuntiare. Credere autem est per auctoritatem, intelligere per rationem, dicere per catholicam et rationabilem locutionem. . . . *Modus* scribendi de Trinitate debet esse fundatus supra intellectum fidei et cum modestia et timore propter periculum. *Intentio* scribentium de Trinitate est ostendere, quod Pater et Filius et Spiritus sanctus sunt tres personae et unus Deus. *Ordo* scribendi est, primo per auctoritates ostendere veritatem, deinde per rationes et congruas similitudines."—"Regarding the most holy Trinity itself, there are three ways to treat it: first, it is possible to *believe* it; second, to *understand* what is believed; and third, to *speak* of or enunciate what is understood. Believing is through authority, understanding through reason, and speaking through Catholic and rational discourse. . . . The *manner* of writing about the Trinity ought to be founded upon the understanding of faith and with modesty and fear because of the danger. The intention of those writing about the Trinity is to show that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three persons and one God." Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Bonaventure are taken from Bonaventure 1938. All English translations are my own.

[31] Bonaventure, *Super Sent*. I, d. 2, dub. 8.

[32] Bonaventure, *Super Sent*. I, d. 2, div. text.

refine his approach. Where Lombard operated primarily as a collector, gathering patristic authorities to demonstrate the fact of revelation, his thirteenth-century successors constructed a semiotic system to explain the mode of that revelation.

The primary similarity between Albert and Bonaventure lies in their shared refusal to accept a rupture between the Testaments. Both maintain that the Old Testament text signifies the divine persons themselves, not merely divine attributes. They affirm that these texts are not merely literary personifications but grammatical and logical signs that the Trinity is the literal referent of the Old Testament.

Furthermore, both Albert and Bonaventure employ the tools of high scholastic logic to defend these readings. They move beyond the general category of insinuation to technical distinctions. Both utilize the concept of co-signification to explain how a word can signify one thing (unity) while co-signifying another (plurality). Both rely on the doctrine of appropriation to explain how attributes common to the essence (like power in creation) can function as proper names for specific persons in the narrative of Scripture.

However, a subtle divergence in emphasis distinguishes their approaches. Albert, true to his Aristotelian spirit, tends to focus on the metaphysics of the text. His analysis of the *I am* in Exodus 3:14 is characteristic: he is concerned with the ontological problem of who is speaking—whether the essence or the person—and how the divine nature relates to the angelic medium of the voice. His taxonomy of nine ways is expansive, encompassing not just grammatical signs but the metaphysical order of creation and the order of the Incarnation.

Bonaventure, by contrast, focuses more intensely on the logic of the terms. His eight modes rely heavily on grammatical and logical distinctions, particularly the properties of terms. When he discusses supposition, he is analyzing how the subject of a proposition stands for a specific hypostasis (e.g., "God [Father] begot God [Son]"). When he distinguishes between signification and connotation, he is applying a semantic filter to the biblical text. For Bonaventure, the priority is to establish a "Catholic and rational discourse" that secures the intelligibility of the object of faith.[33]

Ultimately, the relationship of both masters to Lombard is one of formalization. Lombard provided the raw materials—the authoritative verses and the patristic consensus. Albert and Bonaventure provided the scientific framework. They demonstrated that the Trinitarian reading of the Old Testament was not an arbitrary imposition of Christian dogma onto Jewish texts, but a coherent hermeneutical operation governed by the objective rules of grammar, logic, and metaphysics.

3. The Veiled Mystery and the Explicit Faith: Aquinas's Development

When turning from the exhaustive taxonomies of Albert and Bonaventure to the work of their most renowned contemporary, Thomas Aquinas, one might initially perceive a retreat. In his commentary on *Sentences* I, Distinction 2, Aquinas offers no dedicated question on the validity of Old Testament Trinitarian proof-texts. However, this apparent reticence is deceptive. A

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[33] Bonaventure, *Super Sent.* I, d. 2, div. text.

broader survey of his corpus—spanning from his treatment of the divine missions in the *Sentences* commentary to the mature epistemological distinctions of the *Summa*—reveals that Aquinas does not reject Lombard's thesis. Instead, Aquinas reconstructs it upon two foundational distinctions: the semiotic distinction between the sign and the thing signified and the mystagogical distinction regarding the mediation of faith between the *maiores* and the *minores*.[34]

3.1. The Signification of the Mystery: From Text to Theophany

While Aquinas assumes Lombard's proof-texts in Distinction 2, he offers a metaphysical defense of Old Testament Trinitarian revelation in his commentary on Distinction 16. Here, Aquinas confronts the nature of the ancient theophanies—such as the three men appearing to Abraham (Gen 18). He argues that a difference exists between the apparitions of the Old Testament and the visible missions of the New. In the New Testament, the visible sign is formed immediately by the divine person. In the Old Testament, by contrast, the apparitions were effected through the ministry of angels. However, this angelic mediation does not empty the event of Trinitarian meaning. Aquinas asserts that in these ancient apparitions, the external form was not merely a creaturely presence but a sign referred "to something else, such as to signify the Trinity [*ad significandum Trinitatem*]." Thus, for Aquinas, the Old Testament contained objective semiotic references to the triune God. The patriarchs were not merely encountering angels; through the angelic sign, they were encountering a signification of the Trinity. The interior reality of the event was "the very knowledge or illumination of the soul concerning the things which are signified by the external signs."[35]

Furthermore, Aquinas maintains Lombard's specific reading of the key texts in his expositions. In the *expositio textus* of Distinction 2, Aquinas affirms that the plural terms in Genesis 1:26 ("Let us make" and "our") signify the "plurality of persons by reason of the plural number," while simultaneously signifying the "unity of essence by reason of the consortium" implied by the collective action. He similarly refines the reading of Proverbs 8:22–25 ("The Lord possessed me"), applying it to the Son via appropriation. He offers a precise metaphysical gloss on the verbs used by Wisdom: "conceived" signifies that the Son is "enclosed in the unity of the Father's essence," whereas "brought forth" signifies the procession "insofar as he exits from the Father through the distinction of persons."[36]

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[34] Mystagogy (from the Greek *mystagōgia*, meaning "leading to the secrets" or "initiation into the mysteries") stems from the roots *mystēs* ("one initiated") and *agōgos* ("leading"). It traditionally refers to instruction into the secret rites and mysteries of a religion. For example, Cyril of Jerusalem (ca. 315–86) delivered "mystagogical Catecheses" to prepare catechumens for baptism and instruct them afterward, while Maximus the Confessor (ca. 580–662) applied the term to his mystical interpretation of the liturgy. Currently, the term often describes a catechesis aimed at promoting a deeper experience of God (O'Collins and Farrugia, s.v. mystagogy).

[35] Aquinas, *Super Sent*. I, d. 16, q. 1, a. 4, co. Citations of Thomas Aquinas follow the Leonine edition where available (Thomas Aquinas 1882–). In instances where the Leonine text is unavailable, works are cited from the secondary editions (Thomas Aquinas 1929, 1933, 1953, 1974).

[36] Aquinas, *Super Sent*. I, d. 2, exp. text.

3.2. The Distinction of Believers: *Maiores* and *Minores*

If the Trinity is objectively signified in the Old Testament, was it subjectively known? Here Aquinas introduces a historical nuance that retrieves and sharpens the Master's own insights. While Lombard's treatment in Book I emphasized the objective presence of the mystery (*expressa documenta*), his treatment of faith in Book III (Distinction 25) had already established a vital distinction between the "distinct revelation" (*revelatio distincta*) granted to the leaders and the "veiled faith" (*fides velata*) of the simple.

Lombard famously illustrated this distinction by allegorizing Job 1:14 ("The oxen were plowing, and the donkeys feeding beside them"). In the Master's reading, the spiritual status of the believer is defined by their proximity to the explicit mystery:

> Distinct [revelation was given] to Abraham and Moses and other greater ones, who possessed the distinction of the articles of faith. Veiled [revelation was given] to the simple . . . . The simple and the lesser ones are the donkeys feeding beside the oxen, because by adhering to the greater ones in humility, they believed in mystery what those men also taught in mystery . . . .[37]

Aquinas adopts this soteriological distinction and applies it rigorously to the hermeneutical problem of the Trinity. He argues that the mystery was veiled "so that the wise could grasp it" while the simple held it implicitly.[38] In his commentary on Hebrews, Aquinas asserts that the Trinity was "explicitly believed only by the *maiores* [*a maioribus tantum*]."[39] These *maiores* would understand, for instance, the signification of "let us make" (Gen 1:26) and the "word of the Lord" (Ps 32:6).

As Piotr Roszak observes, this distinction is not merely sociological but mystagogical, reflecting a structural necessity of revelation. The term *maiores*, derived by Aquinas from Augustine, refers to all those "entrusted with the mission of teaching," acting as mediators who tailor the transmission of the mystery to the capacity of the listener. Consequently, the implicit faith of the *minores* is not a defective faith but a participatory one. The simple believer possesses an "implicit faith in those words that come from their superiors," which acts as a genuine "participation in the knowledge of God" (Roszak 2019, 47). In this framework, faith is understood as a "proper way of cognition" that is inherently mediated; it is not achieved by individual force but is "transmitted and offered" through the testimony of another (Roszak 2019, 58). Thus, the prophets function as instrumental causes, holding the explicit knowledge of the triune nature so that the people might hold it implicitly by adhering to the prophetic word. For the common people, therefore, the Trinity was not explicitly proposed. They held the mystery only implicitly insofar as they believed in the one God who would save them, a faith that implicitly contained the distinct persons involved in that salvation.[40]

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[37] Lombard, *Sent*. III, d. 25, c. 2.

[38] Aquinas, *Super Sent*. III, d. 25, q. 2, a. 2, qcla. 4, ad 3

[39] Aquinas, *Super Heb*., c. 11, lect. 2 (Marietti ed., 577).

[40] Aquinas, *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 8, co.

3.3. The Metaphysical Defense in the *Summa contra Gentiles*

Before achieving his final synthesis, Aquinas moves from exegesis to apologetics in *Summa contra Gentiles* IV. Acknowledging that the revelation of the Son is "rarer" in the Old Law than in the New, he nevertheless marshals the texts to describe the reality of divine generation. Aquinas first seeks to establish that God is a Father not merely by creation, but by generation. He cites Proverbs 30:4: "what is his name, and what is the name of his son, if thou knowest?" He links this to the open testimony of Psalm 2:7 ("Thou art my son"). Aquinas introduces a metaphysical argument from Isaiah 66:9: "Shall not I that make others to bring forth children, myself bring forth, saith the Lord?" Aquinas interprets this not merely as a metaphor for Israel's restoration, but as a theological axiom: if God is the cause of fruitfulness in creatures, he cannot be sterile in himself.[41] Thus, the Old Testament suggests that there is a generative power within the divine nature.

Aquinas is equally concerned to prove that the Son is also God, aware that the title *Son* could be interpreted as mere adoption. He cites Psalm 44:7–8: "Thy throne, O God,[1] is forever and ever . . . therefore God,[2] thy God, hath anointed thee . . . ." Aquinas argues that the first *God* refers to the Anointed One (Christ), proving his divinity, while the second *God* refers to the Father. Aquinas buttresses this with Isaiah 9:6, where the child born is explicitly named "God the Mighty."[42]

3.4. The Necessity of Explicit Faith in the *Summa*

In his mature work, the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas solidifies the necessity of explicit Trinitarian faith for the ancient prophets by integrating the metaphysical insights of the *Summa contra Gentiles* into a comprehensive soteriology. In the *Secunda Secundae*, he argues that faith in the Trinity is necessary for salvation because it is intrinsic to the mystery of Christ. One cannot believe in the Incarnation without believing in the Son who is sent and the Spirit by whom he is conceived. Therefore, Aquinas argues, just as the mystery of Christ was explicitly believed by the *maiores* before the Incarnation, so too was the mystery of the Trinity. In the *sed contra* of this article, he explicitly cites Genesis 1:26 ("Let us make man") as a proof-text, affirming that "in the Old Testament the Trinity of persons is expressed in multiple ways."[43]

This conviction drives his exegetical practice even in his literal commentaries. He interprets the "Holy, holy, holy" of Isaiah 6:3 not merely as a superlative of holiness, but as a reference to the three divine persons.[44] Likewise, he reads the term *spirit* in Psalm 103:30 ("Thou shalt send forth thy spirit, and they shall be created") and Wisdom 1:7 ("the Spirit of the Lord hath filled the whole world") not as a created wind, but as the Holy Spirit, the Creator. He argues that creation is attributed to the Spirit to show he is of divine nature.[45]

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[41] Aquinas, *ScG* IV, c. 2.

[42] Aquinas, *ScG* IV, c. 3.

[43] Aquinas, *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 8, s.c.

[44] Aquinas, *Super Is.*, c. 6, lect. 1 (Marietti ed., 267–69).

[45] Aquinas, *Super Sent.* II, pr.; *ScG* IV, c. 17.

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In conclusion, for Aquinas, the Old Testament is neither silent nor fully articulate. It is a veiled text that spoke clearly to the *maiores*—the prophets and patriarchs enlightened by the Spirit—while remaining a mystery to the *minores*. By distinguishing between the objective sign (which was there in the text and theophanies) and the subjective act of faith (which varied according to the recipient's capacity), Aquinas defends Lombard's thesis while accounting for the historical progression of revelation. The Trinity was not absent from the Old Testament; it was the veiled privilege of the wise.

4. The Hermeneutical Shift: From Explicit Evidence to Implicit Shadow

The confident hermeneutic of Peter Lombard—who classified the Old Testament testimonies as "explicit documents"—encounters a formidable challenge in the modern era. With the rise of historical criticism, the theological landscape shifted from a search for dogmatic continuity to a rigorous appreciation of historical development. This methodological turn generated a distinct counter-narrative regarding the presence of the Trinity in the Old Testament, one that emphasized the strict monotheism of Israel and the danger of anachronism.

4.1. The Historical-Critical Objection: Strict Monotheism and the Redefinition of Pneumatology

For modern historical consciousness, the primary datum of the Old Testament is not the hidden plurality of persons, but the aggressive defense of the oneness of Yahweh. Consequently, a prominent stream of modern Catholic dogmatics posits that the mystery of the Trinity is, in the strict historical sense, absent from the Hebrew Scriptures. Pierre Grelot articulates this position with stark clarity, asserting that "the mystery of the Trinity is not revealed in the Old Testament." He argues that humanity became aware of the distinction of persons "only through the sending of the Son . . . and then through the sending of the Spirit." Therefore, Grelot concludes that "there is no need to search for any expression of Trinitarian theology whatsoever in the literal sense of the biblical texts before the Gospels" (Grelot 1962, 466). From this perspective, searching for the vestiges of the Trinity in the grammar of Genesis or the poetry of the Psalms is a category error; the literal sense of these texts is exclusively monotheistic.

Michael Schmaus deepens this critique by addressing the conceptual framework of the ancient authors. He warns against the projection of later dogmatic categories onto Hebraic concepts (Schmaus 1969, 29). "In view of the later development of monotheism in the New Testament," Schmaus writes, "it should be emphasized that the God of the Old Testament was considered to be one person" (Schmaus 1969, 8). This stands in direct contrast to Lombard's view, where the Old Testament God was understood to be one essence but not a solitary person. Schmaus maintains that while the study of the nature of Christ "implicitly contains the doctrine of the Trinity," the explicit awareness was absent in the ancient economy (Schmaus 1968, xv).

This disconnect is most acute regarding the pneumatology that Lombard so cherished. Where Lombard read "the spirit" in Genesis 1:2 as the third hypostasis, Schmaus argues for a semantic distinction. "God's life is a life of the spirit," he notes, but "the Old Testament itself does not use the concept in our sense." In the ancient context, *spirit* denoted "a power emanating from God," not a distinct person. Schmaus observes that the conceptual landscape of the Old Testament was sufficiently different that even fundamental distinctions, such as that of "body and soul, of matter and mind," were "for long not clearly elaborated." While Schmaus admits that the revelation progresses and a "certain clarification is attained by connecting the expressions 'word 'and 'wisdom 'with spirit," he insists that the term *spirit* only "gradually approaches the ideas which we associate with it" (Schmaus 1969, 29). Thus, texts that Lombard considered "explicit documents" of the Spirit's personhood are reinterpreted by modern dogmatics as references to a divine power, creating a hermeneutical gap between the literal sense of the Hebrew text and the dogmatic sense of the Christian tradition.

4.2. The Magisterial Nuance and the Crisis of Authority

This shift is reflected, with significant nuance, in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (*CCC*). The *Catechism* adopts a position that navigates between the ancient certainty and the modern critique. On one hand, it affirms the ontological presence of the mystery: "To be sure, God has left traces [*vestigia*] of his Trinitarian being in his work of creation and in his Revelation throughout the Old Testament" (*CCC*, §237). It even cites the Byzantine liturgy to link the breath of Genesis 1:2 to the Holy Spirit who "rules, sanctifies, and animates creation," affirming that "power over life pertains to the Spirit" (*CCC*, §703).

On the other hand, the *Catechism* establishes a strict epistemological limit that seemingly diverges from Aquinas's position on the explicit faith of the *maiores*. It states: "But his inmost Being as Holy Trinity is a mystery that is inaccessible to reason alone or even to Israel's faith before the Incarnation of God's Son and the sending of the Holy Spirit" (*CCC*, §237). Where Aquinas argued that the prophets *explicitly* believed the Trinity, the modern magisterial text suggests that the mystery remained inaccessible even to the faith of Israel, underscoring the radical novelty of the New Testament revelation.

This shift raises the stakes for the study of Peter Lombard. If the modern historical critique is correct—that the human authors of the Old Testament had no idea of the Trinity— then Lombard's appeal to *auctoritas* appears fragile. If the texts cited in Distinction 2 do not, in their literal and historical sense, speak of the Trinity, then the Master's claim to have "explicit documents" seems perilously anachronistic. The modern theologian is thus left with a dilemma: how to maintain the unity of the two Testaments without falling into a historical naivety that ignores the development of doctrine.

5. The Theological Retrieval: The Explicitist Thesis

The modern critical consensus—that the Old Testament authors were strict monotheists with no conceptual space for a Trinity—presents a weighty challenge to the medieval synthesis. If

Peter Lombard's "explicit documents" are merely later Christian projections, then Aquinas's systematic theology rests on a hermeneutical illusion. In response, a diverse array of modern theologians has sought to bridge this gap. One could profitably explore the dogmatic refinements of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange (Garrigou–Lagrange 1943, 17, 32) and Jean-Hervé Nicolas (Nicolas 2022, 72–74, 83, 90), who distinguish between literary personification and hypostatic personalization, or the evangelical defense of objective indications offered by Kevin Zuber (Zuber 2022, 47–73). However, this article will focus exclusively on the explicitist thesis of Andy Saville. We prioritize Saville here because his argument—that the ancient authors possessed a conscious, explicit faith—offers the most direct, albeit unwitting, vindication of Aquinas's specific epistemological distinction regarding the *maiores*, a vindication that other retrievals, which often concede the implicit nature of the text, fail to provide.

5.1. Challenging the "Dimly Lit Chamber"

The dominant metaphor in conservative modern theology for the Old Testament's relation to the Trinity is Benjamin B. Warfield's "dimly lit chamber" (Warfield 1932, 141–42). In this view, the furniture of the Trinity is present in the ancient text, but because the lights are off, its true contours are invisible until the "light" of the New Testament is switched on. Consequently, if one could interview Abraham or Moses, they would affirm a unitarian God, unaware of the triune reality that "underlies" their own writings (Saville 2013, 9).

Saville rejects this metaphor of latency. He argues that the "light was already on" and that the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation are "patent in the Old Testament" itself (Saville 2013, 10). This explicitist position moves beyond the defensive strategy of finding mere traces or shadows. Instead, it posits that the Old Testament authors possessed a conscious, explicit faith in the triune God. Saville grounds this claim not in a priori dogmatics, but in an analysis of how Jesus and the apostles utilized the Hebrew Scriptures.

5.2. The Argument from Apostolic Rebuke

The strongest argument against the implicit view lies in the logic of apostolic rebuke. Saville focuses on the narrative of the road to Emmaus, where Jesus admonishes the two disciples: "O foolish and slow of heart to believe in all things, which the prophets have spoken" (Luke 24:25). Saville contends that such a sharp rebuke would be fundamentally unjust if the Old Testament evidence were merely implicit or hidden. One cannot be blameworthy for failing to see what can only be seen with hindsight. If the doctrine of the Messiah's suffering and glory were not explicitly clear in the prophetic texts, the disciples could rightly reply that the rebuke was "unwarranted because the evidence of the Old Testament was not clear" (Saville 2013, 11, 14). The very fact of the rebuke implies that the evidence in the Old Testament was explicit, clear, and sufficient to command assent.

Furthermore, Saville points to the "testimony of Jesus" in John 5:46: "if you did believe Moses, you would perhaps believe me also: for he wrote of me." In the context of John 5, the dispute concerns Jesus's equality with the Father and his specific role as the divine Son. Therefore, when Jesus claims Moses wrote about him, he implies that Moses wrote about this

specific inner-Trinitarian relationship. For the argument to hold weight against his Jewish accusers, the evidence for the Son's relationship to the Father must be "explicit in Moses," not merely a latent meaning discovered later (Saville 2013, 13–14).

5.3. The Argument from Apologetic Persuasion

Complementing the argument from rebuke is the argument from persuasion. The New Testament contains numerous instances where the apostles attempt to persuade Jewish audiences of the truth of the Gospel solely on the basis of the Old Testament Scriptures. Saville notes that for such arguments to be persuasive to a skeptical Jewish audience, the texts themselves must be "explicitly Christian" (Saville 2013, 10).

If the Christian reading were only a *sensus plenior*—a fuller sense not intended by the original author but revealed later—a Jewish skeptic could rightly counter that belief in Christianity "was not required by the Old Testament, since it was not the clear and natural meaning." The logic of apostolic apologetics relies on the premise that the Old Testament objectively teaches the divinity of the Messiah and the distinction of persons. Saville supports this by observing the "lack of surprise" in the New Testament regarding the Trinity. While the early Church fought bitterly over the admission of Gentiles and the Mosaic Law, there is "no trace of any similar struggle" regarding the deity of Christ or the plurality of God. This silence implies that these doctrines were not viewed as radical innovations, but as the accepted teaching of the Law and the Prophets (Saville 2013, 11–12).

5.4. An Unwitting Thomistic Vindication

While Saville operates within an evangelical framework, his explicitist thesis provides a validation of Aquinas's specific epistemological claims against modern detractors. As noted in the previous section, modern theologians often critique Aquinas for attributing explicit faith in the Trinity to the ancient prophets. They argue this is anachronistic. However, Saville's exegetical analysis leads to the exact same conclusion: the *maiores* (the authors and prophets) must have known.

When Saville argues that Isaiah "actually met" the pre-incarnate Christ in the temple vision of Isaiah 6 (Saville 2013, 19), he aligns with Lombard's view that the prophets received a "distinct revelation."[46] When Saville cites 1 Peter 1:10–12 to prove that the prophets "diligently searched" and possessed explicit knowledge of the "sufferings that are in Christ," lacking only the specific time and circumstances, he mirrors Aquinas's distinction that the mystery was revealed to the *maiores* in order to be transmitted to the people (Saville 2013, 16–17).

This convergence alleviates the tension identified by modern critics. We are not forced to choose between a hermeneutic of rupture (where the Old Testament authors knew nothing) and a naive reading where every Israelite was a Trinitarian. Instead, Saville's retrieval vindicates the specific Thomistic category of prophetic agency. The gratuitous grace of

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[46] Lombard, *Sent*. III, d. 25, c. 2.

prophecy granted the *maiores* an explicit vision of the triune mystery—a vision they wove in the "explicit documents" of the text (such as Psalms 44:7 and 109:1)—even if that vision remained a veiled object of implicit faith for the multitude until the Incarnation.

5.5. The Prophetic Mediation: Gratuitous Grace and the Veil

Establishing that the *maiores* possessed explicit faith raises a critical question regarding the production of the text: Did this explicit knowledge influence their writing, or did it remain a private interior illumination? If Moses knew the Trinity, why did he write in a manner that requires such labor to decipher?

The solution lies in Aquinas's categorization of prophecy not as a sanctifying grace (*gratia gratum faciens*) given for the holiness of the individual, but as a gratuitous grace (*gratia gratis data*) given for the instruction of the community. As Paul Rogers observes in his analysis of the *Summa*, prophecy is a grace intended for the "utility of the church," authorizing the prophet to act as a mediator between the divine light and the human capacity of the people (Rogers 2023, 155).[47]

This creates a distinct tension between the clarity of the vision and the obscurity of the text. Rogers clarifies the psychological dynamic at work here by distinguishing between the prophetic light and the prophetic species. The essence of prophecy is not merely receiving new images (*species*) but receiving a divine light that strengthens the prophet's judgment. The *maiores*, operating under this light, possessed a judicative certitude that allowed them to see the Trinitarian reality explicitly within the shadows of the ancient types (Rogers 2023, 186–87, 206).

However, their office was to transmit this truth to a people (*minores*) prone to idolatry and unprepared for the full dazzling reality of the triune relations. Therefore, the prophets enshrined their explicit faith in images and texts that served as indications rather than definitions. Thomas Joseph White articulates this precise tension, acknowledging that the prophetic mind may be explicit even while the text remains a foreshadowing:

> The higher prophets of the Old Testament era may have foreseen the Incarnation of God in explicit ways, but their writings do not make this mystery completely apparent. Consequently, we can interpret Old Testament language for the Trinitarian processions retrospectively. These are features of the Israelite depiction of God that become clearer or come into focus only in light of the revelation of Christ and his Spirit in the New Testament. (White 2022, 62–63)

This observation provides the dogmatic rationale missing from a purely literary analysis. The gap between the explicit faith of the author and the implicit nature of the text is not a failure of inspiration, but a strategy of divine pedagogy. The prophet, empowered by the prophetic light, judges the truth explicitly but translates it into the prophetic representations—into a veiled text—for the people. Thus, the text is objectively Trinitarian because it was produced by a Trinitarian intention (both divine and human), but it remains subjectively obscure until the revelation of Christ provides the retrospective key.

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[47] For a more detailed treatment of Aquinas's understanding of prophecy, see especially *ST* II–II, q. 171.

5.6. The Integrity of the Canon

Ultimately, the explicitist position defended by Saville preserves the Old Testament from functioning as a mere prelude to Christian theology. It restores the text's status as a site of direct encounter with the triune God. By insisting that the apostles read the Old Testament according to the "grammatical-historical method" rather than through an arbitrary spiritualization (Saville 2013, 26), Saville offers a hermeneutical grounding for Lombard's original intuition. The Trinity is not an imposition upon the text; it is the "clear and natural meaning" for those who read the Scriptures with the same mind as the authors who wrote them (Saville 2013, 11)—authors who, as Peter declares, were carried by "the Spirit of Christ" (1 Pet 1:11).

Conclusion: The Veiled Face of the Triune God

The hermeneutical inquiry of this article—tracing the movement from the "explicit documents" of Peter Lombard to the modern explicitist retrieval—exposes the tension between the eternal identity of God and his progressive manifestation in time. Having surveyed the medieval consensus, the modern critique, and the contemporary response, I offer three conclusions that uphold the theological coherence of the Master's intuition while accepting the necessary epistemological distinctions of Aquinas.

I. The Validity of the Lombardian Intuition

First, regarding the status of Peter Lombard's fundamental thesis, his intuition remains theologically sound. Lombard insisted that the God of Genesis is not a solitary monad but a living communion. His reading of "Let us make" in Genesis 1:26 and "Holy, holy, holy" in Isaiah 6:3 was not a pre-critical error, but a recognition of the ontological depth of the text.

The divergence between medieval and modern instincts often stems from a difference in presuppositions: for Lombard, grammar is theology; for the strict historical critic, grammar is often merely a literary device. The critic reduces "Let us make" to a majestic plural to protect a strictly unitarian monotheism. However, this move risks creating a rupture between the God of Abraham and the Father of Jesus Christ. If the plurality Lombard discerned was not objectively there, then the New Testament's claim that Moses "wrote of" the Son (John 5:46) becomes unintelligible (Saville 2013, 13–14). When the Master classified these texts as "explicit documents," he was affirming that the text, born of a distinct revelation to the prophet, speaks of the Son and the Spirit not merely as future possibilities, but as present realities.

II. The Thomistic Correction: Explicit Faith of the *Maiores*

Second, and most critically, we must resolve the epistemological ambiguity regarding the human authors. Modern Thomistic retrievals often rely on a "regressive method"—typified by theologians like Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange—which interprets the Old Testament strictly

through the retrospective light of the New (Garrigou–Lagrange 1943, 17, 32; Nicolas 2022, 72–74, 83, 90). While valid for dogmatic synthesis, this approach often concedes too much to historical criticism. By suggesting that we must read from the New Testament back into the Old to find shadows of a truth that was historically unavailable to the ancients, it risks reducing the prophets to passive instruments who wrote better than they knew.

Aquinas provides a significant theological alternative to this implicit view. Yet, we need not see these stances as mutually exclusive. He does not settle for a "dimly lit chamber" where the prophets are as ignorant as the people. Instead, he rigorously applies the distinction between the *maiores* and the *minores*. For Aquinas, the fact that the Trinity is adumbrated in the text does not contradict the reality of the prophet's knowledge. He argues that while the mystery was indeed insinuated under veils for the many (*minores*), it was explicitly believed by the *maiores*—the patriarchs and prophets who functioned as the mediators of that revelation.

This distinction allows us to harmonize the data. We can agree with modern theologians that the Trinity was indeed veiled to the *minores*—the common people of Israel—who held the mystery only implicitly. However, against the modern tendency to universalize this ignorance, we can affirm with Aquinas that the *maiores* possessed a distinct, explicit revelation. Moses did not write of the Trinity by accident; he wrote of it because, in the gratuitous grace of prophecy, "he [had seen] the Lord" (Num 12:8) (Saville 2013, 22n21). Thus, Aquinas defends the unity of the faith not by collapsing history, but by distinguishing the agents of its transmission: what the prophet beholds explicitly, he proposes to the people under the veil of implicit faith.

III. The Hermeneutical Possibility

Finally, reading the Old Testament as a Christian book remains a vital theological possibility. While the modern hypothesis of a strictly unitarian Old Testament God poses challenges to the unity of the Canon, the explicitist thesis offers a coherent path for reconciliation. When the Church hears the "Word of the Lord" in Psalm 32:6, for instance, she is invited to recognize that while the *minores* may have seen only shadows, the *maiores* could indeed perceive the glory of the Only Begotten. In this light, the revelation of Christ does not necessarily create the Trinity in the Old Testament *ex nihilo*; rather, it allows the Church to see what the prophets may have seen, and to call the Shadows by their Name.

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